

Photos and story from the Former Adventist conference

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Proclamation!

**FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS
INQUIRING ADVENTISTS
SABBATARIANS
CONCERNED CHRISTIANS**

JANUARY–MARCH 2010
VOLUME 11, ISSUE 1

**I have never been
in a better spot**

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Dancing with Truth

**Easter reflections
on "God with us"**

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**Do your children
know Jesus?**

Uncovering the mystery of the incarnation



COLLEEN TINKER

Past, present, and future sins forgiven

I sat next to Richard at a baptism one evening a few years after joining Trinity Church. As usual, we were filled with amazement and moved to tears as we listened to each person tell of coming to know the Lord Jesus. Then a petite girl about 10 years old waded to the microphone and uttered the words that summarized what I did not know at her age:

“...And I know Jesus has forgiven all my sins—past, present, and future!”

My tears overflowed then, and I asked myself, what would it have been like to grow up knowing Jesus as that little girl knew Him? She had no doubt that Jesus had already forgiven all the sins of her entire life.

Moreover, she knew without doubt that she was saved, and she loved Jesus. Furthermore, her love was not a “principle”; she loved Him enough that she was

willing to declare publicly that He was her Savior, and she belonged to Him.

Another day, another paradigm shift...my colleagues from Arrowhead Christian Academy gathered in our kitchen one day in May, 2002, to celebrate the imminent birth of my department chairwoman’s first baby. The head of the science department prayed before we ate, “And please bless this child who is about to be born. We pray she will come to know You at an early age.”

Startled, I realized I had never thought of children knowing Jesus at an early age. As an Adventist I understood children gradually learned the “facts” about Jesus, and somewhere near the “age of accountability” (presumed to be about 12) they would be old enough to decide if they would be baptized. “Knowing Jesus” was not a term I’d heard much in the past. Rather, “deciding to accept Jesus”—resulting in baptism into Adventism—was a cognitive decision we were urged to make, and if a child was much under age 10, he was generally considered unable to make such a decision because he was not old enough to understand.

I know now what the difference is between the way I grew up thinking about Jesus and the way that unforgettable little girl knew Him. I learned about a Jesus who did not finish His atonement on the cross. I had no assurance that my future sins would be forgiven. I did not know I was born spir-

itually dead, nor did I know that Jesus could give me a real (not metaphorical) new birth by bringing my dead spirit to life. I understood Jesus to be my Example, demonstrating by His sinlessness how I, too, could resist sin and please God by my obedience.

When I finally learned who Jesus really is and that He has already finished everything necessary to atone for my sin, and when I finally understood that the Bible teaches I have a spirit that can know and worship God (John 4:25), I finally understood how even young children can know Jesus. The truth about Jesus is revealed in the Bible, and the Holy Spirit convicts even children’s spirits when they are taught biblical truth.

In this issue we focus on the truth about Jesus. Scott Blakey reminds us that Jesus’ birth was for the purpose of His death, according to Scripture. Bill Born challenges us to worship “God with us”, and Chris Badenhorst examines the singular implications of the incarnation. I look at how and what we learned about Jesus as Adventists and also summarize the events of the fifth Former Adventist Fellowship conference. Carolyn Macomber shares her faith story, and Nicole Stevenson articulates her joy in knowing she is God’s daughter. Chris Lee punctuates this issue by discussing what should and should not divide us as the body of Christ.

We pray that as you read, you will experience the Lord Jesus in a profound new way and embrace Him as all you will ever need.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

He is risen, indeed! †

My tears overflowed then, and I asked myself, what would it have been like to grow up knowing Jesus as that little girl knew Him?

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Vol. 11, Issue 1 • January, February, March 2010

Founding Editor **Dale Ratzlaff**

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Copy Editor **Cristine Cole**

Design Editor **Richard Tinker**

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Web: LifeAssuranceMinistries.org

E-mail: proclamation@gmail.com

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Is the cross of Jesus a big deal for you?

Question: Why do evangelicals make such a big deal about the cross?

Answer: The cross and the resurrection are God’s provision for saving humanity. As we approach another Passion Week with its Good Friday and Easter Sunday, we stand in humility and awe as we once again gaze at the uplifted Christ suffering the anguish and pain of the cross. Our mind’s eye perceives His limp, wounded, and blood-stained body sorrowfully laid in another’s cold, damp tomb. Then, early on the first day of the week, our sorrow is transformed into amazing joy. He is risen! Yes, He is risen indeed!

Vicariously, in a moment of time, our mind races back to that eventful week: the disciples clamoring about who was the greatest; the last supper with the symbols of a new covenant in His blood; boastful, self-reliant Peter; the agony under the olive trees; the sleeping disciples; the betrayal kiss, and the disciples fleeing for their lives. We feel the heat from the warming fire; we hear the rooster crow and listen to Peter swear, “I don’t know the Man”.

Stunned, we witness the sham trials, the purple robe, the crown of thorns, the slaps in the face, and the spitting. Standing in the hostile crowd we see the judge take his place and hear his pronouncement, “I find no guilt in Him.” Then from around us rises the damning cry, “Crucify Him, Crucify Him...His blood shall be on us and on our children” (Matt. 25:22-24).

We watch Him bearing His own cross through the narrow, stony streets of the city of peace, where more than a thousand years before the aged Abraham raised the knife to slay his son and was interrupted by the angel. Abraham named the place, “In the mount of the Lord, it will be provided”—and now we see the Lord’s Provision.

We hear the blows of the hammer on nails piercing flesh, fastening it securely to the wood of the cross. We hear Him pray, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” To the repentant thief He speaks a promise of hope, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” To His

mother, “Woman, behold your son.” To the beloved disciple, “Behold your mother.” We hear the cry of true humanity undergoing real torment, “I am thirsty.” We feel the terror of sin’s separation as we hear the

beloved Son who always did His Father’s will cry out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”

Darkness shrouds the cross. There is silence broken only by the sobs of the onlookers and an occasional taunt, “He saved others; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe.” Then, with the last fragment of human strength He proclaims, “It is finished.”

Now, centuries later, we still stand in wonder at the Christ event. It was this event that proved for all time that God is just in the way He justifies sinners.

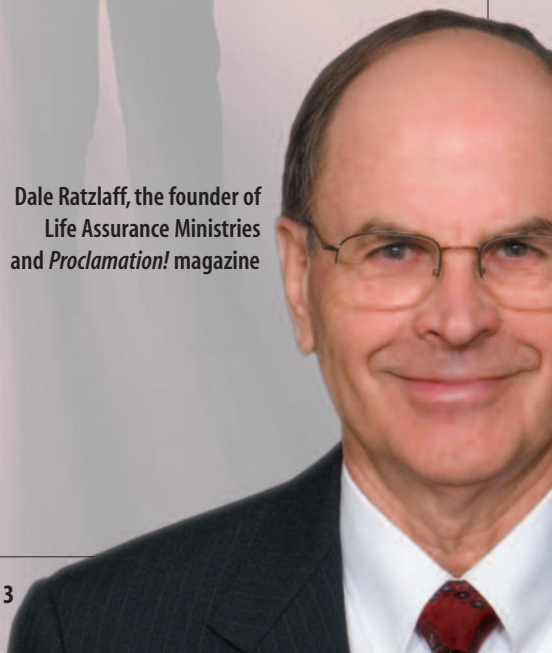
It is here we understand the magnitude of human sin, the depths of agape love, and the long reach of the arm of grace. At the cross we compute the price paid for our redemption. God was there in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting our trespasses against us. As we rehearse this event He commits to us the word of reconciliation. We become ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Why? Because “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). †



Dale and Carolyn Ratzlaff have authored five books concerning Adventism: *Sabbath in Christ*—a volume that explains new covenant Sabbath rest, *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventism*—explores the unique doctrine of a pre-advent judgment that decides eternal destinies, *Truth About Adventist “Truth”*—a little book that’s perfect to give to Christians that need to understand Adventism, *Truth Led Me Out*—in which Dale Ratzlaff tells his own story of following Jesus, no matter the cost, and *My Cup Overflows*—Carolyn’s autobiography. Each of these books is available at www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.com or by phoning 800-355-7073.

Dale Ratzlaff, the founder of Life Assurance Ministries and *Proclamation!* magazine



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I have never been in a better spot

CAROLYN MACOMBER

Let me be upfront and honest right away. I care for people who choose to be Seventh-day Adventist. And that is why I share my story, not out of anger or bitterness, but out of love and concern for those still caught in unbiblical teaching and bondage, for those who wonder if they are saved.

I was a Seventh-day Adventist for 46 years. My pedigree reads like that of Paul in Philippians 3:4-6. I was a Seventh-day Adventist of Seventh-day Adventism. From the 2nd grade through graduate school I attended Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions. I taught 8 years in their elementary schools, was an interim youth director, and directed one of the largest Adventist summer camps in North America. I was an associate pastor in the Adventist Church and was one of two people being considered for the position of professor of Religious Education at Andrews University in 2007. I loved my church and its people.

And then God broke me for His glory in the summer of 2008. In May/June of 2008 I hit total burn out. I was com-

pletely exhausted physically, emotionally, and spiritually. At that time I was attending an interdenominational Bible study called Bible Study Fellowship (BSF). The teaching leader gave out her phone number at the end of the study season, and I called her. We spoke and I shared my exhausted condition with her. Graciously and gently she began to invite me to her home for a meal, for rest, and for conversation.

Unbiblical oxymorons

One beautiful summer evening, as we sat on her porch, the conversation turned spiritual. Deb spoke of her love of God's Word, and I responded innocently, "I believe in the Bible and the Bible only, too." Deb, replied, "No, you don't!" (She doesn't fully remember saying that, now.) I asked her what she knew of Seventh-day Adventism, and she replied, "Not much." I left that evening wondering how a woman who definitely loved the Lord and read the Scriptures could miss God's direct command to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. Either something was wrong with God, or something was wrong with her. I found out as I began to study that something was wrong with my understanding of God. The Father and the Son in the writings and theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were unbiblical. If He had been my example, then sin would have been in Him, and He could not have been the blameless sacrifice for my sin. I began to find that many Seventh-day Adventist teachings were oxymorons.

From that point on I decided I would study the Bible without going to any Ellen G. White writings. If Seventh-day Adventist teachings were truly Biblical, then I should be able to figure out doctrine without the writings of Ellen White. Then came my first "aha". According to Adventist teaching the "seal of God" was the Sabbath; yet I couldn't find "seal of God" identified as the Sabbath anywhere in the Bible. I did find that the "seal of God" was the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14).

I felt my foundation for life crumbling, and I experienced a deep crisis of faith. What was true, and how would I know it? Different denominations took the same Biblical texts and extrapolated different teachings from them. How would I know what was real and true?

At this point I began an email dialogue with my new friend. I asked her, "How do you know what is truth?" Her response was interesting. She wrote, "Remember Jesus' words in John 14:6, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.' Carolyn, He is the very essence and basis for truth." Then I came across a devotional on John 3:16 in a book. "He will take you by the hand and guide you into ALL the truth there is" (*The Message*). I chose to believe I could know what was true about God, Jesus, and salvation, based on the fact that the Holy Spirit had been promised to guide and teach us truth (Jn. 16:5-15).

Rest and the joy of salvation

I was still feeling very burned out when Debbie wrote in another email, "This week I did a small word study on rest and was wowed by what God has to say; 'He is our resting

place.’ Sound like what you are seeking?” I had never thought of Jesus being my rest (Matt. 11:28-29). I had always thought that rest involved not working on the Sabbath. Then I did a personal study on the Old Covenant and New Covenant—using just my Bible and putting in one column all the texts and phrases that fit the Old Covenant and all the texts and phrases that fit the New Covenant. I was beginning to see that the Old Covenant pointed to Jesus, and the New Covenant verified that He literally was our rest.

