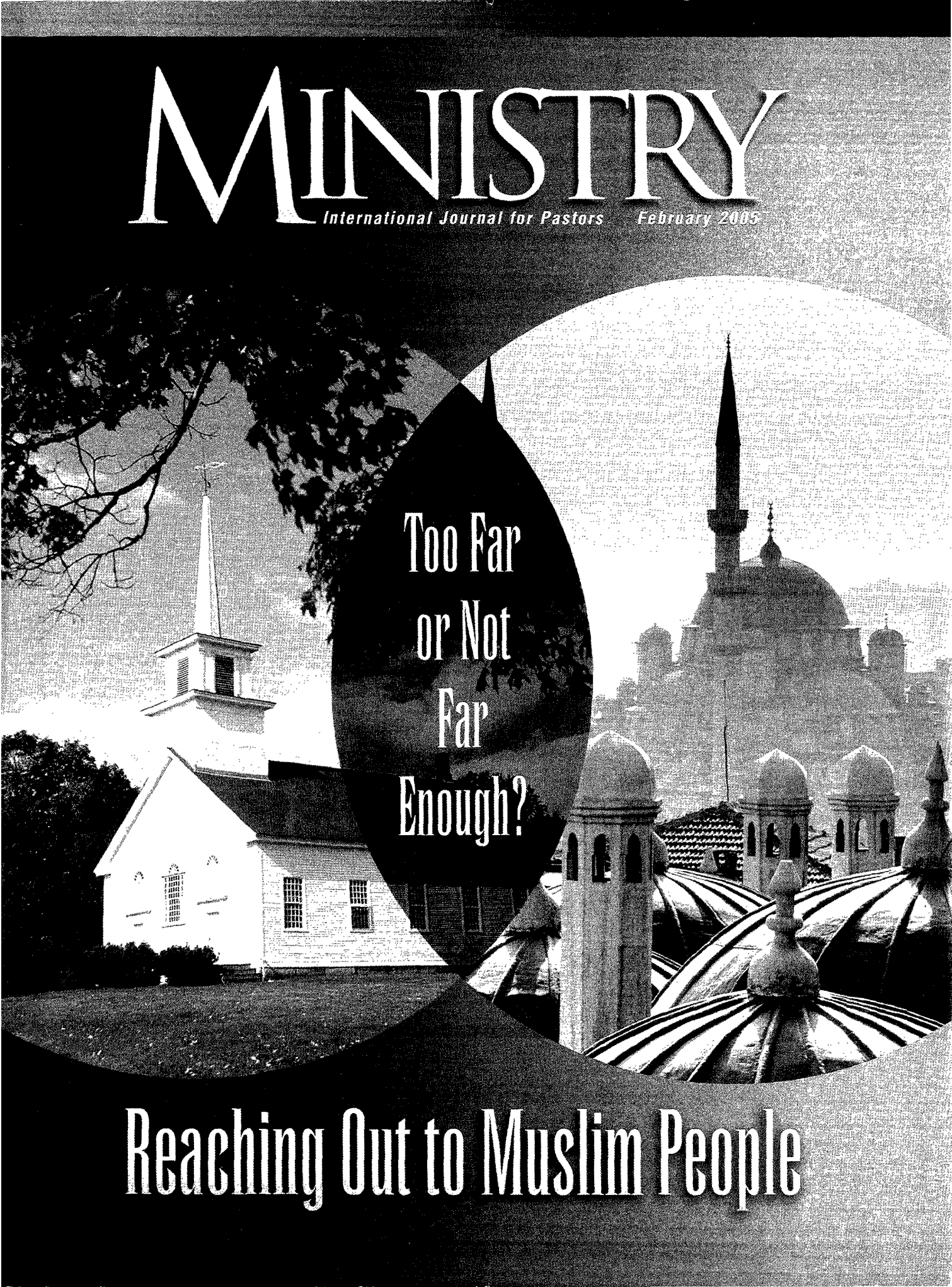


MINISTRY

International Journal for Pastors February 2005



Too Far
or Not
Far
Enough?

Reaching Out to Muslim People

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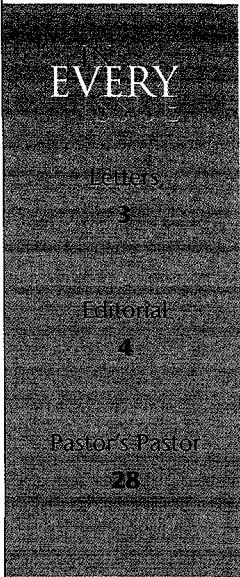
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HOWEVER, WHAT REALLY IS MISLEADING IS HIS COMMENT THAT IT WAS A “CONCEPT THAT SHE STEADFASTLY REJECTED.”

Ed Johnson (June 2004) writes: “There is no need to argue against a fallen, sinful nature for Jesus, for it is not the sinful nature that condemns us, but sin. We are all born with a sinful nature. But we are not sinners at birth.”

It’s true that at the time babies are born, they are not guilty of having committed a sin. But I wonder if Pastor Johnson means that human beings don’t need a Savior at the time they are born. Are all babies born in a saved condition and only begin to need a Savior after they have committed their first sin? I beg to differ with that theology. Every human being from Cain and Abel to the present has needed a Savior from the moment of birth. But this could not have been true of Christ, for He could not have been the Savior if at His birth He had needed a Savior. Therefore, there has to be something sinful about us—about our nature, if you please—at the time we are born that was not true of Christ when He was born.

However, the inspired evidence does not provide us with the information we need to define that difference. Therefore, we each need to respect those whose differ from us and avoid calling them heretics.

—Marvin Moore, Caldwell, Idaho

In our 27 Fundamental Beliefs, the doctrines entitled “The Son” and “The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ” articulate a biblical understanding of Christ’s human nature which does not conclusively answer the question of

whether the incarnation involved taking on moral consequences of fallen human nature or pre-fallen human nature. If we could conclusively end this argument with clear references to the Bible or Ellen White, we would. The fact that we cannot shows that it was perhaps not one of those theological points essential to one’s salvation. I agree with Naden’s view that Christ had Adam’s pre-fallen human nature (no propensities of sin) but with the physical consequences relating to health, aging, and dying.

—Pastor David A. Pendleton, Hailua, Hawaii

Oliver Jacques (June 2004), the great-grandson of Ellen White, does not seem to understand either her theology or the meaning of the word “vicarious” and its derivative, “vicariously.” While he may be correct in saying that Mrs. White never used the word “vicariously,” she did use the term “vicarious atonement” (see *Review and Herald*, Nov. 1, 1892). However, what really is misleading is his comment that it was a “concept that she steadfastly rejected.”

Webster’s *New Collegiate Dictionary* gives among other meanings the following for “vicarious”—“Performed or suffered by one person with results accruing to the benefit or advantage of another, substitutional, as a vicarious sacrifice.” No one can read *Steps to Christ* nor the *Desire of Ages* and say that Mrs. White rejected the concept that what Jesus did on the cross was not for our benefit. Substitution is the very heart of the

gospel. Take it away and you have nothing left. I am distressed to see in recent decades that the heresies of the moral influence theory of the atonement have been creeping into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I am lifting up my voice against such false teachings.

—Pastor Leonard P. Tolhurst, retired chair, theology department, Pacific Adventist University, via email.

Oliver Jacques, great grandson of Ellen White, writes that Ellen White never used the term “vicariously” and that it is a “concept she steadfastly rejected.” In *Review and Herald*, Nov. 1, 1892, Ellen White wrote: “The sacrificial offerings which had been instituted to teach men concerning the vicarious atonement of Christ . . .” Many quotes in Ellen White’s books confirm this concept. I found this statement using my computer.

—Pastor Jan T. Knopper, Australia.

While an electronic search of *The Complete Published Writings of Ellen G. White* reveals one appearance of “vicarious atonement,” the concept of vicarious suffering/death finds a good deal of mention. The phrase “Christ suffered for our sins” appears some 74 times, and the phrase “Christ died for our sins” appears 116 times. And then, what does that gem in *The Desire of Ages*, page 25 (“Christ was treated as we deserve that we might be . . .”), mean if not that Jesus died in my stead? ■

—John M. Fowler, Silver Spring, Maryland.

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Taking back the right to personal peace

Joseph's brothers planned to murder him and throw his body into a dried up well. Instead of killing him, though, they decided to sell him to a group of passing Ishmaelite traders, who took him far from home and into a foreign country, where he was put up for sale on the slave market (Gen. 37).

Amazingly, many years later, Joseph was in a position of authority in Egypt. Not recognizing him, his brothers came to him making their life or death request for food. Struggling with his memories and taken aback by the surprise of facing them again, Joseph opted to help them, offering kindness though they had done so much to wrong him (Gen. 45:3-15).

Forgiving something that horrible takes courage; it takes humility; it takes a healthy sense of oneself. Such forgiveness is what Christ called us to when he said to forgive one another seventy-times-seven times (Matt. 18:22, NKJV).

What about the less hurtful yet nonetheless bothersome and often hurtful offenses we suffer? What about the neighbor you thought was your friend, who you found out has gossiped about you? Do we even have to forgive these people? What if they don't ask for forgiveness?

Many a secular counselor may tell us simply to learn to *let things go*. Perhaps this is also what Christ taught when he told us to "turn the other cheek?" (Matt. 5:39; Luke 6:29). Nevertheless, I believe *letting go* for Christian people is often, ironically, more difficult.

On the one hand, Christians are called to act without anger, so we feel guilty about our reactions and struggle with guilt when we react wrongly or find ourselves unable to act because our turbulent emotions don't match what our consciences are telling us. On the other hand, the New Testament suggests that when someone offends us, we are to go to that person first, and if this is not successful, we are then to go to a church elder and take a witness (Matt. 18:15-17).

JULIA W. NORCOTT



Pulling all of the Biblical advice together and looking at the big picture, everything falls into place. We are to *forgive*, and we are called to *let go*.

According to Christian psychologist and author Melody Beattie, detachment is "releasing, or detaching from, a person or problem in love. We mentally, emotionally, and sometimes physically disengage ourselves from unhealthy (and frequently painful) entanglements with another person's life and responsibilities, and from problems we cannot solve. . . . We trust that Someone greater than ourselves knows, has ordained, and cares about what is happening . . . [and] can do much more to solve the problem than we can."¹

Christian psychologists Henry Cloud and John Townsend, authors of the *Boundaries* series of books, explain that when humans turned from God, we lost our freedom. "We became enslaved to sin, to self-centeredness, to other people, to guilt, and to a whole host of other dynamics."² God gave us the freedom to respond, to make choices, to limit the ways other people's behavior affects us. We can choose not to be victims of other people.

In Galatians 5:1 Paul writes that it was "for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (NIV). We can have Christlike compassion for other people without going crazy!

But what about the New Testament

plan to "deal with it"? What about taking the initiative and handling the situation that needs forgiveness? Judging when doing so is necessary and important. It is also part and parcel of our power of choice, and we should pray for wisdom to know when to and how to make such important moves. If we feel we need to deal with someone because they are a constant part of our lives, for example, then the New Testament model is the appropriate answer. Taking this approach rather than, in contrast, talking behind the person's back is the straightforward, honest, and constructive thing to do.

Joseph's story exemplifies a loving, constructive person whose compassion was not at his own expense. Joseph actually tested his brothers by placing a silver cup in Benjamin's sack (Gen. 44). When he knew he could trust his brothers, Joseph broke down with emotion. He then addressed the past wrong openly and they acknowledged it and asked forgiveness.

Most significantly, however, we know that Joseph was not vindictive, and that he was kind to them in their need and at a vulnerable moment in their lives. "Don't be afraid," he told them. "Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me," he said. "But God intended it for good . . . the saving of many lives." He confronted them honestly. Then the Bible says that he "reassured them and spoke kindly to them" (Gen. 50:19-21, NIV).

Like Joseph, we are not only allowed but actually obligated to live in freedom, the freedom to work from a place of serenity and strength with the right to *detach* in Christian love from anyone who would keep us from inner peace. We are to honor God by honoring "the temples"—ourselves—He created. For without serenity, how can we feel God working within us? (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). ■

¹ Melody Beattie, *Codependent No More: How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Caring for Yourself* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 23.

² Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries in Marriage* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1991), 3.

Too far or not far enough: reaching out to Muslim people

Gorden R. Doss



Gorden R. Doss is associate professor in the department of world mission, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

The attacks of 9/11¹ brought many new issues to center stage. This is true not only for American-Arab but also for Christian-Muslim relations. Many Christians are now trying to reconcile contradictions in their understanding of Islam and to define an appropriate stance toward Muslims. One church leader opined that, after 9/11, Muslims went beyond the reach of salvation, while another labeled Islam a wholly demonic religion.²

One problem with these responses is that the Great Commission includes “all nations . . . even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19, 20, NKJV). The understandable anger of Christians toward Islamic terrorism must never cause us to do or say things that work against God’s stance toward Muslim people or His mission to everyone on earth, by all means including Muslims. Even the horrific images of airliners burying themselves in collapsing skyscrapers must be viewed through the eyes of God’s divine mission in the whole earth and every person upon it.

For American Adventists, the politics and patriotism of the post-9/11 era must never dull the focus of our calling. After all, we are (or should be) Christians first and patriots second.

How should twenty-first-century Christians fulfill their role in God’s continuing way of reaching out to the Muslim world? Answering this question is not easy, given the long history

of trouble between Christians and Muslims, during which each has done unmentionable things to the other. For many reasons, over the centuries even the best efforts of Christian mission among Muslims have generally yielded poor results, when compared with efforts in behalf of other people groups.

Thus, many Christian groups, including our own, are experimenting with creative methodologies that are bearing fruit. However, these experiments are generating discussion and debate around two related questions: “How do Christians live ‘in the world’ without being ‘of the world?’” (John 17:14-16), and, “How do we go far enough without going too far in adapting to culture?” Put another way, the debate is about contextualization.

In the context

Contextualization³ seeks to do all that is humanly possible to lead people to become disciples of Jesus *within their context*. Contextualization assumes that Christianity is a global religion whose “skeleton” or “DNA” of core beliefs is “fleshed out” or “lived out” differently by people in various cultures. Just as Jesus was incarnated into Jewish culture (John 1:14), so His gospel and His church can be incarnated into any culture so that the church may be “a place to feel at home.”

Christ’s own human and divine nature is the model for the church, which Paul calls the “body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27). The church is a human institution that miraculously and mysteriously embodies Jesus Christ; in a sense, it’s a symbol prefiguring the time when Jesus Himself will dwell with His people in glory (Rev. 21:3).

That any grouping of humans could be called the “body of Christ” is itself a miracle of divine grace. In cross-cultural mission, the church in one sinful human society seeks to reproduce itself in another sinful human society. Viewed in this way, the work of mission calls for the deepest humility and for ultimate dependence on the Spirit because no church represents Jesus Christ fully or perfectly.

There are different ways of applying the principles of contextualization. One way is to deny that it is either good or necessary.

Noncontextualization assumes that “one-size-fits-all” and that “my-way-of-being-a-Christian” can be exported to any cultural context and set up like a prefabricated church

building. Typically, noncontextualization condemns all aspects of other religions and assumes that Christianity will make them disappear. Yet this noncontextualization overlooks the fact that Christianity always dwells within a particular culture with its own cultural specificities.

There are multicultural Christians but no culturally neutral Christians. Neither is there a “Christian culture” that exists as such apart from regular human cultures. Although Christians in every culture share important commonalities, they always retain specific cultural characteristics that give shape and texture to their faith and their religion.

Noncontextualization breeds several negative consequences:⁴ First, it places converts in a religious-cultural vacuum. In this vacuum they are associated with an alien culture and religion where they are set apart from their own people.⁵ The resulting ostracism and social penalties vary, but they can be quite severe. The convert may be cast into confusion about her own cultural identity and may lose her witnessing potential entirely.

Second, some local customs that need to be modified or abandoned on the basis of Scripture are retained and driven underground, leaving the door open to syncretism.⁶ When this happens, Christians end up with a “split-level” religion, with Christianity and traditional religion coexisting in a way that produces “deep inner dissonance.”⁷ Split-level Christians have dual allegiances—to Christ, and to the powers of their traditional religion.

Third, missionaries and local leaders become religious police who try to eradicate underground un-Christian customs.

Finally, the local converts who must live with this kind of noncontextualized Christianity are denied participation in a contextualization process. Thus they tend to have neither full ownership of the call to communicate the faith, nor do they contribute their insider cultural knowledge to the evangelizing process.

In short, noncontextualization does not go far enough and the gospel never penetrates the world, because the church never really begins the journey.

In some ways noncontextualization is a fiction because contextualization of some kind always happens. Missionaries and converts in every location apply biblical truth to the local context in some way, knowingly or unknowingly. Perhaps noncontextualization could also be called “blind,” or “haphazard,” contextualization.

Uncritical contextualization

If noncontextualization anchors one end of a spectrum, *uncritical contextualization* anchors the other. Uncritical contextualization takes the side of those who emphasize “being in the world” and “going far enough.” In trying to make Christianity attractive enough to penetrate culture, this approach accepts too much of culture and sells out biblical truth. Uncritical contextualization gives culture “more authority than revelation.”⁸

In church history, the change from the seventh-day Sabbath to first-day worship is a classic example of uncritical contextualization. In modern times uncritical contextualization has been initiated in an attempt to avoid the errors of noncontextualization seen in modern mission history.

One contemporary example of the uncritical approach is the approval of practicing homosexuality as a valid alternative lifestyle for Christians. Uncritical contextualization happens in Europe, America, or anywhere when constant cultural change is not matched with constant Christian self-evaluation by the standard of Jesus Christ and Scripture.

Jacques Ellul says that Christianity has a “propensity to soak up culture like a sponge,” so that it becomes “Christianism,” instead of being the pure religion of Jesus Christ.⁹ Uncritical contextualization “goes too far” and the church becomes part “of the world” because it rushes the journey.

Ironically, both uncritical contextualization and noncontextualization produce the same result—syncretism. The former fails to communicate the pure gospel because it sells out biblical truth in an exaggerated attempt to be relevant. The latter fails because it does not engage local culture and religion in the intentional dialogue with Scripture that unmask individual and corporate sin.

Both styles of contextualization are cop-outs because they try to escape the tension that exists wherever the church is planted within human societies. Clearly, neither approach is an acceptable alternative for Adventist mission among Muslims or anywhere.

Critical contextualization

The Mennonite missiologist Paul G. Hiebert uses the term *critical contextualization* to describe what needs to happen in cross-cultural mission.¹⁰ Critical contextualization accepts the challenge of working within the inherent tension of being “in the world but not of the world” and of “going far enough but not too far.”

The process of critical contextualization rests on several assumptions: First, that God is active in every age, individual, and society through the Holy Spirit and general revelation, drawing and guiding receptive people to Himself (Acts 17:22-31; Rom. 1:20).¹¹ Thus, Christian mission has to engage non-Christian peoples seriously instead of trying to make them “clean slates” (*tabula rasa*) by erasing their religions (as if that were possible).

Second, the gospel can be incarnated or translated into any culture.

Third, the missionary is a facilitator who guides converts in a search for a Christian way of living within their context. The missionary’s outsider knowledge and experience links up with the convert’s insider cultural knowledge to engage local culture.

As the congregation matures it assumes full responsibility for critical contextualization, so that fourth, as the Bible is applied to the local culture, customs will be retained, modified, or

abandoned in a process that requires time, energy, and patience.

Finally, the process is continuous because culture is ever-changing and requires constant re-evaluation.¹²

Critical contextualization is difficult because it seeks to maintain biblical primacy while also respecting culture. Because all cultures are complex amalgams of good and evil, the boundary between being faithful or unfaithful to the Bible is often fuzzy and hard to identify.

Hiebert names three protections from heresy: the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and the global church, or the "hermeneutical community."¹³

Contextualization done the right way is the key to maintaining the purity of the gospel. When Christianity resides in any society for a prolonged period, the pure religion of Jesus Christ becomes encrusted with cultural artifacts or specificities that become identified with the gospel itself.¹⁴

Carrying the gospel across cultural borders using the critical contextualization model forces longtime Christians to rediscover the "pearl of great price" within the layers of cultural encrustation.¹⁵ Only as Christians learn to differentiate between their own culture and their religion can they retain the purity of the gospel. Thus, the task of contextualizing the gospel among Muslims holds the potential that those who carry the gospel will rediscover it for themselves in a fresh and powerful way.¹⁶

The Muslim challenge

But again, what of the challenge of the Muslim world?

While critical contextualization is challenging everywhere, it is particularly challenging in Muslim contexts because Islam resists the development of new Christian congregations with varying degrees of intensity.¹⁷

Ideally, a growing local congregation functions freely as a locus for evangelization and contextualization, with the help of cross-cultural missionaries in the early stages. However, this ideal scenario often cannot

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develop in Muslim lands. Frequently the "extraction method" is used, sending converts to Europe or America and removing their witness at home. But Muslims must somehow be brought to Christ in a way that allows them to remain embedded in their native societies, where the Holy Spirit can work through them in miraculous ways to share the gospel.

The challenges of mission among Muslims suggest several things about methodology:

First, expectations and measures of success must be realistic for the context. We are accustomed to quick and easy successes in evangelism; mission with Muslims, however, requires planning, patience, and discipline. *Second*, a methodology that allows for individual and congregational growth as steps in a process is needed. *Third*, reliance on the Bible and the Holy Spirit must receive extraordinary emphasis (Hiebert's first and second guards against heresy). *Fourth*, alternative or parallel organizational

structures are needed for church oversight and guidance (Hiebert's third protection against heresy). *Finally*, unprecedented missionary education and specialization is required.

Implementing a holistic, successful methodology will require great creativity. The problem is that creative approaches make us feel uncomfortable because some parts of the *Church Manual* may not be followed as we seek to adapt to challenging cultural situations. Also, success stories usually cannot be published, and the *Annual Statistical Report* will not include some of the numbers. In short, creative methods seem radical because they take us outside of our well-established institutional box.

Is there biblical precedent for using "radical" methods in mission? We can easily forget what a radical departure the apostles made when they went from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria and to the whole Gentile world.

Before Peter's missiology could be turned upside-down, he had to see

a symbolic vision commanding him to eat filthy beasts (Acts 10).

The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) made decisions that to us seem like simple common sense 2,000 years later, while at the time it strained apostolic adaptability almost to the breaking point. Since the time of Abraham, circumcision had been the visible symbol of covenant relationship with Yahweh (Gen. 17:11). Yet, the apostles were open enough to the Holy Spirit to be shown that this ancient cultural-religious tradition, once commanded by God, did not have to be carried across the cultural border into the Gentile world.

Some Jewish Christians never did make this radical leap of faith with the Jerusalem Council and spent their lives opposing Paul and his colleagues.

Cross-cultural mission that uses the critical contextualization model often feels radical to established Christians. When Muslims accept Jesus Christ they inevitably follow Him in a way

continued on page 29

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Did the Apostolic Council set aside the Sabbath? (part 1)

Tim Crosby

In Acts 15, the leadership of the early church met to settle a controversy. "Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.' This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question" (Acts 15:1, 2*).

Around this time, the issue of circumcising Jews who had become Christians was debated among the Jewish proselytes in the Christian community. Josephus tells of Helena, queen of Adiabene, and of her son Izates, who embraced Judaism under the influence of a Jewish merchant named Ananias. King Izates feared that his subjects would not accept him if he submitted to circumcision. Ananias assured the king that circumcision was not the most important thing: "The king could, he [Ananias] said, worship God even without being circumcised if indeed he had fully decided to be a devoted adherent of Judaism, for it was this that counted more than circumcision. He told him, furthermore, that God Himself would pardon him if, constrained thus by necessity and by fear of his subjects, he failed to perform this rite. And so, for the time, the king was convinced by his arguments. Afterwards, however, since he had not completely given up his

desire, another Jew, named Eleazar, who came from Galilee and who had a reputation for being extremely strict when it came to the ancestral laws, urged him to carry out the rite." (Antiquities 20.41-3, Loeb).