Debbie then told me that she was praying I would return to the joy of my salvation. I thought, that is a crazy prayer! I’m dying inside, have an elephant on my chest, dissonance in my head—and you are praying for me to return to the joy of my salvation! Yet, the phrase wouldn’t leave my mind. I emailed Debbie, asking if we could talk about salvation. I didn’t believe in that “once saved, always saved” business! Yes, I had been taught we could have assurance of salvation, but I’d also learned that we could fall out of salvation. Here was another Adventist oxymoron. Yes, you can know you are saved, but you can never “really” know you are saved.

Debbie responded by writing, “If Christians believe that it is by grace that we are saved, thru faith, not by works (Eph. 2:8-9) ... in other words if we don’t DO anything to earn it, how can we DO anything to lose it? It is a gift—even the faith to believe is a gift; it is all of Him. The response to His great salvation is such that I DO what pleases Him as testimony to the fact that I am His and He is mine. Being born again is like physical birth; we don’t do anything to be born, but we are actively involved in receiving birth. Why do you think Jesus said that we have to be born again, first by water (physically), then by the spirit? One of my favorite Scriptures regarding this mystery is 1 John 5:11-13. It is clear that either we have spiritual life in Christ or we don’t—and we can know! It is His work. If it were based on anything but Him, we might be liable to lose it, but it is based on Him—the unchanging, faithful, perfect, unfailing God that He is.”

The Holy Spirit continued to work on my heart, and I asked Debbie if we could have prayer together. I wanted a witness to confirm if I ever doubted that I had believed and received Jesus as my sole source of salvation. On July 15, 2008, we prayed together in her living room. and I was sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of my inheritance in Christ (Eph. 1:13-14).

This decision led to more searching of the Scriptures and more wrestling, but my foundation, the Cornerstone, Jesus Christ, was in place (Is. 28:16; Rom. 10:9-13; Rom. 9:31-33; 1 Peter 2:6).

Jesus is worth the loss

I began to find more and more inconsistencies between Scripture and Adventist doctrines and teachings. As a result I chose to remove my membership from the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

I was told that if I didn’t stop the removal of my membership from the Seventh-day Adventist Church I would be terminated from my employment with Andrews University. I



SHARON CAREY

Carolyn Macomber is a doctoral student at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. She is a children’s teaching leader for the St. Joseph Bible Study Fellowship, and she is a member of The Chapel in St. Joseph and is co-founder and leader of the Former Adventist Fellowship launched there last year. You can read her experiences as she processes out of Adventism into the Christian community at her blog at www.kerianderson.wordpress.com. You can watch her testimony at www.FormerAdventist.com (click “Defending the Faith”).

chose to live with integrity and informed them I would continue to remove my membership. In August I was fired. It is interesting that a university that advertises itself as Christian would fire someone over placing their faith in Jesus Christ and choosing to attend an evangelical church.

Because some Seventh-day Adventists kept showing up at my house unannounced I moved out of my home to a summer cottage owned by a Christian.

As of this writing I am still unemployed, have lost most of my friends who either shun me or try to persuade me to return; my things are in storage, and I’m living in someone else’s home.

Paul writes, “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Phil. 3:7-9; ESV).

I have never been in a better spot! To know Christ, and to know that my salvation is secure in Him is a treasure worth the loss of any earthly power, prestige, money, or relationships. He is my LORD and Savior. †

The cross of SCOTT BLAKEY Christmas

Think of it. That blessed night in Bethlehem has become such a well-known, oft-told story, we sometimes forget the full meaning of that night—why this seemingly humble birth became the dividing line of history.



Scott Blakey is the Bible Department Chair at Arrowhead Christian Academy in Redlands, California, where he has taught for 19 years. He is a graduate of UC Santa Barbara and The Master's College. He and his wife, Sheri, have been married for twenty years and have two sons, Samuel and Aaron. They serve and worship at Trinity Church in Redlands. He seeks to be like Ezra, first studying and living out the Word before teaching it, and he is constantly amazed by God's grace and goodness.

The night on which we look back was looked forward to—was longed for—for centuries, millennia even. In reality, the birth story has become too comfortable for many of us; we have romanticized and mythologized it to the point of robbing it of its full meaning, ignorant of what led up to it and uncomfortable with where this precious life was heading. This is truly a great day to celebrate—God has come to His people in human flesh! But over this day hangs the knowledge of another day, the long, difficult day that would end this life, but that would ultimately open the door for an even greater celebration.

Some History Behind That Historic Night

In earliest human history, on the tragic day mankind fell into sin in the Garden, God gives us the first promise of salvation, the first hint of who this Savior would be. As He curses the serpent for his part in the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve, He gives this cryptic pronouncement;

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel (Gen. 3:15).

And so the rest of Old Testament history becomes the story of waiting for and anticipation of this promised “serpent-crusher.” (Indeed, in the phrase “her seed,” we also get our first hint of the virgin birth.)

Centuries later, God would give another great promise related to this coming One. In making His covenant with Abraham, the Lord proclaimed, “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, prophesied of his son, Judah;

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples (Gen. 49:10).

Thus, in these promises to Abraham and Judah, we have the specific family and tribe from which this promised Savior would come, who is now identified as a ruler over all people. Interestingly, the name given him here, “Shiloh,” shares its root with “shalom,” the Hebrew word for “peace.” The one Israel longed for would not only be the serpent-crusher, but a peace-giver as well.

This “royal” promise to Judah, however, would not be fulfilled until over 600 hundred years later, when David would take the throne. Altogether, in fact, there would be over 2,000 years between the promise to Abraham and the arrival of the Promised One (and millennia more if we go all the way back to the original promise in Eden); there is little wonder, then, that a repeated cry of God’s people over those centuries was, “How long, O Lord?” More would be revealed about the coming one when God made a covenant with David, including the promise; “Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever, your throne shall be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:16). While the full meaning of this promise may not have been apparent to David, it clearly points ahead to the One whose reign will never end, who does sit on the eternal throne (Rev. 22:3).

Other details are given throughout Old Testament history and prophecy. Micah tells us Messiah will be born in

Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). In Numbers 24:17, we read “a star shall come forth from Jacob” to announce the Savior’s birth. Jeremiah tells of the “new covenant” God will make through this One, through whom He “will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jer. 31:34). Most amazingly, Isaiah (harkening back to the promised seed of the woman in Genesis 3) makes his most well-known prophecy;

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14).

So the centuries passed, with more pieces of the puzzle being added, and with the patience and faith of the Israelites being tested. They wandered in the wilderness with Moses, triumphantly entered the Promised Land with Joshua, saw their nation slide into disobedience in the days of the judges and then rise to great prominence and enter a Golden Age under Saul, David and Solomon. They saw that great nation split, with ten tribes taken into captivity by Assyria never to return, and Judah taken by Babylon and brought back home as part of God’s faithful promise to David. They saw Rome come in and conquer and rule over them. And this became the time of which Paul wrote;

But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons (Gal. 4:4-5).

The Angels Proclaim Good News!

All of history comes together then in the (seemingly) insignificant town of Bethlehem, taxed to its limit by the Roman decree that has brought the Jews—and most significantly, Mary and Joseph—to the towns of their forefathers to be counted for the census.

In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flocks by night (Luke 2:8).

Did the shepherds have in mind that night all of God’s promises about the coming Messiah, the One who would come to save and rule over all people? We do not know, but it is not hard for us to imagine that their thoughts were on much more immediate, mundane concerns. What we cannot imagine is the terrifying shock of the sudden appearance of angels and the glory of God before them! Their fears are allayed by the gentle and joyous news they hear;

“Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased” (Luke 2:10-14).

And thus did God keep all His promises—and keep His great promise. This descendant of David (and Judah, and Abraham, and Adam) has come in the womb of a virgin to Bethlehem, the foretold city, in order to invade human history and save His people.

The angels proclaim peace to the shepherds (and to us all). The longings of God's people are answered by this announcement. Jesus came to rescue people from fear and guilt, sin and death; "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). One of the great titles foretold for the Messiah was that He would be the "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). In Ephesians 2:14, Paul writes; "For he Himself is our peace." One of the great, comforting promises Jesus Himself gave to His disciples was, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (Jn. 14:27).

The Reason He Came

We cannot consider the peace of Christ without an honest, uncompromising look at how that peace was attained. This peace does not come from the warm feelings that well up in us at the tender scene of Mary and her new-born child, nor does it come from the teaching of love and forgiveness Jesus provided as an adult. No, this peace was bought at a terrible price. We see this in the words of the Lord Himself in Hebrews 10:5-7;

Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, "Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure." Then I said, "Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God."

Jesus came in human, bodily form in order that He would one day offer that body as a sacrifice on Calvary to pay for the sins of men. We see traces and hints of this horrible violence even in His birth story, as Herod orders the slaughter of innocent children in his mad, jealous attempt to eliminate this rival "King of the Jews" (Matt 2:16-18). On the day Jesus' parents brought their new-born Son to the Temple to present Him to the Lord, could Mary have imagined the darkness of the cross when Simeon prophesied that a sword would pierce her soul? The peace the angels announced came "through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20).

In Hebrews 10, where we read Jesus' "parting words" before He entered human life as a divine embryo, the teaching is clear that the sacrifices commanded and performed in the Old Testament were a mere "shadow of the good things to come" (10:1) that could not permanently remove sin, explaining why they had to be repeated year after year for all those centuries of waiting. Those sacrifices, being powerless to save, were a mere "reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (10:3-4). The Law put in place by Moses, never meant to save but meant to show people their sin and point ahead to Christ, shows the futility of human effort, especially as it becomes empty ritual. That sweet infant body in the manger is the body spoken of here, prepared for a sacrifice in order to perform God's will; "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). We can not separate the cross from the Incarnation, from Christmas, for it is the source of that promised and proclaimed peace; to do this is to be like the false prophets of Jeremiah's day;

They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, Saying, "Peace, peace," But there is no peace (Jer. 6:14).

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church;

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

"I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

Paul—and all of Scripture—is eminently clear that apart from the cross, we can not understand Christ; apart from the cross, the Incarnation makes no sense. Interestingly, we are never in Scripture commanded to celebrate or commemorate the birth of Jesus, but we are given a clear command by the Lord Himself to remember His death (Matt 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:23-26), and not just His death but also His resurrection and the new life we have because of what He has done, what He alone could do.

Christmas and the Cross

Two words stand out as we consider the Christmas story—humility and glory. There is the utter humility of Mary and Joseph, a poor couple far from home, forced to deliver their first-born into the world in a manger. At the same time a band of angels, surrounded by the glory of God Himself, proclaims the arrival of the new-born King, the promised Messiah! These words follow Jesus throughout His earthly life, as He Himself lived a life of poverty, often with no place to lay His head (Matt. 8:20), but also a life wrapped in glory, "glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). We are captured, perhaps even charmed, by the humble picture of Jesus in the manger, the holy family huddled as outcasts that night in a tender moment. Jesus would be humbled much further than this, humility giving way to humiliation as He hung on the cross, the ultimate outcast taking on the sins of man. Yet here too there is glory. In Philippians, Paul explains how Christ took on flesh, humbled Himself as a servant, humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross.

For this reason also, God highly exalted him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow of those who are in heaven and on the earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the father (Phil. 2:9-11).

The long-awaited time of Jesus' arrival still contained some surprises. The shepherds, still reeling from their angelic visitation, must have found it puzzling that the heralded Messiah they were sent to find would be a peasant child sleeping in a feeding trough. The magi surely found it odd that the foretold King would be found in Bethlehem, not the palace in Jerusalem (which, remember, was their first stop).

Likewise, the other end of Jesus' earthly life contained its own surprise, found in the angel's question to the women at the empty tomb; "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen" (Lk. 24:5-6). We joyfully celebrate the life of the Savior at Christmas, a celebration made even more joyous by the fact that He lives today as our risen Lord, victorious over the cross and sin and death. †

Dancing with Truth

NICOLE FAITH STEVENSON

Blind and fatigued in this dark lonely room,
My vision was stolen, my soul in a tomb.
I once had seen clearly, at least so I thought,
'Til I lost my soul vision by the lies I was taught.

It's cold in here now, as I sit and I sway,
I shiver in terror of going astray.
But there must be more than this brutal façade,
My soul yearns for healing and cries out to God.

In response the earth quakes and a light burns my eyes;
I cover my face and I hide with the lies.
At first it is painful; I resist it with fear;
Head hidden, I tremble, weighed down by each tear.

This light is too bright for my eyes to adjust,
But my "vision" resolves as my heart learns to trust.
The things that I see rock my world to its core;
Hope's not elusive—it had seemed so before.

This light fills the room—and courage my heart—
But with it comes Truth, shredding darkness apart!
I see suffering and loss, heartache and sorrow—
I raise up my head with God's hope for tomorrow.

My world crumbles around me, bare to the bone,
But beyond all the rubble, sits a King on His throne.
He calls me by name! I trip over my past,
Each loss worth the gain of **FREEDOM AT LAST!**

I run with abandon t'ward the King of **ALL** kings!
I'm held in His arms while He talks of great things:
A promise fulfilled, which He once gave to me,
"I promise you child, Truth **WILL** set you free!"

I sit at His feet and He wipes every tear.
He tells me the story of how I got here.
I drink up each word, pain beginning to soothe,
The lies of the dark one exposed by the truth.

My spirit receives a new burst of life—
Assurance! Salvation! Joy even in strife!
The King my companion! My Abba! My Friend!
My future is **SEALED!** My heart on the mend!

Then Abba, extending His arm with a smile, says,
"Come now my daughter; let's dance for a while."
There in His arms, I am loved, I belong...
And together we dance to my new spirit's song.

My eyes slowly open, and now I can see:
This dancing with God is real inside me!
No chance of abandonment—intimate, near—
I take courage and heart and give Him my fear.

A quick glance around me; I see things anew.
My past is in shambles—I know what to do.
So very aware of my losses incurred,
I know I must **CLING** to God's Holy Word.

I'll never deny the Truth I now know
To preserve reputation—I'll let all that go.
Though the way may be fraught with roadblocks and pain,
I'll dance with my God, counting each loss as my gain!

Nicole Stevenson committed her life—her past, present, and future—completely to the Lord Jesus on Valentine's Day, 2010, at the end of the Former Adventist Conference.



Easter reflections on “God with us”

BILL BORN

The Easter season is upon us, and it is simply wonderful! My heart erupts in praise the more I consider how this season came to be. It began with the advent of the Christ-child, my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—the helpless infant lying in the dirty manger, and yet the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the one who was “in very nature God.” This truth is captured in the doctrine of the incarnation. As I pause to reflect on that truth, my mind is blown away by the implications for mankind, and I am inspired anew to approach the One in the manger just as the shepherds did: telling others what they had seen and heard, and glorifying and praising God.



The birth of Christ is truly one of the most amazing and incomprehensible events in the narrative of God's plan of redemption. The deeper our understanding of the deity of Christ, the more authentic will be our response of worship throughout the entire year.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14 NIV).

Before we consider the implications of the incarnation, it would be profitable to establish the truth of the doctrine first. The word "incarnation" is not contained in the Bible but has been used by Christians to capture the truths that the Scriptures teach about the deity of Christ; mainly that Jesus was God in human flesh. According to Wayne Grudem in *Systematic Theology*, "The Latin word *incarnare* means "to make flesh," and is derived from the prefix *in-* (which has a causative sense, "to cause something to be something") and the stem *caro, carnis*, "flesh." Instead of an exhaustive study of the deity of Christ, however, I will attempt to help you "see his glory, the glory of the One and Only." Let this glimpse inspire a response of worship with awe and reverence.

Going in chronological order, we first consider the prophecies by Isaiah.

The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (Is. 7:14 NIV).

The name Immanuel means, "God with us." Again Isaiah prophesies about the identity of the coming Messiah.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6 NIV).

Herein lies compelling evidence that the Child in the manger is indeed "God with us". Let's examine what the

Scriptures declare about the four names attributed to Jesus—and worship! The fullness of God is revealed in Jesus Christ, the Son. He will be called:

1. Wonderful Counselor

All this also comes from the LORD Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom (Is. 28:29 NIV).

Worth mentioning here is that Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the Counselor who would remain with them after He departed. In this single name we see the mystery of the Trinity—God, Christ, and Holy Spirit all being declared a Wonderful Counselor.

2. Mighty God

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing (Deut. 10:17–18 NIV).

Imagine, the child born in Bethlehem is the Almighty God!

3. Everlasting Father

But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name (Is. 63:16 NIV).

It is too much for me to comprehend that the Everlasting God spoken of by Moses and the Father and Redeemer of old was the child born in the manger.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God (Ps. 90:2 ESV).

Again we see the indivisible unity of the Trinity.



4. Prince of Peace

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thes. 5:23 NIV).

Jesus is Lord!

It is clear just from what Isaiah told us about the identity of the child that was to be born that He was in some mysterious way the same as the Almighty God, the LORD, the one and only, *YAHWEH*. Although surrounded with mystery, it all begins to make sense when we compare Isaiah's prophecy with its fulfillment in Christ, especially considering how the first hand witnesses processed it. No doubt the divinity of Christ amazed the New

Testament writers. I wish I could ask each one the question, "When did you come to the understanding that Jesus was LORD?"

The angels declare the identity of the Christ-child in their announcement to the shepherds.

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord (Lk. 2:11 NIV).

Even the Shepherds understood the news to mean something extraordinary about the Savior. We are told that,

When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them (Lk. 2:17-18 NIV).

Before the angels' announcement, Elizabeth understood that her son, John, was the forerunner

of the Messiah, and therefore declared that Mary's baby, yet unborn, was "my Lord."

In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Lk. 1:42-43 NIV).

This is an extraordinary statement concerning the identity of Jesus and must have been based on the Holy Spirit's giving her and Zacharias fresh understanding of the Old Testament prophecies! They knew that their son was the messenger, the forerunner of the Messiah. Matthew points out this fact about John in his gospel.

This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him" (Matt. 3:3 NIV).

John himself indicated his understanding of Jesus' divinity when he said,

After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie (Mk. 1:7 ESV).

Jesus declared his own identity as LORD.

"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" (Jn. 8:58-59 NIV).

Grudem explains this encounter clearly.

Jesus combined two assertions whose sequence seemed to make no sense: "Before something in the past happened [Abraham was], something in the present happened [I am]." The Jewish leaders recognized at once that he was not speaking in riddles or uttering nonsense: when he said, "I am," he was repeating the very words God used when he identified himself to Moses as "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 3:14). Jesus was claiming for himself the title "I AM," by which God designates himself as the eternal existing One, the God who is the Source of his own existence and who always has been and always will be. When the Jews heard this unusual, emphatic, solemn statement, they knew that he was claiming to be God. "So they took up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple" (Jn. 8:59).

The disciples and apostles also referred to Jesus as Lord and God. John begins his gospel by declaring Jesus as being the eternal Word of God who was, in fact, God. Later he says,

No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known (Jn. 1:18 NIV).

Thomas, upon seeing Jesus after His resurrection, calls him, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 20:29 NIV). Peter opens his second letter referring to, "...our God and Savior Jesus Christ..." (2 Pet. 1:1 NIV). Paul says that He is "...Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen" (Rom. 9:5 NIV). Finally, we see a picture in Revelation of Jesus at His second coming.

He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God... On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev. 19:13,16 NIV).

The deity of Christ is powerfully demonstrated in the Scriptures. Pause to worship the Lord, Jesus Christ!

Christ by highest heav'n adored, Christ the everlasting Lord! Late in time behold him come, offspring of the virgin's womb. Veiled in flesh the god-head see, hail the incarnate Deity. Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel. Hark the Herald Angels sing, glory to the new-born King!³

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9 NIV).

Implications of incarnation

Let's pause and consider the implications of the incarnation. The passage above has always captured it best for me. What God did was above all else a sacrifice—a gift exchange so to speak. Yet we come to the party with empty

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hands, worse yet, dirty hands. And God—He comes offering to us all of the riches of the universe. It has been said that the incarnation is the most amazing miracle of God—the Creator of the world and everything in it, being made like us. The precursor to and perhaps a sacrifice even greater than Christ’s death on the cross for our sins, was that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The One who owns all the riches of the universe became poor in order that we who were poor might become rich. What an exchange!

And what riches are we offered? Grace. Forgiveness. Redemption. Eternal life. A new identity as a child of God, and a new family! We were given something that we did not deserve and never could have earned ourselves. It is clear from the passage that God did this for our sakes. He had you and me in mind! And what exactly did it look like for God to become poor? Elsewhere, Paul sums it up like this.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness (Phil. 2:5–7 NIV).

It is nice to pause here to contemplate the weight of this statement—it is pointing to the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. Christ’s example is that He took on human nature, not in the form of an elite and powerful human, but as a lower class servant—starting out as a helpless child, later becoming an obscure Galilean, and then being crucified as a criminal. Paul continues the story.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross (Phil. 2:8).

One cannot—or at least should not—ever consider the manger out of the context of the cross. The cross was Christ’s purpose, and that is why His death was a matter of obedience. Christ was obedient by fulfilling His purpose. Paul wonderfully states His purpose as being another great exchange.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:20–21 NIV).

That statement follows the incarnation pattern—through Christ, God gave all He had in order that we might be lifted out of poverty and into incredible riches. Christ’s purpose in coming was our redemption.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (Jn. 3:16 NIV).

Three point application

In conclusion, I have noticed three points of application based on the truth of the incarnation. First, we have been given a new possession—we have been taken from poverty and given riches. This rich possession is the gospel—the good news! We have been given the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. We’ve been given grace! Can we ever say, “Thank you” enough?! Dare we keep it to ourselves, or shall we proclaim it freely? These riches in Christ are for all!

Second, we have been given a new preoccupation—generosity toward others and humility that puts their needs above our own. This new preoccupation is the context of both the Corinthians and Philippians passages considered above. Paul is encouraging us to have an attitude and actions like Christ, and he uses the incarnation as his major point of motivation. The response of those who comprehend the meaning of “God with us” is not just to be wowed, but also to be like Him. Christ has given us an example of generosity, humility, and service, and we are called to follow in doing the same.

Finally, we should be compelled to a new position—worship. Paul finishes his great incarnation passage in Philippians with a powerful statement of worship:

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9–11 NIV).

Above all else, Easter is a time to bring glory to God in the highest—a time to declare joyfully that Jesus Christ is Lord! The more we understand the mystery of “God with us,” the more we will praise him. Have you seen the glory of the One and Only God, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth? If so, then loose your tongues to joyfully declare and sing, might I even suggest shout, that...

Christ is the Lord, O praise his name forever, His power and glory, Evermore proclaim!⁴ †

Endnotes

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Bits & Bytes/Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), n.p.

² *ibid.*

³ Charles Wesley, “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,” 1707–1788.

⁴ John S. Dwight, “O Holy Night,” 1813–1893.



Bill Born lives in Redlands, California with his wife, Julie, and their three children, Billy, Maria, and Benjamin. He has been the Pastor of Worship Ministries for the past six years at Trinity Church in Redlands, California. Bill is the son of Mission Aviation Fellowship missionaries and a graduate of Biola University. Prior to becoming the worship pastor at Trinity, he taught high school mathematics for nine years.

Uncovering the

MYSTERY

of the incarnation

CHRIS BADENHORST

The core of the Christian teaching of the incarnation is that “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Cor. 5:19 KJV)—that in Jesus of Nazareth, the transcendent God stooped low for us and for our salvation. Therefore, the good news as recorded in the New Testament includes the birth of Jesus. An angel of the Lord declared: “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2:10, 11). The incarnation is therefore the root of all Christian truth. According to the first epistle of John, true Christian faith is faith in the incarnation (the Word made flesh—1 Jn. 4:2) just as true Christian life is the life of brotherly love (1 Jn. 4:19). In this article we will consider two aspects of the incarnation: 1) The uniqueness of Jesus’ birth and 2) the significance of Jesus’ birth.