Among other things, this history tells us that Jewish agents traveled about the empire, some advocating a lax policy on circumcision, others a strict one. Paul wrestled with a similar situation in some of his churches. So the controversy over Jewish proselytes and circumcision was not limited to Christians.

The Jerusalem council took up the issue around A.D. 45. After much discussion, speeches by Peter and James crystallized the consensus, which was then written down. The Gentiles were commanded "to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality" (Acts 15:29).

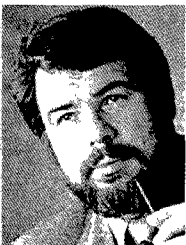
Generations of scholars have wondered what reasoning process the apostles followed to arrive at their conclusion. On what did they base their decision?

Levitical precedent

Under the direction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28) the apostles found a passage in the Torah that laid down rules that applied to aliens living among the Jews. Notice how the decree of Acts 15:29 follows Leviticus exactly, in precise textual order. Notice also that each segment of Leviticus repeats that the law applies to non-Jews:

"You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols:" Converts to Christianity must no longer offer any sacrifices to idols; "this is to be a lasting ordinance for them and for the generations to come. Say to them: 'Any Israelite or any alien living among them who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice and does not bring it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to sacrifice it to the LORD—that man must be cut off from his people'" (Lev. 17:7-9, italics added).

". . . from blood:" "Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood—I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Therefore I say to the Israelites, 'None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood.' Any Israelite or any alien living among you who



Tim Crosby is pastor of the Willowbrook Seventh-day Adventist Church in Boonsboro, Maryland.

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hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth, because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, 'You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off' (Lev. 17:10-14, italics added).

“. . . from the meat of strangled animals:” “Anyone, whether native-born or alien, who eats anything found dead or torn by wild animals must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be ceremonially unclean till evening; then he will be clean. But if he does not wash his clothes and bathe himself, he will be held responsible” (Lev. 17:15, 16).

“. . . and from sexual immorality:” “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them: “I am the LORD your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt. . . . No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the LORD. Do not dishonor your father by having sexual relations with your mother. . . . Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable. Do not have sexual relations with an animal. . . . The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things”’ (Lev. 18).

Leviticus 17–18 offers a far stronger parallel with Acts 15 than the Noachide covenant of Genesis 9, which forbids only blood but says nothing about food sacrificed to idols, things strangled, or *porneia*. The Noachide laws may have influenced Leviticus 17–18, but it is Leviticus 17–18 that stands behind Acts 15 (a later passage that mentions approximately the same offenses is Ezekiel 33:25, 26).

The apostolic rationale is obvious: the laws of Leviticus 17 and 18 explicitly refer to Gentile proselytes—the word translated “alien” here is the Greek *proselytos* in the Septuagint (LXX).

Was the apostolic decree provisional?

Modern expositors often claim

that the apostolic decree was merely provisional or temporary. But the source documents suggest otherwise. Allusions to the decree are found in the last book of the Bible: “Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality” (Rev. 2:14).

This is repeated in 2:20. By twice citing the first and last stipulations of the apostolic decree of 15:29, John implies the binding nature of the whole. There is no doubt that the apostolic decree stands behind the text, for Revelation 2:24 alludes to it again (“I will not impose any other burden on you;” cf. Acts 15:28). Evidently some Christians at the end of the first century did not regard the apostolic decree as testing truth, and John, as he wrote the book of Revelation, regarded this group as heretical.

John’s position prevailed in the second-century church. The *Didache*, which may be seen as a species of early Christian “church manual” written around A.D. 100, says “Keep strictly away from meat sacrificed to idols, for it involves the worship of dead gods” (6:3).

Justin Martyr claimed that Christians “abide every torture and vengeance even to the extremity of death, rather than worship idols, or eat meat offered to idols” (*Trypho* 34). Eusebius regarded the teaching that there was no harm in eating things sacrificed to idols as a heresy of Basilides (*Hist.* 4.7.7).

In the second half of the second century, Christians were still not allowed to eat the blood of animals (*Hist.* 5.1.26). Finally, all bishops of the Christian church, up until the capture of Jerusalem by Hadrian around A.D. 135, were Jewish (*Hist.* 4.5), not Gentile, and so were expected to enforce the apostolic decree. Evidence suggests that the apostolic decree was still considered normative well after the New Testament was completed.

Did the Apostolic Council set aside the Torah?

It is impossible to maintain that the church leadership in Acts 15 intended to set aside the Torah when their decision was based upon the Torah. It is important to remember that the apostolic decree exempted only Gentile believers from circumcision; Jewish believers were still expected to observe it. This is implied not only in Acts 15 itself but also in an interesting conversation between James and Paul recorded in Acts 21:20–25. It may help to read the passage aloud, emphasizing the words in italics:

“Then they [James and the elders] said to Paul: ‘You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. . . . As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.’”

In other words, James and the elders were apparently chiding Paul for allegedly teaching Jewish Christians that they were no longer bound by the law (21:21), in violation of the agreement of 15:19, which exempted only Gentile Christians (21:25). This explains the elders’ request to Paul in 21:23–27 to sponsor four Jewish brothers in observing a vow (probably the Nazirite, see Num. 6) to reassure the critics that Paul, a Jew, was “living in obedience to the law” (Acts 21:24).

It is unclear whether Paul agreed with James that Jewish believers should be circumcised. In 1 Corinthians 7:19 Paul writes, “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts,” but he makes no distinction between Gentile and Jewish believers.

The issue would arise, however, only in the context of Gentile converts, though it is unlikely that Paul

would have objected to Jewish believers circumcising their own children. At any rate, his acquiescence to the elders here (Acts 21:26) and his earlier circumcision of Timothy (16:3) show, at the very least, submission to church leadership.

Even later Paul made sure he was ceremonially pure before he entered the temple (Acts 24:18). So Paul himself observed parts of the ritual law ("to the Jews I became like a Jew," 1 Cor. 9:20). He even seems to have supported in principle the prohibition against meat offered to idols (1 Cor. 10:14-21), although he created a major loophole where the origin of the meat was uncertain (10:25-28).

Unresolved differences among New Testament leaders

The New Testament debate over the law is easier to understand if we allow for the possibility that Paul and the Twelve had unresolved differences of opinion on the matter.² Galatians 2:12 seems to suggest that Paul's theological opponents in Acts 15:1, 5 were allied in some way with James.

This much, however, is clear: the Jewish founders of Christianity did not expect Jews to abandon their heritage when they accepted Jesus. Indeed, the earliest Christians considered themselves not as a separate religion but as a sect of the Jews known as "the Way."³

Paul regarded Christianity as fulfilled Judaism, and Gentile Christians as true Jews: "It is we who are the circumcision" (Phil. 3:3). "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code" (Rom. 2:28, 29). "It is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring" (Rom. 9:8). "Those who believe are children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7). "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according

to the promise" (verse 29).

By the end of the first century John even refused to allow ethnic Jews the right to any longer claim the title "Jew."⁴ The church called itself "Israel"⁵ and assumed Israel's canon. The apostles saw the church as the legitimate continuation of God's covenant people.⁶ They believed they were authentic Jews, so they did not simply discard the Jewish Scriptures and start from scratch. Rather, they selectively discarded certain "external regulations applying until the time of the new order" (Heb. 9:10).

It is essential to remember that early Christianity was derived from the Old Testament. Christian evangelists did not preach from Christian texts before the destruction of Jerusalem at the earliest, and probably not until the second century. Their preaching was based on the canon of their parent community, Judaism—in the same way that contemporary Adventist evangelistic preaching appeals only to the traditional Christian canon, ignoring any later authoritative writings.

The apostles would have been astonished by the modern evangelical notion that nothing in the Old Testament is binding except that which is repeated in the New. Paul believed that "all [Old Testament] Scripture . . . is useful for teaching" (2 Tim. 3:16). "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith?" he asks. "Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law" (Rom. 3:31).

Luke, Paul's disciple, records the words of Jesus: "It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law" (Luke 16:17). He also records Paul's testimony in a Roman court of law, "I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets" (Acts 24:14).

If the apostles did not simply discard the Torah, how could they set aside circumcision for Gentiles? Notice that the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 17:10-14, where circumcision is commanded, is

said to apply only to the descendants of Abraham and their slaves—not to the aliens living among them. Exodus 12:43-48 implies that aliens living among the Jews were not normally circumcised unless they wanted to partake of the Passover. ■

*Part 2 of this article (to appear in the April issue of Ministry) will explore why the Ten Commandments are not mentioned in the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15.**

** Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.*

1 Wild animals often kill by strangling their prey, so "torn by wild animals" suggests strangulation.

2 Some of the theological differences between Jewish and Hellenistic Christianity surface in the epistles of Romans and James. James' polemic against "faith alone" in chapter 2 of his epistle provides a provocative counterpoint to Paul's exposition of righteousness by faith in Romans 3 and 4. Both writers use the very same text about Abraham believing God (Gen. 15:6) to arrive at differing conclusions (contrast James 2:21-23 with Rom. 4:1-5). Paul's fundamental thesis is stated in Romans 3:28, "We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law." Contrast this with James 2:24, "You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone" (NASB). Here the formula "faith alone," in its only occurrence in the Greek New Testament, is rejected as error. To harmonize Paul and James, one may distinguish works of law from works of faith. Works of law are bad (Rom. 3:20, 27, 28; Gal. 2:16, 3:2; 5, 10), while works of faith are good (Rom. 13:12; 2 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 5:6, 18-23; 1 Tim. 2:10; 5:10, 25; 6:18, 19; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14). Even works of faith are worthless as a ground or basis of salvation but are essential as a fruit or result. Fruitless trees/vines are cut down/off (Matt. 3:10; 7:19; Luke 13:7, John 15:2; Heb. 6:7, 8; Jude 12), because the lack of fruit indicates that the tree is dead. Hence "faith [i.e., mere mental assent] without works is dead" (James 2:17, 26). Even Paul preached that his hearers "should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds" (Acts 26:20; cf. Luke 3:8). Our best efforts at harmonization aside, the apostles still found that Paul's writings contained material that was "hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16)—and it seems significant that, immediately following this statement, Peter warns against antinomianism (3:17).

3 Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23, 22:4, 24:5, 14, 22; 28:22. "The Way" is already a technical term among the Essenes at Qumran: 1QS 9:17-21 states that the instructor is not to argue theology with outsiders, but is to save his reproof for "those who have chosen the Way, treating each as his spiritual qualities and the precepts of the era require. He shall ground them in knowledge, thereby instructing them in truly wondrous mysteries, if then the secret Way is perfected among men of the *Yahad* (community), each will walk blamelessly with his fellow, guided by what has been revealed to them. That will be the time of 'preparing the way in the desert' (Isa. 40:3). He shall instruct them in every legal finding that is to regulate their works in that time, and teach them to separate from every man who fails to keep himself from perversity. These are the precepts of the Way for the Instructor in these times." 1QS 10:21 mentions "any who rebel against the Way." 4Q400 frag. 1, col. 1:14-16 mentions those "who transgress the true Way." 4Q405 frag. 23, col. 1, says of the angels: "None of them omits a precept or fails to acknowledge anything the King says. They neither run from the Way nor reverence anything not a part of it." See Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 140, 141, 367, 376.