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1. The Uniqueness of Jesus' Birth

There are three aspects to the birth of Jesus that make it unique: a) His preexistence, b) His conception by the Holy Spirit and c) His virgin birth.

Preexistence

Jesus was the only child ever born into the human family whose life was preexistent. The Scriptures teach us that He came from His Father in heaven and returned to His Father in heaven. He was the Creator, the Second Person of the Godhead, the Word of God, the Self-existent One, whose going forth was from the days of eternity.

The coming of God to this world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth was no doubt the most astounding event ever witnessed on this planet. Nothing like it had ever happened before and nothing like it could ever happen again. The eternal God who dwells in unapproachable light and majesty incomprehensible “became flesh and lived for a while amongst us” (Jn. 1:14). The Creator of heaven and earth and the galaxies of infinite space was born of a woman, grew up in a humble peasant home, and traveled about as an itinerant preacher for about three years declaring the good news concerning the reality of the kingdom of God.

He was then brought to trial for blasphemy because He claimed to be God in human form and was executed on a Roman cross where He died in ignominy and shame on the first Good Friday. He was buried in a borrowed grave but rose from the dead on Resurrection Sunday. Fifty days later He ascended to heaven to take His place as Lord of all at His Father's right hand (Acts 2:32-36; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3).

Conceived by the Holy Spirit

The most ancient church creed, The Apostle's Creed, states, “I believe...in Jesus Christ...(1) conceived by the Holy Ghost, (2) born of the Virgin Mary.” Both Matthew and Luke tell the story of the birth of Jesus. As we examine these accounts, we will find that the conception of Jesus was completely different from ours.

Luke states that he “carefully investigated everything from the beginning” (1:3). This investigation likely included an interview with Mary, the mother of Jesus, who would have told him what happened. She related how the angel Gabriel appeared to her and told her she was going to fall pregnant and give birth to “the Son of the Most High” (1:32). “‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’ The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God...’ ‘I am the Lord's servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May it be with me as you have said.’ Then the angel left her” (1:34-38).

Matthew's record includes the genealogy of Jesus. In 1:1-15 he lists forty-two generations. Beginning from the first generation he repeatedly says, ‘So-and-so was the father of so-and-so’. This pattern, however, changes in verse sixteen. Matthew does not say that ‘Joseph was the father of Jesus’, but “Joseph,

the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ”. Jesus did not therefore inherit any genetic material from Joseph. He was ‘begotten’ of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. Matthew emphasizes this point by stating that Mary “was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit” (1:18). He also records how the angel appeared to a troubled Joseph, telling him that “what is conceived in her [Mary] is from the Holy Spirit” (1:20). This explanation was important for Joseph to hear because he knew he was not responsible for Mary's pregnancy (Matt. 1:18-20).

The birth of Jesus, therefore, was unique, not only because of His preexistence, but also because He was conceived supernaturally in the womb of Mary by the miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit. Even here the Bible illustrates that man makes no contribution to his salvation and deliverance.

Because Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, His humanity or human nature was holy. Gabriel announced to Mary that “the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). In other words, Jesus did not inherit “the law of sin” (Rom. 7:23) or sinful nature like everybody else. His humanity was therefore holy and sinless in the absolute sense, like “a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Pet. 1:19).

In contrast, David speaks of his own conception as sinful: “Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5). His words apply equally to all members of the human race. Everyone born into the world is conceived in sin and is therefore sinful by nature. But because Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, He was born sinless—sinless by nature. If Jesus had a sinful nature like everyone else, He could not have been our Substitute in salvation. God demands sinlessness, not only in deed, but also in nature—“in the inner parts” (Ps. 51:6).

The virgin birth

Matthew and Luke both state that Jesus was born of a virgin named Mary. This fact makes His birth absolutely unique. There was none other like it, and it will never be reenacted. So, like other children, Jesus was born of a woman, and being born of Mary, He partook of his mother's flesh and blood exactly as we do. His was a real manhood. He possessed all the properties of a human being—except, unlike us, He was free from every taint of sin (Heb. 2:14-17; 4:15).

There are always those, however, who emphatically deny the virgin birth of Jesus on the basis that it is a biological impossibility. This argument, of course, is true—it is a biological impossibility! If, however, we consider it from a historical point of view, such an event did occur. Both Matthew and Luke confirm the virgin birth in their historical records. And Luke assures us that he “carefully investigated everything from the beginning” (Lk. 1:3). If these historical records are rejected as evidence, then, to be consistent, all other documentary evidence of a historical nature must be rejected as well, but such a rejection would be totally unreasonable.

The birth of Jesus, therefore, was unique because of His preexistence, because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and because He was born of the virgin Mary. Moreover,

being conceived by the Holy Spirit means that Jesus was absolutely holy and sinless in every respect; and being born of Mary means that He partook of human nature in every respect except its sinfulness. Because Jesus was sinless—“a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Pet. 1:19), He could be our Savior and Redeemer. Only thus could we be “redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to [us] from [our] forefathers” (1 Pet. 1:19).

2. The Significance of Jesus’ Birth

The significance of the birth of Jesus can scarcely be overestimated. It gave a new lease on life to the human race and made possible the new creation of a new humanity by means of the new birth. It laid the foundation for all the evidence of the grace and goodness of God exhibited in the life and ministry of Jesus. Finally, it was preparatory to the atonement, the sole basis of forgiveness by God (Col. 1:14), reconciliation to God, (2 Cor. 5:18-20) and peace with God (Rom. 5:1). Jesus’ birth—not the Ten Commandments—demonstrated for all time the glory of God’s character.

The good tidings (or Gospel) of Jesus is expressed by the New Testament authors in a variety of ways. One idea, however, unites the New Testament witness: Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the Old Testament. He is the goal to which Old Testament history moved; it all pointed to Him as its true end (Matt. 5:17; Rom. 10:4). When we finally see the birth of Jesus against the background of the Old Testament, we realize He is the new Creation, the new Moses, the new Joshua, the new David, and the promised Offspring.

The New Creation

There is a remarkable correspondence between the new creation that began with Jesus and the old creation. For example, the angel Gabriel said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Lk. 1:35). This statement makes us think back to the old creation where it is stated that the Holy Spirit overshadowed the world (Gen. 1:2). As the Holy Spirit hovered over the earth and as the first creation came into being through the action of the Holy Spirit, so the Holy Spirit is pictured again as the Progenitor of the sinless human nature of Jesus. Thus is Jesus presented as the new Creation in the New Testament—the sinless Source of a new humanity. By His death on the cross Jesus buried our old sinful history so that through faith in Him and the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit we could become identified with His sinless history.

The New Moses

Not only is there a correspondence between the birth of Jesus as God’s new Creation and the first creation, but there is also a clear correspondence between the history of Jesus and the history of ancient Israel. For example, the story of Herod and the slaughter of the innocents take our minds back to Moses and the slaughter of the innocents by Pharaoh. Then there is the parallel between Jesus’ escape from the cruel hatred of Herod and Moses’ escape from the cruel hatred of Pharaoh.

In these parallels Matthew wants us to remember that Moses was the great deliverer of the Old Testament. He was God’s instrument in leading His people from Egyptian bondage under Pharaoh through the Exodus. Thus, at the very beginning of his story Matthew is telling us that Jesus is

MINISTRY News

Magazine now quarterly

The Life Assurance board voted last December to produce *Proclamation!* four times a year instead of six. Each issue will have 32 instead of 24 pages. This quarterly production schedule will save nearly \$50,000 per year. Even though this issue is coming to you late, you will still receive three more issues this year.

We thank God for those of you who support *Proclamation!* with prayer and also with donations. We pray for you, and we pray also that God will impress those who need to be supporting this magazine to do so.

He is completely faithful, and we praise Him for what He is doing as He shines the light of Jesus into the dark corners of confusion and brings people into the freedom of knowing Him and being transformed by the gospel.

We continue to receive many new names to add to our *Proclamation!* list. If you know of someone who could benefit from

receiving this magazine, please send their name and address in the enclosed envelope.

Conference videos available

You can see the videos from the FAF Weekend presentations online at www.FormerAdventist.com. Check out Carolyn Macomber’s faith story from Friday evening as well as Mark Martin’s powerful presentation that same night. The Q & A panel fielded some intense questions and included Jonathan Bilima, Paul Carden, Carolyn Macomber, Mark Martin, Colleen Tinker, and was moderated by Richard Tinker.

You can watch Gary Inrig, Bill Born, Dale Ratzlaff, and Jon Rittenhouse from Saturday as well, and audio files of the testimonies given at the Saturday evening communion service are also online.

the new Moses of a New Covenant and that the time has come for God to lead His people from bondage under the great Pharaoh, Satan, through the new Exodus to be effected by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The New Joshua

No one person in the Old Testament, however, could adequately represent all that Jesus is. The angel said to Joseph, “You are to give Him the name Jesus [transliteration of Joshua], because he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Not only is Jesus the new Moses who will deliver His people from the bondage of this world of sin and from the great Pharaoh, Satan, but Jesus is also the new Joshua who will lead His people into the heavenly Canaan. Whereas Moses led the people out of Egypt, Joshua led them into the Promised Land. Jesus is both the new Moses and the new Joshua. He leads His people out of spiritual Egypt and He is the One who shall lead them into spiritual Canaan—our eternal heavenly home.

The New David

The angel also said to Mary: “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His Father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end” (Lk. 1:30-33).

In the Old Testament God made promises to David. David was born in Bethlehem, and David was a shepherd. Therefore, when Luke tells the story of the birth of Jesus, he mentions the town of Bethlehem and the shepherds as reminders of David, the shepherd king. Jesus is the Son of David; indeed, He is the new David. At His ascension Jesus was enthroned as King at the right hand of God in fulfillment of what God had promised David (Acts 2:34-36; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3b). From there He reigns over all principalities and powers (Matt. 28:18; 1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20-22; 1 Pet. 3:22) directing the affairs of this world to its final consummation (1 Cor. 15:24, 25).

The Promised Offspring

Another parallel between the birth of Jesus and the history of the Old Testament is the Old Testament declaration that the hope of humanity is in an Offspring. After Adam and Eve had sinned and were about to be expelled from the garden of Eden, God spoke His word of promise to them when He addressed the serpent: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel” (Gen. 3:15). In other words, “Satan, you have overcome the woman by

deceiving her; you have brought the human race into bondage as a result; but I pledge this day that the Offspring of the woman will overcome and defeat you.”

What a marvelous hope was given to the human race! The same promise was given to Abraham: “Through your offspring, all nations on earth will be blessed” (Gen. 22:18). And later in Isaiah: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given” (Isa. 9:6). In fact, the Old Testament regards children as a great blessing because the hope of the people lies in the promised Offspring. Indeed, for the women of the Old Testament it was better to die than not to have children. Rachel cried, “Give me children, or I’ll die” (Gen. 30:1).

From the beginning of human history, the hope of humanity was linked to an Offspring to come. God had placed this hope in the human heart ever since He promised that the Son of Eve would be the Savior and Deliverer, and the entire Old Testament yearned for a Son. Parents in every generation, fervently hoped that the son born to them might somehow be the One that God had promised. Not only did Israel yearn for the Son of Promise, though; the hope of the entire world depended on that Son.

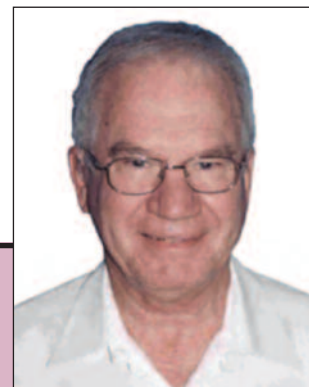
Finally, “in the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4), God gave us the promised Son—His Son, Jesus Christ, “the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8). In Jesus God wonderfully answered all the hopes of mankind. With the birth of this Son came the birth of a new humanity and the beginning of a new history. His birth, therefore, opens before us a new birth and a new beginning. Without the birth of Jesus and without identifying with His new holy history, there could be no such thing as us being born again. We are only born again as, by faith and the work of the Holy Spirit, we are united with Christ and become part of the new holy history that began with Him. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come” (1 Cor. 5:17).

Jesus is indeed the Son of promise and the fulfillment of the Old Testament history which pointed to Him as its true end. He is more, however, than just the hope of Israel (Acts 26:6, 7); in Jesus the hope of humanity is gloriously realized far above all that we could have thought (1 Cor. 2:9)! He delivers us from a life of futility (1 Pet. 1:9); He leads us back to the Father’s house (1 Pet. 3:18). His birth was for us (Isa. 9:6).

The story of Jesus’ birth is part of the story of His life, death, and resurrection. To tell this story and its significance is to proclaim the Gospel! †

Endnote

I am indebted to the late Evangelical scholar Dr. F. F. Bruce for some of the parallelism in the second part of my article. See his book *This is That—The New Testament development of some Old Testament Themes* published by Paternoster Press Ltd, 1976.”



Chris Badenhorst, a former Seventh-day Adventist, is a retired civil engineering technician who still works part time on one of South Africa’s oil refineries in the city of Durban on the east coast. He is married with three step-children and one grandchild. His wife is also a former Adventist who shares his enthusiasm for the gospel of God’s grace. Although they are not members of a particular denomination, they attend a local Baptist church for worship and fellowship.

Do your children

COLLEEN TINKER

Ever since I can remember I had a picture of Jesus in my mind. Like most of my Adventist friends, I learned Bible stories and knew the heroes of faith from a young age, and I am thankful for that.

As I learned those stories, I developed a concept of Jesus and my relationship to Him. I didn't realize it at the time, but my internal picture of Jesus was uniquely Adventist. From hours of poring over Uncle Arthur's volumes of *The Bible Story*, from sitting in Sabbath School and Adventist elementary school and academy, from my Sabbath School lesson papers and the books my parents bought me at the yearly sale on the last night of campmeeting, and from growing up in an Adventist home with two parents who worked at an Adventist hospital, I absorbed a certain understanding of Jesus.

I knew that my Adventist classmates and the Adventist adults I knew shared a similar concept. He was "100% God and 100% man". He was the "second person of the Godhead".

He was the "Friend of children". In fact, as I moved toward my teens, it became more comfortable simply to say

"God" when I referred to Him; "Jesus" really was for kids.

Jesus was loving and meek. He never treated anyone disrespectfully or uttered a complaint. He was forgiving and gentle. He came to "show us the Father". He understood me because He was human. He could plead my case before God the Father because He experienced all the temptations I experienced. He died for me, and it made Him very sad when I was disobedient or disrespectful, or when I didn't help my mother when she was tired or didn't act lovingly to my classmates. In fact, if I was naughty, He would turn His head away from me, shutting me out, and I would grovel in guilt and beg Him to forgive me.

While He died for my past sins, He also died to uphold the law, allowing His crucifixion to



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demonstrate the depths of sin to which people would plunge if they ignored God's commands.

Most of all, He was my Example. He showed me how to defeat Satan by using the Bible to answer the devil's temptations. He showed me how to pray without ceasing so I would have the strength to resist sin as He did. He demonstrated the perfect obedience to God's law that came from relying on the Holy Spirit's power that God gave Him at His baptism.

In fact, Jesus had no advantage that I didn't have as a human because He set aside His "God-power" and took my sinful nature so He could be just like me. Referring to Jesus, Mrs. White states, "...He took upon Him our sinful nature" (*Review and Herald*, Dec. 15, 1896). She further says, "He took upon His sinless nature our sinful nature..." (*Medical Ministry*, p 181). His life proved to me that I, too, could rely on power God would give me to resist temptation and honor God by perfect obedience and by living a life of perfect love just as He did. In fact, His perfect life and perfect sacrifice made it possible for His perfect character to be reproduced in me if I was willing to deny myself and overcome sin by embracing His eternal, holy Law—the transcript of God's own character.

Jesus' death made it possible for me to be saved, but unless God could see I was committed to His law and was

showing an increasing trend in my life toward love and obedience, He would not make up the difference between my imperfection and His holy standard when He came to my name in the judgment.

These were the things I knew about Jesus as an Adventist child.

Why am I writing this?

One of the most frequent responses I hear to the articles in *Proclamation!* goes something like this: "Why do you always criticize? We all love Jesus and believe in Him. Why don't you just focus on the gospel and stop attacking Adventism?"

Here's my answer: Who we believe Jesus to be shapes everything else. If we understand Jesus to be different from the way He has revealed Himself in Scripture, we have a faulty foundation. If our foundation is faulty, we're not building on the Rock but on sand (Matt. 7:26, 27). We are placing our faith in a false, distorted gospel (Gal. 1:6-7). As Paul Carden of The Centers for Apologetics Research said at the February, 2010, Former Adventist Fellowship conference in one of his answers on the question and answer panel: "If you are believing in the wrong Jesus... you're not believing unto salvation," even if you sincerely think you do!

know Jesus?



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SHARON GIBNEY

As Paul Carden of The Centers for Apologetics Research said at the February, 2010, Former Adventist Fellowship conference in one of his answers on the question and answer panel: “If you are believing in the wrong Jesus . . . you’re not believing unto salvation.”

I know that in spite of the words I used as an Adventist, I did not believe in the Jesus revealed in the Bible. I believed, rather, in a Jesus shaped and interpreted by Ellen White—and I didn’t even know it.

Because I know how I and dozens of other former Adventists to whom I have talked used to understand Jesus, I know I must share Jesus as I now know Him to be from Scripture.

In order to understand how we acquired this “distorted Jesus”—and to demonstrate that these notions are not anecdotal but are intentionally instilled from earliest childhood in the most disarming ways, I have examined a variety of Adventist children’s books, both current and classic.

Who do Adventists say He is?

In order to see how the words taught to children relate to the organization’s beliefs as a whole, we’ll first examine two of Adventism’s fundamental beliefs. The second Fundamental Belief of the Seventh-day Adventist organization is entitled “The Godhead”, and it says, “There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation.”¹

Moreover, the fourth Fundamental Belief, entitled “God the Son”, sounds at least equally orthodox: “God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God’s power and was attested as God’s promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to minis-

ter in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things.”²

The second fundamental belief as quoted above states the “Godhead” is “a unity of three co-eternal Persons,” but it does not state those Persons are one Being or one in substance (as do historic and universal Christian affirmations of faith). Further, Jesus did not merely exemplify righteousness as stated in the fourth Fundamental Belief quoted above. He was righteous and holy, and He was God. He did not merely do miracles by the Father’s power; He had the power to do those miracles in Himself. He did them, however, in submission to His Father.

Before dismissing those details as “nit-picking”, it is important to understand that the Adventist church was founded by followers of the ancient heresy called “Arianism”—the belief that Jesus is not eternal, almighty God but was created or otherwise “begotten” by the Father at some time in pre-history. James White and Joseph Bates, co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist movement (along with James’s wife Ellen Gould White), were both non-Trinitarians, reflecting their earlier affiliation with the non-trinitarian Christian Connexion. Later, Ellen White herself abandoned her early Methodist understanding and adopted language such as the “three Worthies of heaven” and the “Heavenly Trio” to connote the three persons of the Trinity.³

The founding non-trinitarianism and the corresponding belief that Jesus is not eternally one with the Father continues to color the way Adventists perceive Jesus. In talking with dozens of people with Adventist backgrounds over the past ten years, I have discovered that most of them shared my earliest understanding that Jesus is the meek, mild, gentle, less fearsome representative of the Godhead. We shared the early belief that Jesus is “all God”, but we didn’t understand Him to possess exactly the same essential attributes the Father has. Moreover, we perceived the Father to have a body just as Jesus did, and we understood that God exalted Jesus in past ages,—before He ever came to earth—thus triggering Satan’s jealousy and rebellion in heaven.⁴

Altered Stories for children

I began with a five-book set of Bible stories written by Carolyn Byers entitled *Forever Stories*. Currently for sale in Adventist Book Centers, this set was copyrighted in 1989 and 1990 by the Review and Herald Publishing Association and state they are written at a pre-school listening level and an early elementary reading level. This series opens with “pre-creation” stories and ends with the new earth, and they are modeled after Ellen White’s “great controversy” worldview.

The Bible does not tell us stories of “pre-creation”. Rather, it opens with the simple words, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The worldview that shapes Adventism’s understanding of Satan’s importance, Jesus’ incomplete atonement, and the eternal significance of the Sabbath, is explained in the fanciful accounts of Adventist children’s books, and these books reflect the teachings of Ellen White.

The first chapter of Byers' first book tells the Ellen White-shaped story of creation. Throughout the story she refers to "God and His Son":

God and His Son loved Their happy home with the angels. But Their love was so big that They wanted somebody new to love. They talked together and decided to make a brand-new world...

It made God and His Son smile to think about people. The people would laugh and sing and play. They would think up new ideas. God would enjoy talking to them. God's new people would be kind and loving to each other and to the animals. Then joy would ripple from their world to other worlds.

God and His Son could hardly wait to tell the angel about Their plans. At the next meeting, God told them "My Son and I are planning a special surprise. I need you to help Me by doing just what My Son says."⁵

Then Byers says Lucifer became jealous of God the Son and met with the angels to say,

"With God's Son in charge, our freedom is gone. He will tell us what to do. We are angels. We don't need that Son to boss us around."⁶

Byers continues by explaining that God and His Son discussed the Lucifer problem and decided that he would have to be banished from heaven. They also discussed "happiness":

What would bring everyone everywhere happiness for all time? They decided that people should be able to choose whom they wanted to obey. To help them choose, people would be told about Lucifer... "We must let Lucifer talk to them," God said. "That is fair. But We will not let him follow them around. Lucifer can talk to them only when they go near one spot, the forbidden tree."⁷

Toward the end of the first book, after Adam and Eve had eaten from the forbidden tree, Satan is described as laughing and laughing, claiming that the people God made, their "pretty world," and the animals were all his. Again Byers refers to "God and His Son"; they "knew what was happening...it made them weep. God quickly sent angels to guard the tree of life."⁸

As Byers describes God's meeting with Adam and Eve after their sin, she describes Adam and Eve as being "so afraid they did not even want to talk to God, their best friend."⁹

The first book ends with the expulsion from the garden.

What's wrong here?

There are many problematic descriptions in this book, but the foundational misrepresentation is the use of the oft-repeated "God and His Son" in the setting of Genesis. In Genesis 1 through 3, God is never described as a separate individual from His Son. Rather, the biblical account over and over repeats, "Then God said..." before each day of creation recorded in Genesis 1. In verse 26 the plural form of the generic term for God, *elohim*, is translated, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness," but this verse is followed immediately by these words in verse 27: "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

God is one. He is not two or three. Jesus Himself con-

firmed this fact in Mark 12:29-31 when a scribe had asked Him which commandment was foremost of all. Jesus replied,

The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' And the second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.

Explicit in the first of the two greatest commandments is the Lord Jesus Himself declaring that God is one Lord. Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, announces in essence that we must know God is one Lord before we can love Him with all our heart. Jesus, who claimed for Himself the identity of God by telling the Jews that before Abraham was born, "I AM" (Jn. 8:58), declares that God is one, and we must understand this truth in order to worship and love Him properly.