continued on page 25

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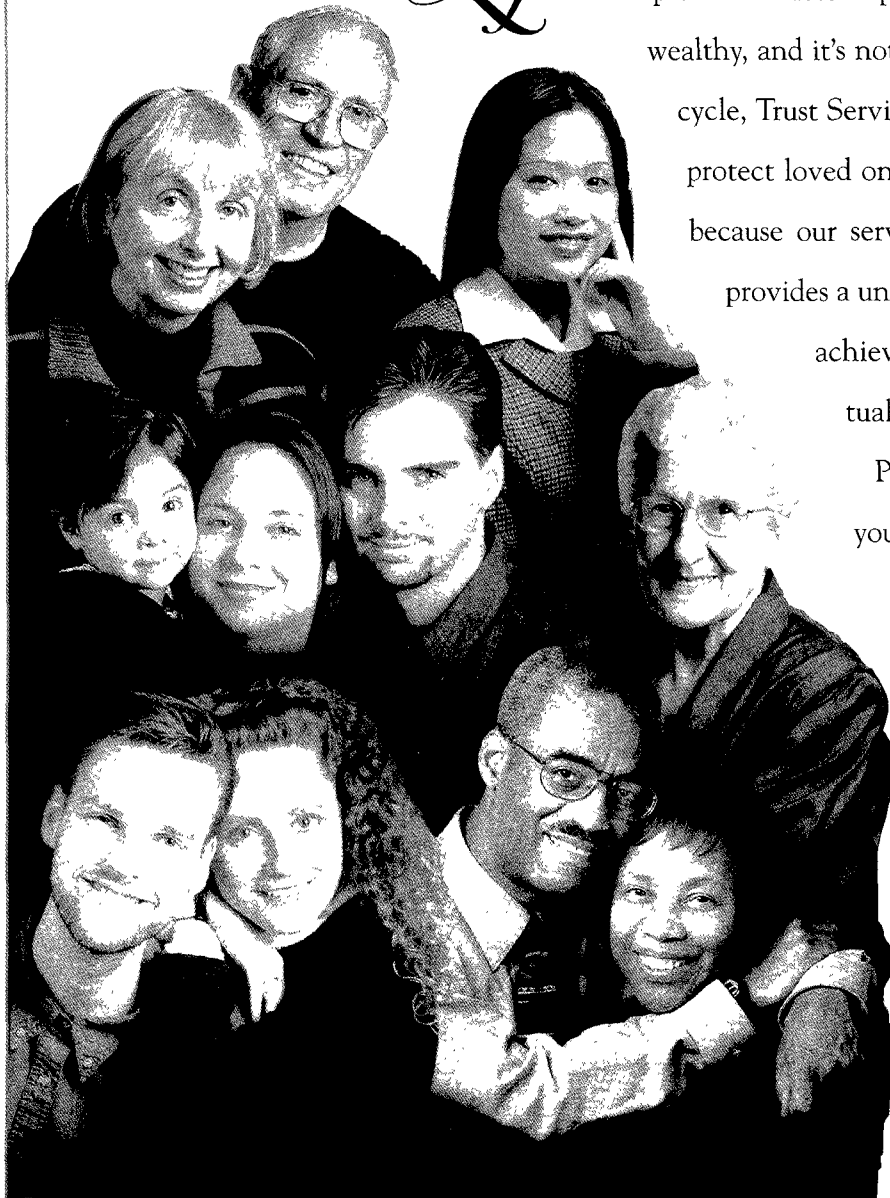
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The choice: assumption or assurance?

Lyndon K.
McDowell



Lyndon K. McDowell, D.D., is a retired pastor living in Scottsdale, Arizona.

There's an old nursery rhyme that asks, "Where did you come from, baby dear, out of the nowhere and into the here." Good question, though the answer, at least today, is greatly debated.

The informed contemporary person might ask the question like this: "How do those lifeless chemicals produce exquisitely ordered structures called organisms?" This is the question that drives current research. It is the basic reason for the exploration of Mars to find water, and for plumbing the depths of the sea to learn the secrets of the thermophiles and methanogens. It is also the driving force behind libraries of speculative assumptions and hours of laborious research. Yet the answer remains as elusive as ever.

Scientists have succeeded in unraveling the chemistry of living things and have found that they obey the laws of physics and chemistry. But life itself is "not fully explained in terms of those sciences."¹ The statement "*Omnis cellula e cellula* (every cell from a cell), remains one of biology's essential verities."² In fact, despite all the assurances and predications that presume basic evolutionary theory to be a proven explanation for our origins, the theory is based on an array of assumptions, such as:

Assumption I. The universal phylogenetic tree

The universal phylogenetic trees vary

according to the assumptions of those who draw them, but they all have one common feature—the tree has no roots. What is called "the last common ancestor" remains an assumption.

This does not mean that scientists have not tried to invent those roots. Because all living organisms carry their genetic information in nucleic acids, RNA and DNA, and because these are expressed in specific sequences of proteins, attempts have been made to assemble them artificially.

In the 1950s, Stanley Miller, working in Harold C. Urey's laboratory, designed an experiment that elicited much publicity. He tried to simulate the type of air and water he imagined existed on the primitive earth and then bombarded the mixture with a continuous electrical discharge. The experiment produced a number of amino acids and enabled Miller to explain how they were produced.

This work seemed to be encouraging. It generated even more excitement when an Australian meteorite was found to have the same amino acids in relatively the same quantities. It looked as if we were about to find the secret of life. It soon became evident, however, we were mistaken.

Leslie Orgel, who tried a similar experiment, explains the problem: "Nowadays nucleic acids are synthesized only with the help of proteins, and proteins are synthesized only if their corresponding nucleotide sequence is present. It is extremely improbable that proteins and nucleic acids, both of which are structurally complex, arose spontaneously in the same place at the same time. Yet it also seems impossible to have one without the other. And so, at first glance, one might have to conclude that life could never, in fact, have originated by chemical means."³

A typical phylogenetic tree is found in the authoritative textbook *Molecular Cell Biology*, which reads in part that it "depicts a view of how all life on earth, from simple bacteria to complex mammals, evolved from a common single-celled progenitor,"⁴ and it is "based on the assumption that organisms with more similar genes evolved from a common progenitor more recently than those with more dissimilar genes. . . ."⁵

The tree is divided into three main branches. The lowest branch and, therefore, the earliest in evolutionary time is labeled

"Bacteria"; it has six twigs, each carrying the name of a different bacterium, one of which is the familiar *Escherichia coli*, or, more familiarly, *E. coli*.

The next branch of the stem, thereby indicating more advanced evolution, labeled "Archaea," also has six twigs. The third branch has the general name of Eukarya, and is assumed to be an evolutionary advance to more complexity. The organisms have extensive internal membranes that enclose specific compartments.

One of the six twigs on this branch is the one humans belong to. It is labeled "Animals." Next to us are two shorter twigs. The closest are "Plants," the next closest "Fungi." In terms of this evolutionary theory, our nearest relatives are flowers and shrubs; we are also cousins to mushrooms.

Each form of life on the tree fits exquisitely into its niche. Theodosius Dobzhansky waxes almost lyrical as he contemplates this. "The more one studies living beings the more one is

impressed by the wonderfully effective adjustment of their multifarious body structures and functions to their varying ways of life. From the simplest to the most complex, all organisms are constructed to function efficiently in the environments in which they live." Then, he adds, the ancestors of these living things "were in general less complex, less perfect and less diversified than the organisms now living."⁶

But there are no intermediate forms between the various kinds on the tree. His assumption suffers from the same disability as does the geological column. The different forms are found "*constructed to function efficiently in the environments in which they live.*" There are no others.

Assumption II: Protein sequences determine age

It should be noted that the length of the branches and of the twigs mentioned above represents the extent of

the differences between the DNA or RNA sequences of the various creatures. It does not represent time in years. Yet time is implied.

Protein sequences appear to diverge at a fairly constant rate. We are told, for example, the protein components of hemoglobin, called globins, change at the average rate of one amino acid every four million years. Most changes are neutral, that is, they cause no differences in the offspring, but evolutionists believe these changes may be used to compute the number of years since the various species split off from one another.⁷ This is how they compute the relationship between chimpanzees and humans.

This theory has a problem. The textbook *Molecular Cell Biology* teaches that "the creative part of the evolutionary process is *adaptation* to rapidly changing environments."⁸ But studies show that this is not possible. There appears to be no way in

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which “changes in the environment can call forth specific gene mutations.”⁹ Change comes by chance mutations only. According to Cavalier-Smith, “Such changes should be seen as internally generated accidents rather than adaptive responses to external conditions.”¹⁰ Even if an environment did have an evolutionary effect, changes would hardly be regular as postulated by the molecular clock.

One reads or hears so frequently the emphatic affirmations that evolution is a proven fact that it is refreshing to find honest statements to the contrary. Franklin Harold writes: “I share the commitment to a material conception of life, but that makes it doubly necessary to remember that before the cells were taken apart—as long, indeed, as they were alive—they displayed capacities that go beyond chemistry.”¹¹

“Any reservations about the mechanisms of evolution are apt to be seized upon by enemies of the principle itself,” writes Harold, “and make Darwin’s children anxious. Let me, therefore, state unambiguously that I, like the vast majority of contemporary scientists, see the living world as wholly the product of natural causes.” But “that said, there remains a battery of open questions about the forces and events that shaped the history of life.”¹²

Why then are so many scientists so adamant about evolution? Because “we have no better alternative to offer,” says Harold. Then he adds, “but we must concede that there are presently *no detailed Darwinian accounts of the evolution of any biochemical or cellular system, only a variety of wishful speculations.*”¹³

In an acrimonious correspondence between the editor of *Nature* and 22 scientists from the various branches of science at the British Museum (Natural History), London, the scientists wrote, “We have no absolute proof of the theory of evolution,” while there is circumstantial evidence in favor of it, “the theory of evolution

would be abandoned tomorrow if a better theory appeared.”¹⁴

Assumption III: The “simple” cell

As we have seen, the phylogenetic tree is built on the premise that life evolved from a simple cell, but that “simple cell” has yet to be found. Would Darwin have ever even formulated his theory if he had possessed an electron microscope and been aware of the complexity and design of cells too small to be seen by the naked eye?

E. coli is placed on the lowest branch of the tree, assumed to be early in terms of evolution. Invisible to the naked eye, measuring 2 micrometers long and 0.8 micrometers in diameter, it is a marvelous example of design and complexity.

The cell is enclosed within a double wall, or membrane. Within this membrane are about 2,400,000 proteins, 1,800 kinds of molecules, 14,000 messenger RNAs, and 200,000 transfer RNAs. Add to that 22,000,000 lipid molecules and 280,000,000 small metabolites. All these jostle together in the cytoplasm which is 75 percent water, but they all have a purpose and work harmoniously.

In the human body the various units share and cooperate in its metabolism. The kidneys, for example, service the blood, but the heart pumps the blood. Stem cells are born in the bone marrow, but they are selected in the thymus and are transported by the vascular system.

A similar coordination is present in the tiny bacterium. All the proteins and molecules share in its internal metabolism. Their work is encoded in its genes. It is estimated that those instructions equal about ten pages in the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

Metabolism requires energy, and energy in *E. coli* is provided by electrical power generated by the cell. An alternative energy source is also available, if required. Electricity drives its external flagella, which rotate like propellers. The “propeller shaft” penetrates through the membrane and into the cytosol by means of a bushing and can propel the little bug at a speed of about ten to twenty cell lengths per second.

Besides this, the direction in which the cell is driven is “computerized.” The flagella all rotate together in a counterclockwise direction when the cell is in forward gear, but when its “computerized” sensing mechanism informs it that the gradient to which it is heading has changed, a “switch” is thrown, and the flagella change gears and begin a clockwise rotation. This results in what is called a “tumbling motion,” and the cell changes direction.

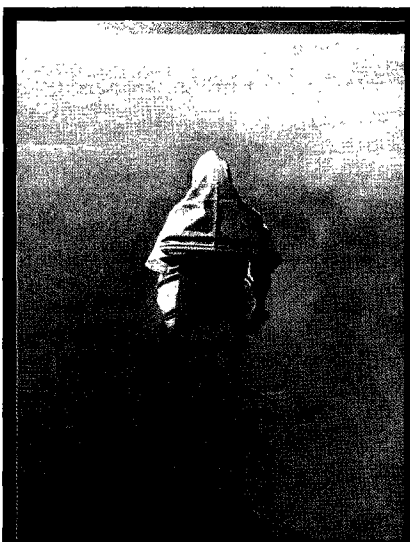
Of course, I am writing metaphorically. The pictures elicited may be unreal, but the facts are correct.¹⁵ Such is just a brief introduction to this simple cell!