While our one God is expressed in three Persons, they nevertheless are one Being. Carolyn Byers clearly portrays God as a separate being from "His Son". She did not accidentally describe them this way; Ellen White said in the third volume of *The Spirit of Prophecy* that Jesus "taught that God was a rewarder of the righteous, and a punisher of the transgressor. He was not an intangible spirit, but a living ruler of the universe."¹⁰ She also said she asked Jesus "if his Father was a person, and had a form like himself. Said Jesus, 'I am in the express image of my Father's person.'"¹¹

Jerry Moon, associate professor and chair of the Church History Department at the Seventh-day Adventist Andrews University Seminary, confirms that Ellen White steered the church away from traditional views of the nature of God:

Thus her visions confirmed what her husband had written in 1846, that the Father and the Son are 'two distinct, literal, tangible persons.' The visions also disproved, to her mind, the claim of the Methodist creed that God is 'without body or parts.' Thus these early visions steered her developing view of God away from credal trinitarianism...¹²

This series of stories by Byers establishes from the very beginning that God and Jesus are separate beings, and she implies they both have bodies. She does not refer to "God" as the Bible does. Instead, she develops the "great controversy" theme in her story by saying Lucifer told the angels they didn't need "that Son to boss us around".¹³ Genesis never hints at such a separation between Father and Son. God is spirit, and the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit share the same essence. They are one Being, and Lucifer has never been a threat to God Who is sovereign over him.

Finally, while in the flesh, Jesus says in John 4:24, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." God is spirit; this fact alone means we cannot reduce Him to a physical representation. Moreover, the Bible tells us absolutely no details about Lucifer's rebellion, and it never states that Lucifer refused to obey "God's Son" and was jealous of Him. Yet these ideas derive from the "continuing and authoritative source of truth"¹⁴ of Ellen White's writings.¹⁵

From their earliest years, Adventist children learn details about Lucifer and his supposed role that are not taught in the

Bible. They learn that God is separate from His Son, that each of them has a physical body, and that God exalted His Son to a position of authority over the angels. Also, they learn that God (as well as His Son) is their “best friend”, as quoted above. The Bible never describes God as our “best Friend”. He is God; we are to worship and honor Him.

Friends of God

The Bible teaches us to call God our Father (Matt. 6:9) and Jesus our Lord Christ (Rom. 1:7). The Spirit is identified as “the Spirit of holiness” (Rom. 1:4), and God as “Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28) as well as “love” (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). Jesus is described as a “propitiation in His blood” (Rom. 3:25), the “Savior of the world” (Jn. 4:42), the “author of [our] salvation” (Heb. 2:10), a “merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb. 2:17); and our “brother” (Heb. 2:11, 17). He is the Creator (Heb. 1:2) and the radiance of God’s glory; the “exact representation” of God’s nature (Heb. 1:3). The Bible never allows us to diminish any Person of the Holy Trinity by placing Him on the level of a buddy.

To be sure, Jesus did call His disciples His friends (John 15:13-14), and Abraham was called “friend of God” (Jas. 2:23). Both James and Jesus, however, define the sense in which a person is called a friend of God. Jesus said, “You are my friends if you do what I command you...I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn. 15:14-15). Lest there be any confusion, John also identifies what Jesus has commanded us to do if we would be His friends: “believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn. 3:23a; Jn. 6:29).

James clarifies,

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (Jas. 4:4).

In no way am I suggesting Jesus is not the friend of children or of us. Neither would I hint that God was not Adam and Eve’s dearest friend. The point I want to make here is that within Adventism, the notion of God being our “Friend” is stressed from childhood on as a way of teaching that there is no need ever to fear God. He allowed people to put Jesus to death as a “demonstration” of His character of love. Instead of emphasizing that Jesus paid an atoning price for sin, Adventism teaches an undercurrent of the moral influence theory of atonement.¹⁶ Consequently, when Adventist authors and teachers stress Jesus or God as “friend” without also teaching Savior, Defender, Protector, Guardian, and God, they teach a limited Jesus who doesn’t have the same power or authority as the Father, and a self-limiting God whose main purpose is defending our freedom and vindicating His own loving character.

The idea of teaching children to call God their “best friend” reflects an idea that has gained great popularity within Adventism as a result of the teaching of Graham Maxwell and Jack Provonsha who spent several decades on the religion faculty at the Seventh-day Adventist Loma Linda University. They promulgated the moral influence theory of the atone-

ment among Adventists; this paradigm negates the centrality of the cross and eclipses the sovereign power and control of the entire Trinity, including that of the Lord Jesus.

The 1962 book *Our Friend of Galilee* by Gladys Rosser, published by Pacific Press Publishing Association, illustrates that this idea has been taught to Adventist children for decades. The book has 28 chapters, and 18 of them end by stating some application of the idea that Jesus is our Friend.

Chapter 8, “The Temptation”, tells of Jesus resisting Satan in the wilderness after His baptism. Completely missing the significance of Jesus demonstrating that He was the Perfect Israel who honored God during those 40 days of desert fasting as Israel failed to do in 40 years of desert wandering, the chapter omits the fact that the Holy Spirit led Jesus to be tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:1; Lk. 4:2). Instead Rosser emphasizes the idea that although Satan’s temptations seemed appealing on the surface, Jesus resisted and became able to sympathize with us. The chapter ends thus:

Then He left the wilderness and went out to show that He was a Friend to every weak, tempted man, woman, and child on earth.¹⁷

Rosser ends the story of Jesus quieting the storm on Galilee with these words, “The disciples never forgot it. ‘No matter how loud and fierce the tempest may beat around us,’ they would say, ‘when we say, “Lord, save us: we perish,” He will hear and come to our aid. What a Friend!’”¹⁸ (A more appropriate response would be, “What a Savior!”) Further, the story of Jesus healing the centurion’s son concludes, “How happy they were as they clung to each other. ‘Jesus healed you, son,’ the father said. ‘He is a good Friend to us. And we shall tell all our friends about Him.’”¹⁹ Finally, Rosser summarizes the conviction of the Roman centurion at Jesus’ death this way: “A Roman centurion, who only a few hours before had helped crucify Jesus, now accepted Him as Saviour and Friend.”²⁰

The biblical idea of friendship with God is that when a person puts himself in submission to the authority of God as revealed through the Lord Jesus, he becomes God’s friend. The Bible does not tell us to approach God as a friend unless we have been made right with Him. Unless we are forgiven and born again, we are considered God’s enemies, by nature “objects of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). The idea of thinking of Jesus—and by extension, the Father—as our familiar “friends” is never taught in Scripture. We cannot think of Him as being just like us. Jesus did not do miracles to show us we don’t have to fear Him. He did miracles to reveal Himself as the singular Savior of the world, the eternal, almighty, Creator God who had authority over creation, life, and death—yet He took on humanity so He could pay the price for human sin (Heb. 2).

Why Jesus came

All of these very human portrayals in Byers’s books of who and what Jesus and His Father are lead to the pervasive message that Jesus’ life on earth was primarily to show us the

“truth about God” in two ways: that He is man’s “friend” and that Jesus is our Example, showing us how to live.

The Bible gives us a different picture. First, Jesus is an “example”, but He demonstrated how those who are alive in Christ will serve God. He did not come to show us how to live in order to be right with God.

We cannot understand the purpose of Jesus’ incarnation unless we first understand that God is sovereign and holy, and humans are, by nature, “objects of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). Paul explains: “But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith” (Rom. 3:21-25a).

In other words, God is holy and righteous and sovereign, and mankind is hopelessly sinful, unable to obey or achieve any degree of righteousness. Jesus came to justify us by offering Himself to God as a blood sacrifice for human sin. In Jesus, hopeless sinners become God’s righteousness in Christ because He became their sin (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus did not merely pay for a person’s past sins, expecting to help that person resist sin in order to stay justified. Rather, He paid for every sin, both past and future, committed by every person on earth who places his or her faith in Jesus and His shed blood.

These concepts are not too deep for children. The gospel is God’s solution to the depravity of man, which necessitates one’s need of Jesus. Children must be taught that without Jesus, they will suffer the second death for eternity.

In contrast to the biblical account, the second volume of *Forever Stories* has God telling the angels His and His Son’s plan after Adam and Eve ate the fruit:

“My Son will go and live with Adam’s family. He will be born as a baby. He will grow up and show people what God is like. He will heal the sick. He will teach people not to be afraid of God. People will know what God is like. Then they can choose whom they want to follow...”

“When He is a man, Satan’s friends will kill Him.

“On that day, all the angels will see that God’s Son gives everything to help people. He will even give His own life. All the people on the other worlds will see how cruel Satan is. At the same time God’s children on earth will see how to be kind and good even when others are hateful and mean.

“Everybody will know how much God loves each person. Nobody will want Satan to live. He can be destroyed forever.”²¹

First, while Byers says “Adam and Eve ate the fruit”,²² she never identifies this disobedience as “sin”. God announces His plan not as a payment for sin but as a demonstration of God’s love. The picture Byers paints is that humanity has grown afraid of God as they have chosen to believe Satan. Thus, God must prove to them that He really isn’t fearsome but is willing to self-sacrifice to the point of letting His Son be killed in order to show how kind and good He is even

Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, announces in essence that we must know God is One Lord before we can love Him with all our heart. Jesus, who claimed for Himself the identity of God by telling the Jews that before Abraham was born, “I AM” (Jn. 8:58), declares that God is One, and we must understand this truth in order to worship and love Him properly.



when others are mean to Him—thus showing by example how we, too, can and must be kind and good even when we’re treated badly.

Ultimately, Byers sends the powerful message that Satan can finally be destroyed, not because he has rebelled and God has the right to punish sin, but because everybody will finally see and believe that Satan is bad. When this fact is finally clear to all humanity, it will be permissible to destroy him forever. All these ideas are a reflection of the moral influence theory promulgated by Maxwell and Provonsa and are not the fundamental message of the Bible.

The Bible is clear; the simple gospel is not the message that God can be trusted, that Jesus came to set the record straight, or that the purpose of Jesus’ life was to show us how to live or to demonstrate to us how selfish we are. Rather, Paul states that the gospel is of “first importance...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Moreover, mankind has nothing to do with Satan’s demise. He is destroyed because he is evil (Rev. 20:7-10). God does not depend upon human understanding, approval, or input.

Could Jesus have failed?

Although Adventists say that Jesus was fully God, they do not say He possessed all the attributes of God during His incarnation. Moreover, they say He could have sinned and He could have failed to complete His mission. God took a risk, they say, in Jesus’ coming and dying.

For example, Doug Batchelor of Amazing Facts writes,

The real risk in the redemption plan, besides the loss of man, was the breakup of the Godhead. Had Jesus sinned, He would have been working at cross-purposes with the Spirit and His Father. Omnipotent good would have been pitted against omnipotent evil. What would have happened to the rest of creation? Whom would the unfallen universe see as right? One sin could have sent the Godhead and the universe spinning into cosmic chaos; the proportions of this disaster

are staggering. Yet the Godhead was still willing to take this fragmenting risk for the salvation of man. This reveals the depth of God's amazing love.²³

There was never a risk to the universe nor a chance that the Lord Jesus would not succeed in His mission. Paul says this of Jesus in Colossians 1:17, 19: "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together...For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven."

All creation is held together in the Lord Jesus. This holding together has always happened in Him—even while He was on earth and in the tomb. His spirit, which is the Spirit of God, never ceased to exist, even while His body was dead. All things have always held together in Him, and His death, resurrection, and ascension were always certain. Never is there any hint in the Bible that Jesus could have failed.

In *Our Friend of Galilee*, Gladys Rosser describes Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. She portrays Jesus' suffering as a struggle with Satan and the powers of darkness; the fate of all eternity hung on those hours in the garden. Here is how she describes the conclusion of His garden suffering:

All the angels had been watching anxiously. Now they rejoiced that Jesus had won. Gabriel came quickly to His side, lifting Him up in strong arms and resting that weary and fainting head upon his breast. He told Jesus that God and the angels rejoiced because Jesus was giving His life for the world. Pointing to heaven, he reminded Jesus of the many people who would be saved because of His sacrifice. Jesus was encouraged and strengthened to continue in the way He had chosen.