Assumption IV: God would have created the world differently

In his book *The Astonishing Hypothesis* Francis Crick wrote that until Charles Darwin, the “Argument from Design” appeared to be unanswerable. “Yet,” he says, “this argument has collapsed completely. We now know that all living things, from bacteria to ourselves, are closely related at the biochemical level.”¹⁶

Crick’s apparent assumption is that if God created both men and microbes, then He would have created microbes on the basis of a different model than He created man. A relat-

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ed assumption is that God would not have created a world in which there is so much competition and suffering.

Alfred Lord Tennyson expressed those concerns in his poem "In Memoriam." He wrote of "nature red in tooth and claw." "Are God and Nature then at strife?" he asked.

"Who trusted God was love indeed / And love Creation's final law— / Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw / With ravine, shriek'd against his creed."¹⁷

Providentially, Seventh-day Adventists were provided with at least a partial answer to the questions about evil in the world with their theology of the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

Because this great controversy theme was first suggested in 1848/1849,¹⁸ the timing appears significant. Genesis 3:17 also hints at an answer. But for evolutionists the metaphysical argument remains. The theory of evolution is true, they say, because in the struggle described as the survival of the fittest, one would expect Nature to be harsh and competitive, while a world created by a loving God would, at very least, be benign.

Crick is also wrong if he assumes that God would not create microbial life on the same pattern of man. The Bible is clear about the relation between men and animals. "God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."

The word *aphar*, translated "dust" means "the dry fine crumbs of earth."¹⁹ We are made of dust, that ubiquitous material less than 63 microns in size and of which even the stars are made.

But Scripture informs us that we are also related to other forms of life. "God formed both man and animals out of the ground" (Gen. 2:19), thus "All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. . . . All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return" (Eccl. 3:19, 20). It is no surprise then, that

we find similar DNA in all forms of living matter. The basic, underlying design is that of the Creator.

From assumption to assurance

In response to an inquiry of mine, Crick ended his letter with, "If you believe in a resurrection, you can believe anything." The statement proved a timely heuristic stimulus to explore the basis of my own faith. Why did I believe as I did about Creation, the virgin birth, and the Resurrection?

As I review my life, God has been good to me. In all the twists and turns of my experience, in both shadow and sunshine, He has been there to sustain and guide. I know that God lives. But experience is too personal to persuade, too subjective to be the foundation of faith in the face of well-nigh-universal disbelief.

The first three chapters of Genesis cannot be used either, for it is "by faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command" (Heb. 11:3). To depend on my own personal belief in the existence of God and His way with me, would, in a very real sense, put me on the same level with evolution. Besides, Genesis is such an abbreviated account of Creation that it leaves too many questions unanswered and is too easily open for personal assumptions, of which we have many.

My mind turns to Luke's gospel. There is no question about the basis of Luke's faith. He *carefully investigated* everything. *Many*, he found, had written down an account of the events. He listened to the oral accounts of those who were *eyewitnesses from the beginning* (Luke 1:1-4).

Were it not for the "metaphysical" aspects of the events—the virgin birth and the Resurrection—Luke's history would surely be regarded as one of the most reliable of the time.

Sir William Ramsey, in his book *St. Paul, the Traveler and Roman Citizen*, recognized this. "I may fairly claim to have entered this investigation without any prejudice in favor of the

conclusion which I shall now attempt to justify to the reader. On the contrary, I began with a mind unfavorable to it."²⁰ It was his study of Luke's methodology and his accuracy that changed his mind.

Paul's account also rings with reliability. He affirms that over five hundred were witnesses to the Resurrection, and while "some are fallen asleep," the majority were still alive and able to testify to the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

It is always the metaphysics that people rebel against. As it is today, so it was in Athens in Paul's day. "When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered" (Acts 17:32).

Next, there is the gospel story itself. It has what J. B. Phillips called "the ring of truth." John Polkinghorne, former professor of mathematical physics at the University of Edinburgh, is also persuaded by the force of the gospel accounts. "One of the strong lines of argument for the truth of the resurrection is the astonishing transformation of the disciples from the demoralized defeated men of Good Friday to the confident proclaimers of the Lordship of Christ at Pentecost and beyond, even to the point of martyrdom."²¹

There is an unqualified assurance in the proclamation of faith by those who lived in the first century. "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard," wrote John. "We have not followed cleverly invented stories," wrote Peter; "we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

Of course faith itself is fundamental, but it is clear that the writers of the New Testament saw the most crucial role for careful investigation, extensive, qualified eyewitness testimony that reliably filled out the whole picture. Faith and this kind of investigation are inseparable, forming a highly convincing whole.

Having made my stand on this assurance, I may then, legitimately and without apology, add my own experience to the weight of evidence.

Like thousands of others through the centuries I can say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

The choice is clear:

The shaky basis of assumption: "Molecular science, for all of its non-nonsense airs, asks one to swallow some real humdingers, and none bigger than the assertion that all extant organisms have descended from a unique population of cells in the distant past."²²

Assurance: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . . . Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life" (John 1:1-4). ■

- 1 Franklin M. Harold, *The Way of the Cell* (Oxford: University Press, 2001), 14.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 20.
- 3 *Scientific American*, October, 1994, 78. Orgel is senior fellow and research professor at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies. He discusses several attempts to simulate conditions in which life could originate and then closes his article with the note: "As we have seen, investigators have proposed many hypotheses, but evidence in favor of each of them is fragmentary at best. The full details of how the RNA world, and life, emerged may not be revealed in the near future."
- 4 *Molecular Cell Biology*, exec. editor, Sara Tenny (H. Freeman and Company, 2001), 6.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 5. Emphasis supplied.
- 6 Readings from *Scientific American*, "Evolution and the Fossil Record," 20, 1950.
- 7 For problems with the molecular clock, see also Hunter, *Darwin's God, Evolution and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2001), 42.
- 8 *Op. cit.*, 3. Emphasis in original.
- 9 Harold, *op. cit.* 50.
- 10 See *The Biology of Free-living Heterotrophic Flagellates*, D. Patterson and J. Larsen, eds. (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1991), 120.
- 11 Harold, *op. cit.* 65.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 190.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 204, 205; emphasis supplied.
- 14 *Nature*, 290, March 12, 1981, 172.
- 15 For technical description see Harold, *op. cit.*; chapter 5.
- 16 Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis. The Scientific Search for the Soul* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994).
- 17 *The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson, Poet Laureate* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1901), LVI, 261.
- 18 Arthur White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years*, 1:371.
- 19 Koehler and Baumgartner, *Lexicon In Veteris Testamenti Libros*, "aphar."
- 20 William Mitchell Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927), 7, 8.
- 21 John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 33.
- 22 Harold, *op. cit.* 169. Franklin M. Harold is emeritus professor of biochemistry and molecular biology at Colorado State University.

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Presenting evolution and Creation: How? (part 1)

Leonard Brand and
Cindy Tutsch



Leonard Brand, Ph.D.,
is professor of biology
and paleontology at
Loma Linda University,
Loma Linda, California.



Cindy Tutsch is
associate director of
the Ellen G. White
Estate, Silver Spring,
Maryland.

Because we begin with these premises, (1) that God is love, (2) that He is light, and (3) that “in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5)—we are convinced it’s unreasonable that He would leave us with a Bible story of creation we can’t trust.

Genesis, we believe, is the actual description of how our planet was prepared by God to accommodate life. It is an account of how God created life in six literal, historical, 24-hour days, culminating with a literal 24-hour Sabbath day of rest. This Creation event was later followed by a worldwide flood, also depicted in the Genesis account.

Why would a God of love who wishes to be trusted and loved, a God who is light, a God in whom there is no darkness, give us an account of creation totally at variance with what really happened? We don’t believe that He would.

However, while convinced of the literalness of the Creation account, we have reason to be concerned about how creationists express or present the chronicle to others.

Win arguments, lose souls

As creationists, what is our goal in a publication, a lecture, or a sermon dealing with a literal creation? What impression do we want to leave? A sermon can uplift Jesus Christ and leave the audience wanting to follow Him, or it can leave the audience with the impression

that we have disdain and even animosity for those who disagree with us.

James was a graduate student in molecular biology at a large state university. He became friends with another graduate student, an evolutionist and atheist. They discussed many topics, and as their friendship grew they discussed religion. James finally invited his friend to attend a Seventh-day Adventist evangelistic meeting, and he came.

That night the topic was creationism. The evangelist used the all too common sarcastic, condescending approach to the topic so often seen in our publications and sermons. James’s friend would *never talk about religion again*.

We need to be careful and thoughtful about how we deal with this issue. Much of the material in creationist publications is written by people who do not understand evolution and evolutionists. They often misunderstand what evolutionists believe; they misquote them by taking part of a statement out of context, thus making it say something that the person was not really saying. They use the evidence that seems to fit our creationist beliefs, while they ignore other evidence that is more of a challenge to us as creationists.

On top of this, creationist writers generally seem to follow the pattern seen in other creationist publications, and thus the cycle continues.

Well-founded animosity?

Many scientists harbor a deep-seated resentment for creationists. Creationists, in turn, tend to think this is because those scientists hate and look down on God, or the idea of God. That may be true of some, but not all. The resentment is often fueled by the way they are treated by creationists.

We make fun of their beliefs; we make sarcastic comments about evolutionists, implying that they are stupid, and we misuse their statements, making them appear to say things that they are not saying. They do not see us as loving, kind fellow human beings with strange, implausible beliefs; they see us as dishonest and hateful dogmatists—and in response, many of them hate us.

A prominent evolutionist and outspoken antiCreationist at a famous university has been heard to say that creationists are “cheats and liars.” A few years ago he had a graduate student who was a conservative creationist. The professor had a hard time accepting this at

first, but finally professor and student became friends. The graduate student was a kind and thoughtful person, a true friend to the evolutionist, especially during the evolutionist's bout with cancer. The evolutionist continued to be an outspoken antirevolutionist, but he seemed to value his ongoing friendship with a creationist who was a real friend. He even told the creationist that he did not see him as a cheat or liar like the rest. Friendship can gradually break down barriers and draw people to us and to our Lord.

God's love for evolutionists

At Loma Linda University, several faculty members do research in biology and geology, and at times work in collaboration with scientists from other universities who believe in the evolution of life over millions of years. We can successfully work with them because our specific research projects do not depend on whether one believes in large-scale evolution or in long geologic ages.

If we treat them with respect and are true friends to them, and are also careful scientists, when they find out we are creationists they do not reject us but continue to respect us despite disagreeing with our beliefs. We do not need to make evolutionists hate us in order to tell the truth about our commitment to our Creator.

The world is not divided into the good creationists and the bad evolutionists. Many scientists have never had opportunity to see reasonable alternatives to a materialistic evolutionary process. Many scientists, though convinced by the evidence for evolution, are unwilling to give up on God and/or are searching for some meaning in life. Do we want to draw these people to us or drive them away?

Certainly God wishes to give them a fair opportunity to learn that He has a message of hope for everyone and that He is worthy of their confidence. We have a passion to see believers realize that these evolutionary scientists are people who need to be

DO

Present positive reasons for belief
 Discuss concepts and beliefs
 Love and support people
 Respect those who believe differently
 Remember that there may be an evolutionist seeker in the audience

DO NOT

Ridicule other people's beliefs
 Put people down
 Try to make evolutionists look stupid
 Picture unbelievers as inferior
 Assume that all evolutionists are simply dangerous and hate God

thoughtfully and even tenderly introduced to a Savior, not turned away by our shrill publications or sermons.

These persons include Christians who have accepted evolution as God's method of creation. That belief seems like a dangerous view because, while appearing Christian at the outset, theistic evolution denies that sin is the source of death and thus eliminates our need of a Savior. However, those who hold these beliefs are also persons whom God loves.

If you were giving a sermon at an evangelistic meeting about which day is the Sabbath, and some of your audience were Sunday keepers, would you poke fun at Sunday keeping and make sarcastic comments about them? Certainly not! We must recognize that this is not appropriate when it comes to the topic of Creation, either.

See box above for a list of suggestions that can help us think about how to present this topic.

Think carefully about your audience

When presenting this topic publicly or discussing it privately, it is helpful to think of what types of persons could be in the audience, or what the person feels or is really like with whom you are speaking.