And because He won in the conflict with Satan, He is our best Friend when we have to meet and conquer Satan.²⁴

The Bible does not suggest Jesus "won" anything in the garden. It is not possible for us, still bound in time and mortal flesh, to understand fully what happened there. We do know some things, though. God was not waiting to see what Jesus would do; He is sovereign over all and omniscient. Jesus, God in human flesh, knew in advance that He would die and rise again the third day, because He told His disciples that He would (Matt. 16:21; 17:9, 12, 23; 20:19). He "resolutely set out for Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:51) to complete His divine mission. At the same time, Jesus the man was struggling with God over the agony He faced in becoming sin, being physically brutalized, and being separated from the Father. He suffered real temptation.

God the Father knew what was happening. Jesus' agony in the garden, though, was not the occasion of His decision to "go through with it". That decision was made before creation. At the same time, Jesus the man struggled to submit Himself completely to the Father's purposes and to trust Him as He faced indescribable agony.

It is wrong to think Jesus won the victory that redeems lost souls during his struggle in the garden. His victory over

sin came only when He shed His blood on the cross and paid with His life the price of sin.

One more point related to Rosser's conclusion above: we never have to "conquer Satan". Jesus did that on the cross (Col. 1:15). Peter tells us to "resist the devil" by standing firm in our faith (1 Pet. 5:9; Heb. 2:14, Jas. 4:7), but we can resist him because, when we are in Christ, His victory over Satan is ours.

Mormon similarity

Gladys Rosser, however, did not invent the idea that Jesus conquered Satan in Gethsemane. Ellen White wrote,

The humanity of the Son of God trembled in that trying hour...The awful moment had come—that moment which was to decide the destiny of the world. The fate of humanity trembled in the balance. Christ might even now refuse to drink the cup apportioned to guilty man. It was not yet too late...

The woes and lamentations of a doomed world rise before Him. He beholds its impending fate, and His decision is made. He will save man at any cost to Himself...

Christ's agony did not cease, but His depression and discouragement left Him. The storm had in nowise abated, but He who was its object was strengthened to meet its fury. He came forth calm and serene. A heavenly peace rested upon His bloodstained face. He had born that which no human being could ever bear; for He had tasted the sufferings of death for every man.²⁵

The idea that Jesus won "in the conflict with Satan" in Gethsemane, that He "tasted the sufferings of death for every man" in the garden, is amazingly similar to the Mormon doctrine that Jesus paid the price for the sins of the world in Gethsemane. They say that Jesus shed His blood in His sweat as He struggled in the garden, and Mormon leaders say that Jesus' "most challenging experience came in Gethsemane."²⁶

Elder Bruce McConkie of the Mormon Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote this in 1985, by his own admission echoing the words of the Mormon prophets and apostles:

We do not know, we cannot tell, no mortal mind can conceive the full import of what Christ did in Gethsemane.

We know he sweat great goutts of blood from every pore as he drained the dregs of that bitter cup his Father had given him.

We know he suffered, both body and spirit, more than it is possible for man to suffer, except it be unto death.

We know that in some way, incomprehensible to us, his suffering satisfied the demands of justice, ransomed penitent souls from the pains and penalties of sin, and made mercy available to those who believe in his holy name.²⁷

The Ellen White-endorsed idea within Adventism that Jesus won the victory over Satan and human sin in the garden is eerily similar to the Mormon doctrine of Gethsemane. To think Jesus' suffering in Gethsemane was where the true work and decision for atonement was done is not biblical. Christian theology never sees Jesus' struggle in the garden as part of His sacrifice for sin. While He experienced the most intense human struggle, He did not defeat Satan nor was he the sac-

rifice for sin in Gethsemane. Those saving acts happened on the cross (Col. 2:15). Adventist theology says His sacrifice on the cross was separate from the atonement which He applies in heaven. The Bible teaches His sacrifice and atonement are synonymous and were finished on the cross (Rom. 3:25-26; Heb. 9:11-28).

At no time did Jesus waver from His purpose: to shed His blood on the cross for the sins of humanity and to reconcile fallen humanity to God (2 Cor. 5:19), and He always knew He would rise from death. God sacrificed in the incarnation and death of Jesus, but He did not risk the existence of the Trinity.

Jesus' purpose

Isaiah foretold that Jesus would bear our griefs, carry our sorrows, be wounded for our transgressions, bring us peace with His chastisement, and heal us with His stripes (Is. 53:45). John the Baptist announced that Jesus was “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” The writer of Hebrews asserts, “through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” (Heb. 2:14-15). Jesus said of Himself, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (Jn. 3:14-15).

Adventism, however, teaches its members from childhood that Jesus came to demonstrate God's character and to teach us to be obedient and loving just as taught in the moral influence theory.

Carolyn Byers tells the story of the crucifixion like this:

At the top of a little hill, soldiers nailed Jesus' hands and feet to a cross.

Jesus hated the wickedness of those around Him. He longed for quiet and peace. He could have run away. But He didn't. God could have saved Him. But God didn't. Jesus died so that everyone everywhere *could see what Satan is really like*. And what God is really like (emphasis mine).

That afternoon Jesus died so that people could choose to follow Him. And be saved.²⁸

Never in her books does Byers state that Jesus died to pay the price of sin as that would be contrary to the moral influence theory which is obviously the basis of her theology. Moreover, she states as her first reason for Jesus' death the revelation of Satan's true nature; the second reason is the demonstration of God's character. Although she does say He died so people could be saved, she never states how a person becomes saved. Her only emphasis is the demonstration of what Satan is like compared to God.

Undergirding the “demonstration theory” articulated by Carolyn Byers, Arthur S. Maxwell, in his classic ten-volume set *The Bible Story*, which is still currently sold in Adventist Book Centers, has been teaching Adventist children since 1957 the essence of how to get to heaven: have a heart full of love. In the eighth volume, Maxwell, the father of the promulgator of the Moral Influence theory among Adventists, tells



Never in her books does Byers state that Jesus died to pay the price of sin as that would be contrary to the moral influence theory which is obviously the basis of her theology.

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the “sheep and the goats” parable. He characterizes the goats as “little, selfish people who never give a thought to other people's needs and sufferings.”²⁹ These, Maxwell emphasizes, will share the devil's punishment.

“So it is love,” he says, “that makes the difference. It is love that separates those who are saved from those who are lost... Love is the passport to heaven. If we do not have it in our hearts—if we do not show it by gracious words and kindly deeds, we shall never enter the kingdom of God.”³⁰

Maxwell then admonishes his readers to think about someone they know whom they should feed or with whom they should share their water or clothes.

The problem with Maxwell's admonitions—the problem that plagued me throughout the first decades of my life—is that neither he nor anyone else explains how to generate that mandatory, salvific love. In fact, Maxwell confounds this issue by completely inverting the biblical teaching about love. On a page illustrated by a color drawing of a glowing Ten Commandments with the word “LOVE” written in gold spanning the tablets, he says,

There would be no mansion for anybody who did not have love in his heart. And love is shown by keeping His commandments.

“If you love Me,” He said, “keep My commandments.”

Again, “If a man loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”³¹

On the following page Maxwell summarizes his point:

If you want your heart to be God's home, if you want Him to live with you and keep you all your days, this is the way. *All you have to do is to love other people as much, or more, than you love yourself*. And when God sees this love in your heart He will come, by His Holy Spirit, and dwell with you and be your Comforter, guide, and Friend the rest of your life³² (emphasis mine).



THEARTWORK © ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/ELENA RAY, DOVE ARTWORK © ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/SUE McDONALD

Arthur Maxwell had it upside down; we do not live with love so God will put His Spirit in us. Instead, we humble ourselves before the Lord Jesus and receive Him. Then God places His Spirit in us—and only then do we experience love.

Truth sets us free

I despaired of ever being able to experience that selfless “love for God and love for man” that was the mark of someone worthy of heaven. I comforted myself with the Ellen White phrase, oft-repeated in her works, that “love is a principle”.³³

God’s word finally revealed to me the subtle deception behind Maxwell’s—and Ellen White’s—words. It is not “love” which Jesus said is necessary in order to see the kingdom of heaven; it is being born again of the Spirit.

In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’” (Jn. 3:3-7). In his letter to the Ephesians Paul expresses it as follows: “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... But because of his great love for us, God... made us alive with Christ... it is by grace you have been saved” (Eph. 2:1-5).

Paul expressed the same truth in his letter to Titus: “For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures... But when the kindness of God our Savior... appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:3-6).

Ephesians 1:13-14 explains how this new birth happens: “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.”

In other words, the gospel—that Jesus died, was buried, and rose on the third day according Scripture—is the message of salvation. Accepting the fact that we are utterly depraved and in need of a Savior, believing that the Lord Jesus died to pay the price of human sin—including my

own—and rose again to give us life, results in our being born again by the indwelling Holy Spirit “who is given as a pledge of our inheritance” (Eph. 1:14a).

This gospel, which “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16), is not a demonstration of God’s character, a revelation of Satan’s character, or a mandate to love so God will give us His Spirit. No! This gospel is the singular news that the Lord Jesus, the almighty, eternal, omniscient, infallible Savior and Substitute, took human flesh and became sin for us so we might “become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). His body and blood opened a new, living way to the Father (Heb. 9:19-20).

Only after we are born again and become God’s adopted children (Rom. 8:15-16) will we have love in our hearts “because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 5:5). Love is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Arthur Maxwell had it upside down; we do not live with love so God will put His Spirit in us. Instead, we humble ourselves before the Lord Jesus and receive Him. Then God places His Spirit in us—and only then do we experience love.

Double-minded?

So, you may be asking, why make all this “fuss” over details? Isn’t it enough that we all believe in Jesus? Why divide over whether the gospel is about God’s character or whether Jesus defeated Satan in Gethsemane rather than at the cross? As long as we agree that Jesus is God’s Son and the “Savior”, why worry about whether or not He has the same essence as the Father and the Spirit, or whether He died to pay a sin-debt or to demonstrate God’s forgiveness?

The reason we focus on these differences is that one set of understandings describes Jesus as He is revealed in the Bible. The other set of understandings teaches a false Jesus of the anti-gospel Moral Influence theory. Children who grow up learning the Bible stories with the great controversy worldview woven into them, who learn that Jesus was gentle, mild, and abused for the purpose of exposing Satan’s evil and God’s goodness—these children learn to call this unbiblical person “Jesus”. They learn all the right names and titles: Savior, Son of Man, Son of God—but they learn these names describe a fallible, limited god who is not the same as the mighty, eternal, unfailing Son of God described in Scripture.

Adventism has capitalized on the fact that Ellen White has made contradictory statements about Jesus depending from whom she plagiarized. On the one hand, she has written that He is the Savior, the Substitute, the Son of God whose life is original, not derived from another Source. On the other hand she has written that he shared in the man’s sin nature, that His atonement was incomplete; that He is Michael the archangel.

Holding these contradictory beliefs together makes one double-minded. Jesus cannot be both God in flesh, our sinless Substitute who died as our once-for-all sacrifice for sin, and a man with a fallen nature and suppressed deity who demonstrated to us how we, too, could achieve a saving righteousness by overcoming sin in our own fallen natures.

Yet these conflicting beliefs “work” for Adventists because, when evangelical Christians ask them questions, they use the “orthodox” statements they learned from Ellen White. Concurrently, they believe they must follow Jesus’ example in order to overcome sin and be saved.

In mathematics, if one adds a positive and negative number of the same value together, the result is zero; it is never a positive nor a negative number. They cancel each other.

The same is true with Jesus. One cannot believe both that He is our Substitute and Savior who paid the price of death for sin demanded by God, and simultaneously believe He did not complete the atonement at the cross and that His purpose was merely to demonstrate God’s character. To hold these two beliefs is to cancel the significance and power of Jesus in one’s life.