They could represent at least three types: (1) those who firmly believe in the Genesis account of Creation and are not likely to change their mind, (2) those who definitely don't believe in Creation and are also not likely to change their mind, and (3) those who are searching or are at least open to see this question in a new way, or (4) those who don't know how to explain

the evidence for earth's origins but are searching for meaning in life.

There is always the possibility that some in the audience are in the third category; even if there is only one, our sermon should be addressed to that seeker. When the opportunity arose, Jesus was glad to give His personal attention to just one seeker. Our goal is to reach that one seeker, not to amuse or impress the others with our witty comments about evolutionists.

Adventist young people

Much of the existing creationist material takes the position that evolution is just a mindless theory giving people a way of evading the truth about God. Such creationists think that if evolutionists would simply look at the evidence that is so obvious to the creationist worldview, they would realize that Creation is obviously correct.

We like to think that we can *prove* that the Bible is right and *prove* that evolution (speaking about the large-scale aspects of evolution theory, beyond the changes that occur within created groups) is wrong.

Well intended as we may be, we sometimes present this approach to our young people, many of whom attend public universities where scientists spread before them an overwhelming array of data that destroys their creationist beliefs. Here these creationist young people find out that evolution is not a stupid theory but can be supported by an array of evidence that looks convincing, and many lose faith.

How much better it would be if we
continued on page 30

The Adventist “pioneer” theological heritage: Implications for faith, preaching and teaching

Woodrow W.
Whidden



Woodrow W. Whidden, Ph.D., is professor of religion and theology and church history at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

One of the most critical moments in the ministry of Jesus is recorded in John 6 when many of His disciples withdrew and “walked with Him no more” (verse 66, NKJV). At this juncture, Jesus turns to the remaining twelve and asks: “Do you also want to go away?” (verse 67). The response of Peter, framed as a rhetorical question, speaks eloquently and plaintively for the whole human race—“Lord, to whom shall we go?” (verse 68).

The question of the meaning and destiny of human existence can be found only in the truth of Christ and His gospel. What other answer can compete with it? Furthermore, the portrayal of Christ and His gospel, in the setting of the distinctive “theological” convictions of “pioneer” Adventism (1845–1915) forms a uniquely comprehensive set of perspectives and beliefs. And these convictions have a powerful potential for shaping the Seventh-day Adventist Christian worldview, philosophy of life, mission, and ethical perspective.

“Present truth”

Adventist historian and writer George Knight has suggested that the two major theological accomplishments of the “pioneer” period were (1) to forge out what was “Adventist” and (2) what was “Christian” about the Seventh-day Adventist belief system.¹

The traditional Adventist term “present truth” is one that from our earliest existence as a people has influenced our conception of what encompasses those doctrines that convey the theological consensus of early pioneer Seventh-day Adventism (1845–1863) and helped the “pioneers” of mid-nineteenth century Adventism clarify what was more especially the “Adventist” component in their theology when it was projected against the backdrop of what is Christian.

This consensus included the following points: (1) The second coming of Christ as literal, visible, imminent, and pre-millennial; (2) the sanctuary ministry of Christ, which encompasses His work as High Priest in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary and the “investigative judgment”; (3) the eternal authority of the law of God and the seventh-day Sabbath; (4) the nonimmortality of the soul (conditionalism) and the unconscious state of the dead; (5) the annihilationist view of hell (the wicked destroyed); (6) the millennium as a period in which the redeemed rule in heaven with Christ while Satan presides over a desolated earth; (7) spiritual gifts, including the gift of prophecy, are all still active options for the Spirit to bestow upon the church; (8) holistic health (physical, mental, social, and spiritual) is greatly emphasized as an integral part of the process of mental, spiritual, and ethical development (i.e., sanctification); and (9) a profound sense that, as the “remnant church,” Seventh-day Adventism has a special task in fulfilling the prophetic vision of the three angels of Revelation 14.

These distinctive, or “present truth,” doctrines did not stand out as isolated pearls on a string but were given collective theological force through the shaping power of four key framing perspectives:

1. A hearty commitment to the Protestant sola scriptura principle. Thus there is the strong conviction regarding the primacy of scriptural authority in all theological and ethical considerations.

2. Under the rubric of the primacy of Scripture, the apocalyptic portions of the biblical canon (especially Daniel, Jesus’ Olivet discourse,² and the Revelation) were given a privileged place in shaping Adventist theology.

3. The “great controversy” motif. This meta-narrative traces the origin of sin, God’s reaction to this celestial “fall,” and how sin spilled over

into this world with the earthly fall of Adam and Eve. This narrative then traces all the redemptive initiatives God has instituted for the salvation of humanity and the restoration of harmony in the universe.

4. Sanctuary imagery (drawn from the books of Daniel, Revelation, Jesus' Olivet discourse, and the New Testament book of Hebrews) and the "investigative judgment," which helped develop a cosmic "theodicy"³ that forms the background for the great controversy between Christ and Satan and its finale.

The great controversy and sanctuary perspectives became self-conscious keys that help unite the pillars or landmarks of "present truth" with the "eternal verities"⁴ of the larger Christian doctrinal heritage.

The embracing of the "eternal verities" reflected a growing awareness of the importance of key doctrines bequeathed to Western Christianity through the decisions and creeds of the first four ecumenical councils and the later heritage of the Protestant Reformers from 1517 to 1850.

The most important doctrines retrieved by Adventism from this Heritage of Eastern and Latin Christian orthodoxy were:

1. The Trinity, with a special accent on the full deity and humanity of Christ

2. The essence of Augustine of Hippo's emphasis on human depravity

3. The Eastern Orthodox optimism of transforming grace

4. The Latin emphasis on legal metaphors of salvation. Furthermore, the "eternal verities" were augmented with the following from Adventism's Protestant heritage (1517–1850):

1. The great "*solas*" of Luther and Calvin (*fide*-faith, *scriptura*-scripture, *gratia*-grace, and the priesthood of all believers)

2. The Arminian emphasis on free will

3. Protestantism's emphasis on total human depravity, on legal metaphors of salvation, and on the optimism of grace

4. English and American revivalism, with its missionary burdens

5. American "restorationism" with its radical biblicist, optimistic individualism, and "sanctified" rationalism

Christ at the center

The collective effect of the above was to raise consciousness about the centrality of the person of Christ: His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement as Advocating Intercessor in the heavenly sanctuary.

While "pioneer" Seventh-day Adventists were truth-driven seekers for biblically based doctrinal clarity, they gradually came to understand that the exaltation of not only the teachings but also the person and work of Christ would serve as a catalyst for a deeper experience in the things of God. And this deeper, Christocentric perspective would give birth to a revival that would prove to be more loving and winsome (and more effective) in its service and witness to the world.

In this context, Ellen and James White developed an awareness of the spiritual aridity among the "truth" burdened saints of the Adventist "remnant." This realization led to the stirring conviction that Christ, the Cross, and the love of God needed to enter not only into Adventism's doctrinal development but into its collective heart, soul, and spiritual growth.

These developments ultimately led Ellen White to her most profoundly stirring portrayals of the love of God. Furthermore, such portrayals were accompanied by earnest appeals to God's people to embrace this "love divine" as manifest in the saving work of Christ and the redemptive moving of the Holy Spirit. These portrayals included the following:

Doctrinally, godly love was poignantly described as an unfolding of divine justice and mercy, which resides in the very core of God's nature. Such love was expressed in other more theologically practical and tensional balancing acts—law and grace, justification and sanctifica-

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The Bible Teaches Prayer for Others

"If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Matt. 21:22)

"This kind can come out only by prayer." (Mark 9:29)

"And will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night?" (Luke 18:7)

"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful." (Col. 4:2)

"Pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thess. 5:17)

"We constantly pray for you." (2 Thess. 1:11)

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me." (Matt. 26:38)

"They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." (Acts 4:31)

"Jesus' own prayer of dedication and intercession for His disciples, for you, and for all believers." (John 17)

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tion, lingering mercy and the inevitability of judgment.

This crucial and climactic exposition of the love of God (especially in the setting of Christ's atoning death on Calvary), the recovery of the doctrine of the Trinity in the setting of the "great controversy" theme, and Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary all come together in *The Desire of Ages*, especially on pages 761-763.

It is in the context of Ellen White's ministry from 1888-1901 that Seventh-day Adventism has really embraced the task of integrating its "Adventist," or "present truth" heritage with its larger "Orthodox" and Protestant heritage. The fruit of this integrating effort was manifested in an effort to make the proclamation of the three angels' messages more Christ- and Cross-centered. And this Christo- and cruci-centric effort resulted in the uplifting of the great theme of all themes—the Trinitarian love of God for alienated, deprived, and unworthy sinners.

Ellen White was in the vanguard of every significant theological, revival, and missiological renewal of Seventh-day Adventism. Without her contributions, Seventh-day Adventists could have easily evolved into a semi-Christian cult. Her strong emphasis on finding truth through the Word was crucial to our doctrinal formation.

Further considerations

The Biblicism behind these vanguard initiatives includes not merely bringing together all of the key texts on any given theological subject or theme but also carefully interpreting them in the setting of the overarching great controversy theme. Yet this narrative is not primarily about Lucifer and his rebellion, the Fall, and the ultimate restoration of peace and justice in the universe. Instead, the centerpiece that drives this whole narrative is the nature or character of God's love—especially as it is manifested in the life, teachings, death, resurrection, and heavenly intercession of Jesus.

In the context of the "love story" of the person and work of Jesus, the key theological contributions and perspectives of Ellen White come into play. And this powerful portrayal of the unfolding of God's love will profoundly illuminate each doctrine with an alluring and fruitful significance.

For Ellen White, God's love was comprehensively expressed at the Cross and included two key components: a wonderfully balanced unfolding of (1) justice and (2) mercy.

Most certainly, divine love's primary "calling card" is an enduring mercy. But it is quite easy for mercy to degenerate into soupy indulgence. Therefore, love must be ultimately conditioned by justice. On the other hand, justice can easily degenerate into cold vengeance or calculated impartiality. But at the Cross, and in its subsequent redemptive developments, the love of God has been steadily revealed as a wonderful inter-balance of justice and mercy, resulting in the full solution to the sin problem. And, out of this redeeming love, we are confronted with the genius of the Trinitarian contributions to the Adventist theological pilgrimage.

Dry as the hills

The early "pioneers" had become stout defenders of the law (both moral and physical, i.e., "health reform") and bold proclaimers of judgment. The Sabbath was to be observed, not so much experienced. The millennium was more about the devil getting his due than about God giving clear views of redemptive strategies and decisions.

Ellen White said that we had preached "the law until we [had become] as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain."⁶

This mere justice emphasis had led to preaching that consisted mostly of "theoretical discourses" typically framed in a debating style. Most tragic of all, this was done to the exclusion of any Christ-centered emphasis on "practical godliness."^{7, 8}

It was not, of course, that Mrs.

White wanted to do away with the doctrinal and theoretical aspects of truth, or to neglect the justice of God; there was simply, instead, a lack of Christocentric grace that should suffuse doctrinal essentials with the merciful side of "love divine."

Sensing this need, at the General Conference of 1883 Ellen White sounded a strong message of grace. This was the period that climaxed with the great revival of "righteousness by faith" and a clear accenting of the primacy of justification by grace, through faith alone. The atoning death of Christ as a merciful sacrifice for the sins of the world became the keynote of her writing and speaking ministry. Especially in the aftermath of the Minneapolis General Conference of 1888, she exalted the crucified One as the great channel of the love of God for a doomed world.

Furthermore, not only did this period feature the uplifted Christ and His merciful, justifying grace, but it also witnessed a somewhat protracted, steady advance in the recovery of key doctrines such as the full deity of Christ and the personhood of the Holy Spirit. In other words, Trinitarian yeast was being instilled into the Adventism.

Interestingly enough, when Adventism began to proclaim its "present truth" in the light of the Trinitarian love flowing from Calvary and Christ's heavenly ministry, a new element was brought into the work. Those doctrines, which had been primarily viewed as conveying justice, were now seen as also fused with mercy. Not surprisingly, a new note of hopefulness was featured in the proclamation of the blessed hope.

Conclusion

The sum of the matter is this:

As inheritors of this rich legacy, Adventists must accentuate each doctrine, each practice, each standard, and every ethical demand in the light of the arresting narrative of Triune love as unfolded at the cross of Christ and in salvation by faith alone in the

merits and grace of Christ.

If any doctrine, practice, or moral demand cannot be informed by or more clearly inform the Trinitarian love of God, it should be reconsidered. If the love revealed at the Cross and appropriated through salvation by faith alone is not in our preaching, teaching, or practice, such efforts are not worthy of our time and energies. ❏

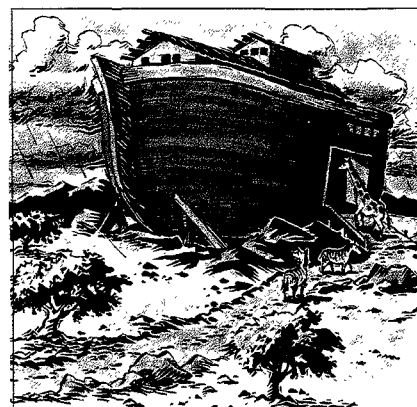
- 1 George Knight, *A Search for Identity* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assoc., 2000), 10.
- 2 Reported by the synoptic writers in Matthew 24 and 25, Luke 17 and 21, and Mark 13.
- 3 The expression "theodicy" is the technical term that has reference to any attempt to give some satisfactory theological explanation for the problem of evil.
- 4 The expression "eternal verities" was coined for Seventh-day Adventists by Leroy Edwain Froom to describe Adventism's discriminating doctrinal appropriations from the larger or broader Christian tradition, or the "great tradition" of twenty centuries of Christian theology.
- 5 We need to alert the reader that we are using the term "Orthodox" to refer to both the Latin, or Western Roman Catholic tradition and the Eastern, or Greek Catholic tradition of churches. The latter are usually referred to as the "Orthodox" family of churches headed by the Patriarch of Constantinople (present day Istanbul, Turkey).
- 6 White, *Review and Herald* articles, March 11, 1890.
- 7 This expression refers to the steps to reconciliation with God and a life of effective witness and service.
- 8 White, *Gospel Workers* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1948), 158, 159.

Apostolic Council

continued from page 12

The term also occurs in Jubilees 23:20, 21; Odes of Solomon 11:3; 17:9; 39:7, 13. Elsewhere in the New Testament, see Mark 1:3/Luke 3:4/John 1:23; Mark 12:14/Matt. 22:16/Luke 20:21; Matt 7:14, 21:32; Luke 1:79; John 14:6; Rom 3:17; Heb 10:20; 2 Peter 2:2, 21. The source of "the way" may be Isa 35:8, LXX: "There shall be a pure way, and it shall be called a holy way, and there shall not pass by there any unclean person, neither shall there be there an unclean way; but the dispersed shall walk on it, and they shall not go astray."

- 4 Rev. 2:9, 3:9 John's invective against the Jews here was written by a fellow Jew and cannot be called anti-semitic; it is no worse than similar aspersions in the Old Testament: see Isa. 1:4, 23, 57:3, 4; Jer. 6:28; 23:14; Ezek. 16; 23. The comment of N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 447, is relevant here: "Even today, not least in Jerusalem, one may see posters and placards in which one group denounces another (often remarkably similar) group as being diabolically inspired."
- 5 Gal. 6:14-16; cf. Rom. 9:6. Notice the census from the tribes of "Israel" in Revelation 7.
- 6 According to Brent Kinman, "Lucan Eschatology and the Missing Fig Tree," *JBL* 113, no. 4 (1994): 675n23, in recent scholarship on Luke/Acts the essential unity of Israel and the church has been emphasized by defining Israel as an entity consisting of those Jews and Gentiles who believed Jesus to be the Messiah. Israel has been redefined so as both to incorporate believing Gentiles and to exclude ethnic Jews who do not believe. See J. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God. A New Look at Luke/Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 41-74; E. Franklin, *Christ the Lord: A Study in the Purpose and Theology of Luke-Acts* (London: SPCK, 1975), 77-115; D. L. Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 9-11; idem, "The Exaltation of Jesus and the Restoration of Israel in Acts 1," *HTR* 79 (1986): 278-286; Fitzmyer, 59; J. T. Carroll, *Response to the End of History: Eschatology and Situation in Luke-Acts*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 92 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).



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Attempts to reach our youth

L. Albert Mathewson



L. Albert Mathewson is a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner at Lakeshore Mental Health Institute, Knoxville, Tennessee.

Recently I attended a Christian convocation. Having worked with young people for much of my life, I was interested in what had been planned for the young people, and so I stopped in at the youth meeting with my 15-year-old son to observe.

I watched a multimedia presentation which was a candid interview with the conference president. He answered questions about things that related to teenagers, and did so with charm and admirable candor.

What followed totally surprised me. Several young men led the song service. They played electric guitars, a keyboard, and a drum set. By the end of the second song, some of the kids were dancing in the aisles and I was dumbfounded.

What was almost more amazing was what popped into my mind as I watched and listened. Through the years I have somehow garnered a reputation for being a progressive Adventist. In earlier years I had stood, guitar in hand, where the song leaders now stood leading a more "contained" song service. So it was surprising when this popped into my mind:

"The things you have described as taking place in Indiana, the Lord has shown me would take place just before the close of probation. Every uncouth thing will be demonstrated. There will be shouting, with drums, music, and dancing. The senses of rational beings will become so confused that

they cannot be trusted to make right decisions. And this is called the moving of the Holy Spirit."¹ Hard on the heels of these words came some others: "Judge not that ye be not judged."

I was determined to cast the event in the best light possible and, lacking the courage to directly confront the leadership, I assumed that the conference had invited this group in an attempt to "reach our young people." For years, I have worked with honest individuals who have been worried that—with television and movies, video games and the Internet—our young people will no longer be content with the "plainness" of religious meetings.

I now fear, however, that our attempts to "keep up" with modern culture will cause us to create "nominal" Christians.

Stages of growth

Before the age of five or six, kids are eager to acknowledge that Jesus loves them and they love Him right back! But all too often something happens: The same people who as kids loved to come up front and listen to the children's story find themselves in the back row of the balcony with sleeves rolled up, ties loosened, and minds far away from the church service.

Many teenagers are unsure of their feelings for God, but do wonder if God can still love someone such as themselves. I think the key to keeping our young people and reclaiming our youth is to translate the assurance of their standing before God into a language that they can hear.

The problem I have with that youth program is not the drums or the tempo of the music itself. In fact if you read the above citation from Ellen G. White carefully, she does not directly condemn drums. She was concerned instead, that the totality of what was going on in the name of God had confused the rational senses.

When I think carefully about this, I must conclude that in our efforts to reach others for Christ, we must be careful not to introduce anything that has a way of confusing or blunting the senses of the people we are ministering to. We cannot afford to bypass or exploit the rational component of the individual. Instead we must appeal to this crucial part of human consciousness in such a way as to help people to understand that being a Christian involves a conscious rational choice.

We have to carefully and purposefully integrate into our evangelistic methods what child development experts have learned about cognitive development, especially as it relates to our children.

Jean Piaget identified four stages of cognitive development: the sensorimotor period (birth to 2 years); preoperational thought (2-6 or 7 years); concrete operations (6-7 to 11-12); and formal operations (11-12 to adult). I would like to concentrate on the latter two.

Too much, too soon

In many churches attempts are made to reach our children while they are in the concrete operations phase. Some say that if we do not get our children baptized before the age of 10 or 11, we are much more likely to lose them. But at this age or stage, while they can understand and repeat a religious doctrine, they cannot yet perform abstract problems or consider all the logically possible outcomes. In other words, we are trying to reach them before they are fully "rational beings."

It is not until children reach the formal operation stage that they are suitably capable of thinking logically and abstractly. At this point they also reach the place where they can reason theoretically.

This raises an uncomfortable question: Does our desire to baptize our children at such an early age stem from our insecurities that our faith will not stand logical scrutiny from our young? I hope not! Of all Christian denominations, ours is seen to be the one in which all of the doctrines fit into a logical whole!

Recommendations

In our attempts to rush our children to salvation have we done them a disservice? If so, what can we do to reach our young people?

First, we must surrender the notion that we have to compete with the use of the modern technology and special effects in entertainment. We can, of

course, use technology to our advantage, but to think that we must compete with the entertainment market lowers the gospel to a commodity and changes our pastoral role from minister of the gospel to entertainer. We were not called to entertain, but, in partnership with God, to reach the minds and hearts of people.

The language we use tends to betray us! Do we preach from the *platform*, or the *stage*? Do we stand before the *audience* or the *congregation*? Are our deacons *ushers*, or are they *deacons*? The church, no matter what it does, can never compete with the entertainment industry. Entertainment intentionally plays to the emotions; worship to the soul.

The *second* thing we must do and do well is to teach our children, starting at age 11 or 12, how to think and apply spiritual principles to their lives. Doctrines are important. What we believe about the state of the dead, the Second Coming, and the Sabbath are only going to become more important as we face the eschaton. But doctrines in and of themselves, crucial as they are, are not enough. Unless we can challenge our young to think and reason about God's place in their lives, they will simply warm a pew, if they even stay.

We must openly admit to the various issues with which we struggle and model an effective way of struggling with them before our young people. We must show them how we apply God's Word to our own life, if we would have them learn to do it for themselves.

The sad truth is that many among us are in fact stuck in the concrete operations phase and are threatened by those who would openly question and abstractly apply God's Word.

Another thing we must do is to integrate our young people into leadership and active ministry. I am not talking about dragging up the children's division on Thirteenth Sabbath to sing a couple songs. I am not talking about having a "Pathfinder Sabbath" in which a youngster reads

aloud the sermon his father helped him write. I am talking about giving our young people genuinely significant responsibilities. Our young people must know that they are actually contributing to the life of the church and to the lives of people all around them.

Our 11- and 12-year-olds can help in cradle roll so that the parents can attend a lesson study nearby. Our 13- and 14-year-olds can assist with the kindergarten room in leading song service, teaching the lesson, and helping with crafts. Our 15- and 16-year-olds are more than able to assist in the primary room. If a church is concerned over the loss of warm bodies in the upper classes of the children's division, the class could be divided into two teams and alternated between helping lead in the lower Sabbath School divisions (or whatever the service activity may be) and attending Sabbath School on a weekly basis.

Young people can help in numerous other ways. There is no reason that a 16-year-old individual cannot organize and develop any number of active ministries. Instead of lowering the bar and attempting to entertain our youth, we should give them responsibilities and help them transition into adulthood.

Finally, we must listen to our youth. Every pastor should spend at least as much time listening to the concerns of his members ages 11 to 18 years as he does giving devotionals to the church school or Pathfinders. A pastor may know perfectly well every possible concern a young person could have, yet without engaging in the process of listening to them, the youth will not fully enter into a relationship with the pastor.

While we do not believe that as ministers we stand in the place of God, we are deceiving ourselves if we do not realize that in the most significant ways the minister does represent the church, especially to the youth.

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How do you spell relief?

When four Florida hurricanes destroyed his crop, Dale Bass, owner of Golden Harvest Fruit Company, realized he was "out of business" until the next season. As the premier shipper of high-quality citrus to churches and schools for fund-raising, Dale also understood that many entities would feel the impact as they, in turn, suffered from the lack of shipments and the shortfall of needed income.

Even with no fruit to ship, the business must maintain its contacts, care for its employees, and assure future deliveries. More immediate in the disaster, however, was the trauma of lost homes, jobs, transportation, heirlooms, communication, pets, and even lives. Charitable and governmental agencies move into such disaster areas to provide rescue and long-term rebuilding aid; but even before they arrive, congregations can provide specific help if pre-crisis planning has occurred.

"How do you spell relief?" This very slogan of the famous antacid medicine recognizes that the first great need may be to reduce pressure.

In the midst of disaster, many people become disoriented, experiencing both emotional and physical shock. Victims do not always respond with logic to devastating events. For example, in these same hurricanes, Sharon's 70-something-year-old mother decided she would climb onto her house roof to check the damage caused by a falling tree. While insurance agencies would clearly warn church volunteers against becoming roof-repairers, I would much rather a younger neighbor had climbed that ladder than a senior citizen.

Where do you start? Dale says, "When someone has lost everything, that is exactly what they need—everything! A bottle of water, a thermos of soup, a place to sleep." His Ft. Pierce

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congregation opened its facilities for people to sleep on the pews, established a hot-meal program in the neighborhoods, and began to serve rescuers who had come to work the larger effort. There's a whole lot of religion in a loaf of bread. Add peanut butter and jelly and they will never forget you.

Sometimes the greatest kindness is simply "being there" to sit alongside someone who has experienced great loss. Eloquence is not needed. Your very presence communicates care, concern, camaraderie, and confidence in God's providences. As Saint Francis admonished, "Preach the gospel always; if necessary use words." If you must speak, talk of a hope-filled future; of better days to come. Don't preach, but do articulate hope, assurance, and your personal belief in the ultimate triumph of good over tragedy and evil. And do listen. Allow those whose lives have been uprooted to share their pain. Just the ability to talk about their feelings of loss brings them real stress relief.

How do you spell re-live? Simple actions make a great contribution. Try helping sort the debris of a destroyed house for photos, hauling away trash, running errands, providing emergency child care, sharing transportation, loaning your mobile phone, contacting animal shelters, or phoning relatives. By helping victims focus on the future, you enable them to struggle out of the

immediate chaos toward restoration of normal life patterns. Clothing, food staples, household supplies, bedding, and kitchen equipment may top the list of needed items. When people begin rebuilding their lives, they need everything.

By advance thinking and planning, your church can organize processes to collect and distribute supplies and money in cooperation with other help agencies. A well-maintained database of care groups, crisis counselors, medical centers, insurance companies, and other volunteer organizations will provide vital information for a future crisis. You can also follow up by offering grief and loss-recovery support groups.

How do you spell re-leaf? Dale's citrus groves will re-leaf and produce new fruit. Generous souls will grow again into abundant harvests.

Likewise, a certain "re-leafing" will flourish in your own heart. If you have ministered to strangers through traumatic times, you will discover a host of new friends in whose lives you have invested and in whose souls you have become family. Your own perspective will change concerning life's real essentials as less important issues are eclipsed by the things that really count in life. Opportunities will expand for your congregation to share expertise and to experience fellowship with individuals who, previously, had not been open to the gospel.

And as you plan, remember, "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"¹

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1905), 143.

Too far or not far enough continued from page 8

that differs from the way other groups of people follow Him.

Basic learning theory says that fresh knowledge always builds on prior knowledge. This means that a convert's theology retains Islamic influences, however biblical it may be. Christians in Muslim contexts need to retain some kind of relationship with the mosque if they are to witness. Islamic styles of personal piety and corporate worship remain.¹⁸ In fact, Western Christians, with our highly secular societies, can learn a lot from fellow Christians with an Islamic background.

Effective mission to the Muslim world requires that Seventh-day Adventists follow the precedent of the Jerusalem Council. The cultural-religious divide we seek to cross is just as deep and wide as that faced by the apostles. Only the eternal, universal principles of the Bible will successfully cross the divide.

At the very heart of biblical truth stands Christ. Although the Koran's view of Jesus does not fully agree with the Bible, Muslims possess an openness to Jesus that is an open door to further learning.

We tend to see Muslims as shut doors, and many are—to Christianity as they perceive it. But from a God's-eye-view, Muslims may be more spiritually open to Jesus Christ than some secular citizens of Europe and America. What Muslims need is to see the real Jesus more clearly in the Bible, in the lives of individual Christians, and in the church.

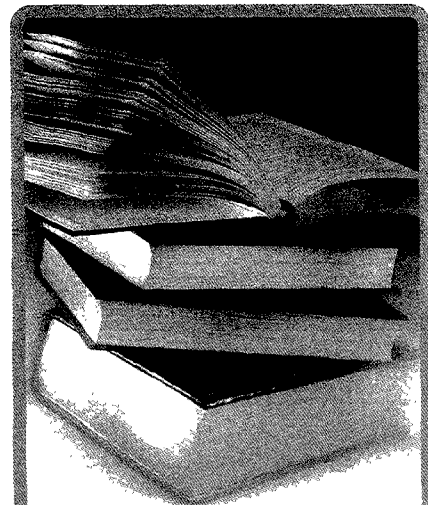
The argument for openness to creative mission strategies among Muslims does not rest on any delusions of quick and easy success. The spiritual journey from being a Muslim to being a mature Christian is long and difficult; the corporate resistance is fierce.

The question challenges us: Will Seventh-day Adventists have the

patience to walk by the side of Muslims from where they are to where God is leading them? If a new and sudden openness developed, would we be prepared with material resources, trained missionaries, and open hearts to reap the harvest?¹⁹

As we seek better ways to obey the Great Commission among Muslims, we must never “go too far” in contextualization so that the churches we plant are merely “of the world,” of Islam, or of anything besides of Christ. However, the precedent of the Jerusalem Council suggests that the bigger concern is making certain that we “go far enough” so that the good news penetrates deeply “into the world” of the Muslim. ❏

- 1 On September 11, 2001 (9/11) Muslim terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners and used them for suicidal attacks in the eastern U.S.A.
- 2 Some post-9/11 Christian rhetoric about Islam suggests oneness in insult making between pastors and imams. That Islamic belief and practice contradicts certain Christian principles is apparently a new discovery for some prominent Christians.
- 3 See “Contextualization” in A. Scott Moreau, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000).
- 4 Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 184.
- 5 Japan is an example of a society in which Christianity continues to be seen as a foreign religion and thus does not realize significant growth.
- 6 “Syncretism” is the “replacement or dilution of the essential truths of the gospel through the incorporation of non-Christian elements” (Moreau, 924).
- 7 Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 20.
- 8 Moreau, 226.
- 9 Quoted in Pat Apel, *Nine Great American Myths: Ways We Confuse the American Dream with the Christian Faith* (Brentwood, Tn.: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, Publishers, 1991), 129.
- 10 Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 186.
- 11 This is not to undervalue the role of special revelation but to acknowledge God's activity among non-Christian peoples.
- 12 For a full discussion of the process see Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 186-190.
- 13 Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 191.
- 14 This is not to suggest that cultural features of Christianity in a given society are all wrong. The problem is that Christians tend to confuse secondary cultural elements with primary gospel principles.
- 15 Andrew F. Walls develops this concept and traces it through six eras of church history in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996).
- 16 Space does not permit a discussion of cultural specificities that pollute Western Christianity. See Pat Apel, *Nine Great American Myths* and Craig M. Gay, *The Way of the (Modern) World: Or, Why It's Tempting to Live as if God Doesn't Exist* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998).
- 17 Some ancient Christian churches exist in Middle Eastern countries, but they are usually constrained by laws against evangelism and church planting.
- 18 Space does not permit a discussion of how culture shapes Christianity in every society.
- 19 Adventists need to remember and learn lessons from our responses to the sudden opening of the former USSR.



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Evolution and creation

continued from page 21

taught them that evolutionists are intelligent people, with abundant evidence for their views, but that there are other ways, better ways, to interpret that evidence. Though we have good reasons for our beliefs, we should not underestimate the ability of non-creationists to make their views look convincing.

Dealing with difficult evidence

The most difficult evidence for creationists comes from paleontology (fossils) and geology. We did not observe the events that produced the fossil record, and we do not know enough to be able to explain much of the evidence. There are no simple answers to some of the scientific data.

Some lines of evidence clearly support Creation and challenge materialistic evolutionary theories; other evidence challenges our biblical understanding of a literal Creation and global flood.

We believe that some day we will understand how the Genesis account

can explain all of the evidence, but that is not the way it is now, even though today much can be explained satisfactorily. Thus we should be honest and help our readers and hearers see that there is reason to trust God's communication to us, even though we don't have all the answers.

We need not be insecure about our beliefs; we can live with some unanswered questions. Too many Christians seem to depend on being able to prove Creation, and this often becomes the focus of creationist publications. Other scientists don't have proof of their noncreationist view either, and they would not be realistic to expect such proof. There is evidence for Creation, but if our faith in God depends on proof, we are in serious trouble because we will never be smart enough to prove our creationist beliefs on a simply scientific or rational basis.

Though presenting the literal Creation account is imperative, may we suggest that, perhaps, no one should write creationist publications unless they have some good personal friends who are evolutionists and consequently have a burden to win those friends by a loving, kind, tactful presentation. The scientific evidence is

much too complex, and the existing creationist literature is too full of errors, for anyone to write more creationist literature without careful consideration of how to present the topic.

Qualified scientists with experience in this area (such as the staff of the Geoscience Research Institute) should be consulted to check the content and the approach.

We need God's blessing in a special way as we consider how to present this aspect of the gospel. Our prayer and desire is for all of us to work together to find better ways of reaching people and drawing them to Jesus. ■

Editorial note: Part 2 of this two-part series will appear in the April issue of Ministry and will consist of a sample sermon, illustrative of the concepts and principles presented in this article.

Reach our youth

continued from page 27

Conclusion

During my entire adult life, I have witnessed the church struggle with how to reach our youth. I don't think we have taken the highest path in trying to do so.

While we wonder how to reach our youth, we fail to remember that God largely used teenagers to help lay the foundation for a highly significant end-time movement, the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He used a 17-year-old girl to give His message, and then building on that base, used her well into her golden years.

In the nineteenth century very young people assumed responsibilities on a regular basis. Perhaps by moving the focus from the "young" in "young adults" to the "adult," we could bring true significance back into the way these up-and-coming "people" view the church. ■

1 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 2:36.

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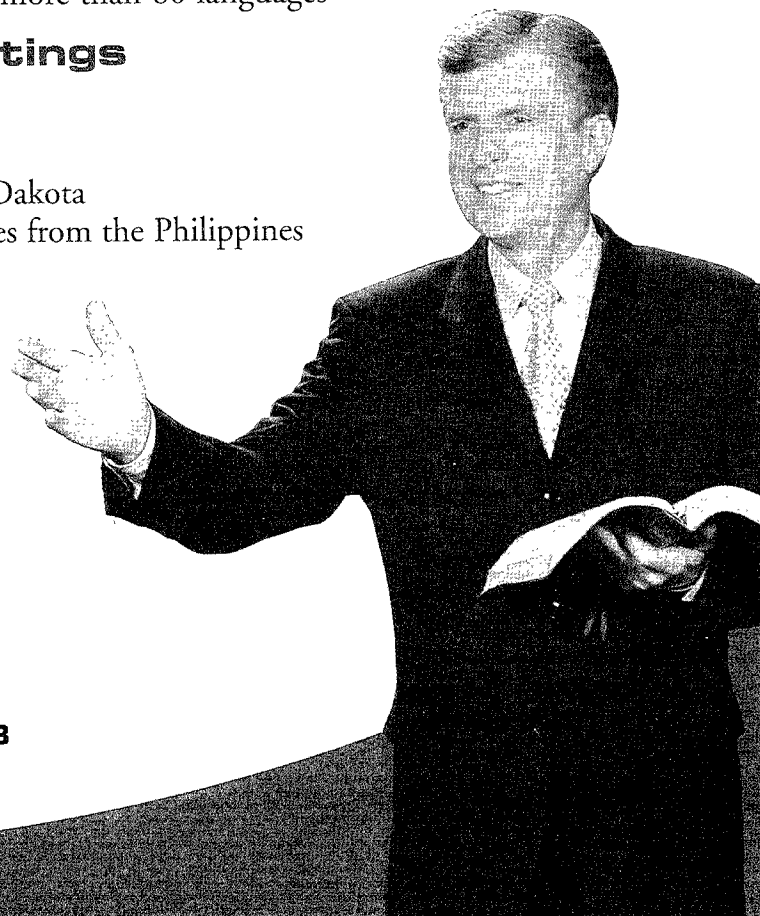
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