Children who are taught to understand Jesus and salvation according to the great controversy paradigm which shapes Adventist children’s literature learn the “right words” about Jesus, but they learn a false, weak effigy of Jesus. Adventist children are being taught to be double-minded, believing contradictory things about the Lord Jesus that render Him powerless, limited, weak, and even embarrassing.

Either we believe in the biblical Jesus or we believe in a false Jesus. Paul wrote, “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord

and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons” (1 Cor. 10:20). A false Jesus is not spiritually neutral; belief in the wrong Jesus does not lead to believing unto salvation. Paul rebukes the Corinthian believers for their gullibility in accommodating those who preached “a Jesus other than the Jesus [he] preached” to them (2 Cor. 11:4). He also rebukes the Galatian believers for “turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven [or the General Conference president or E. G. White] should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” (Gal. 1:6-8).

I pray you will ask the Lord Jesus to reveal Himself to you as He really is—the One Isaiah described this way: “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace” (Is. 9:6).

Bow before the One of Whom all those in heaven sing, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing” (Rev. 5:12) and whom Thomas acknowledged as “my Lord and my God” (Jn. 20:28).

Say with me, “Jesus is my Lord!” †

Endnotes

¹ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 2005, Pacific Press Pub. Assoc., p. 23.

² *ibid.*, p. 43.

³ Tinker, Colleen, “Discovering the Adventist Jesus”, *Proclamation!*, May/June, 2007, p. 11-12.

⁴ In fact, Ellen White has written all of these ideas in her works. They do not appear only in one place, but her non-Trinitarian statements and descriptions of Jesus reflecting an Arian bias appear from the earliest days of the Adventist movement to the first decade of the 20th century. For more details and sources, see “Discovering the Adventist Jesus” by Colleen Tinker in *Proclamation!*, May/June, 2007, p. 10-17. Access online at www.LifeAssuranceMinistries.org. See also www.CultOrChristian.com

⁵ Byers, Carolyn, *Forever Stories*, vol. 1, Review and Herald Pub. Assoc., 1989, p. 11.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 23.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 59.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁰ White, Ellen, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 47, par. 1. (Retrieved from: <http://egwwritings.eu/writings/>)

¹¹ White, Ellen, *Life Sketches of James White and Ellen G. White*, 1880, p. 230, par. 3. Retrieved from <http://egwwritings.eu/writings/>

¹² *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* (JATS), Spring 2006, “The Quest for a Biblical Trinity: Ellen White’s ‘heavenly Trio’ Compared to the Traditional Doctrine,” by Jerry Moon, Andrews University Theological Seminary. (Retrieved from: http://www.atsjats.org/publication_file.php?pub_id=241&journal=1&type=pdf)

¹³ Byers, Carolyn, vol. 1, p. 15.

¹⁴ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 2005, Pacific Press Pub. Assoc., p. 247.

¹⁵ White, Ellen G (EGW); *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 3; P. 37, Par. 2-3. EGW, *Early Writings of Ellen G. White*, p. 145, Par. 1. EGW, *The Signs of the Times*, 02-05-1894, “God’s Love Unmeasured,” Par. 10. EGW, *Advent*

Review and Sabbath Herald, 07-09-1895, “The Duty of the Minister and the People,” Par. 14.

¹⁶ In this view, the purpose and result of Christ’s death was to influence mankind toward moral improvement. This theory denies that Christ died to satisfy any principle of divine justice, but teaches instead that His death was designed to greatly impress mankind with a sense of God’s love, resulting in softening their hearts and leading them to repentance. Thus, the Atonement is not directed towards God with the purpose of maintaining His justice, but towards man with the purpose of persuading him to right action...It was largely taught by the liberal churches. (Retrieved from: http://www.theopedia.com/Moral_Influence_theory)

¹⁷ Rosser, Gladys, *Our Friend of Galilee*; Pacific Press Pub. Assoc., 1962, p. 39.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 114.

²¹ Byers, Carolyn, vol. 2, pp. 8-9.

²² *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 6-8.

²³ Batchelor, Doug, *The Trinity*, Amazing Facts, 2009, p. 29-30.

²⁴ Rosser, Gladys, pp. 98-99.

²⁵ EGW, *The Desire of Ages*, Review and Herald Pub. Assoc., pp. 692, 694.

²⁶ <http://www.truthandgrace.com/Gethsemane.htm>

²⁷ McConkie, Bruce, “The Purifying Power of Gethsemane”, *Ensign*: May 1985, p. 9. Retrieved from <http://www.lds.org>.

²⁸ Byers, Carolyn, vol. 4, p. 63.

²⁹ Maxwell, Arthur S., *The Bible Story*, vol. 8, Southern Publishing Assoc., 1957, p. 189.

³⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 190-191.

³¹ *ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 67.

³² *ibid.*, p. 70

³³ “This love is not an impulse, but a divine principle, a permanent power.” *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 551. “True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 97.

News from the Former Adventist Fellowship Weekend Conference:

Defending the Faith

COLLEEN TINKER



Mark Martin, Friday Keynote speaker



Yen Cress enjoying Sunday lunch



Phil and Jan Harris with Colleen Tinker



Richard Tinker with friends at Sunday lunch



Janice and Michael Hicks

The fifth annual Former Adventist Fellowship (FAF) Weekend, Defending the Gospel, was wonderful, and we thank the staff and volunteers from Trinity Church and also the visiting speakers who helped make a rich and memorable event for about 65 registered guests and dozens more from the community who attended the opening meeting on Friday evening.

Sharon and Scott Strum and their worship team established an atmosphere of joy and reverence that defined all the meetings. Friday evening featured a 10-minute video presentation by Phil Bubar, senior pastor of The Chapel Evangelical Free Church in St. Joseph, Michigan, who with his wife began hosting a weekly FAF Bible study in their home in October. Carolyn Macomber, co-leader of the St. Joseph FAF and a doctoral student at Andrews University (AU), presented her faith story in which she shared being fired from her staff position at AU last summer after revealing that she had placed her trust in the Lord Jesus and had left the Adventist organization.

Mark Martin, senior pastor of Calvary Community Church in Phoenix, Arizona, was the featured speaker. He began by recounting his own firing from the Arizona Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 25 years ago when, as a young pastor, he began preaching justification by grace through faith alone. He continued by articulating powerfully, in words the visiting evangelicals would understand, the depth and darkness of the intricately woven Adventist doctrines that hold its members in confusion, despair, and hopelessness, explaining why Adventists need to be evangel-

ized and why Christians cannot collaborate with Adventists as if they are fellow believers.

Following Mark's talk, a panel composed of Jonathan Bilima, pastor of Kairos church in Riverside; Paul Carden, executive director of the Centers for Apologetics Research; Carolyn Macomber; Mark Martin; and Colleen Tinker moderated by Richard Tinker answered questions submitted by the audience.

Saturday opened with Gary Inrig, senior pastor of Trinity Church, teaching Habakkuk's lessons on trusting God even when His provision looks like disaster at first glance. He is faithful, though, and He keeps His word, restores His people, and punishes evil.

Breakout sessions during mid-morning included Dale Ratzlaff moderating "Bring All Your Adventist Questions", Martin Carey presenting "Idols, Demons, and Slaves" addressing the Galatian and Colossian heresies, Steve Pitcher on "Cults: Comparisons and Contrasts", and Joan Yorba-Gray and Colleen Tinker addressing "De-programming and Restructuring Conscience".

Bill Born, worship pastor at Trinity Church, conducted the day's first Christianity.EDU class: "Adopted Into God's Family". He shared the story of his and his wife Julie's adoption of their daughter Maria and led the group in a study of Ephesians 1, discovering what Scriptures teach about God our Father, Christ our Savior, and the Holy Spirit our helper when we are adopted as God's children.

After lunch Steve Pitcher shared his faith story—punctuated by a 4.1 earthquake that rattled the room and startled those new to



Gary Inrig, senior pastor, Trinity Church



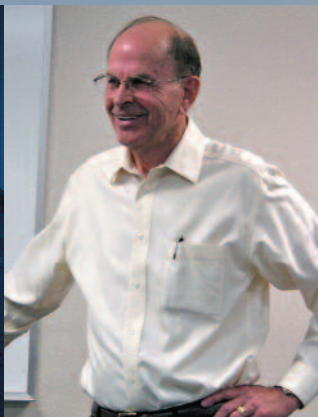
Eunice Sellers with friend Cheryl Granger



Jon Rittenhouse, Christianity EDU



Bill and Sally Ziprick from Spokane



Dale Ratzlaff, founder, L.A.M.



Carolyn Macomber and Nikki Stephenson



Cheryl and Woody Granger testifying



Sharon Carey, photographer



Steve Pitcher, session teacher



Richard Tinker, Mark Martin, Colleen Tinker, Jonathan Bilima, Carolyn Macomber, Paul Carden

Southern California. Dale Ratzlaff followed Steve with a powerful talk he called “A Trip Through Romans”, clearly articulating the simple gospel and its effectiveness in making us new creatures, removing us from the curse of the law, and freeing and sanctifying us in Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Following another hour of breakout sessions, Jon Rittenhouse conducted the final Christianity.EDU: “Does the Bible Teach ‘Once Saved, Always Saved?’” Attendees were impacted by the biblical evidence that they can know their salvation is secure.

After an Italian meal catered by Napoli’s restaurant, Cheryl and Woody Granger opened the evening meeting with their faith story. Greg Taylor, senior pastor of Brethren In Christ Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, was scheduled to conduct the communion service on Saturday evening, but the paralyzing blizzards on the east coast prevented his flight from departing. Dale Ratzlaff led the service instead and invited people to share their praise or testimonies after eating the Lord’s Supper. The evening closed with those present praying for one another in small groups.

Sunday began with Dale presenting “The Faith of Abraham” from Romans 4 followed by church service at Trinity where Gary preached on Galatians 1:6-9: “Accept No Substitutes”, emphasizing that “if we tamper with God’s gospel, the product will inevitably be an ‘un-gospel.’”

Esther and Stanford Shu hosted a farewell lunch at their home after church. People enjoyed the spring-like warmth around the pool and cemented the friendships formed during the weekend.

A highlight of the weekend occurred after lunch when one

young woman confessed to Carolyn Macomber that she was not sure she was saved. Carolyn asked, “Would you like to seal the deal?” The young woman said she would, and she prayed to receive Jesus as her Savior and Lord. She and her husband are amazed at the changes in their lives over the past few weeks, and they are rejoicing that they will raise their children to know Jesus and biblical truth.

We thank the women of Trinity who volunteered their weekend to prepare and serve the food: Lynn Rae Dupree, Thais Kanold, Diana Hall, Bethany Halpin, Rachel Halpin, Rebekah Morgan, and Mary Kay Stear. Thanks also to the audio visual team: Sheri Blakey, Joe Cornell, and Adrienne Halpin; to Bruce Herwig for his help with publicity, and to Ann Mixon and Steve Springsted, pastor of community life, for their coordination of the facilities.

Some comments from weekend participants:

“When we left the luncheon Sunday and Redlands this morning, it was as if a part of us was being ripped off and left behind. [We] will be back...Lord willing.”

“It was a totally powerful weekend. It touched me in deep places I didn’t expect.”

“The love between all of us brothers and sisters is really a taste of heaven on earth.”

Make sure to attend next year. The Former Adventist Fellowship Weekend conference is scheduled for President’s Day weekend, February 18–20, 2011, in Redlands, California. Watch for details and registration information in future issues of this magazine. †

Adventist dualism exposed

I just had an opportunity last night to sit down in front of the fire and read your article ["Who Is the Source?"]. I think you did an outstanding job of addressing Adventism's reliance on Ellen G. White and the gap between what is said externally and what is generally held to be true internally. The dualism of Adventism is one of the most frustrating things to me as I try to talk to evangelicals who have Adventist friends. Evangelicals rarely, if ever, have the knowledge necessary to elicit more than surface denials from Adventists. Thank you for helping to expose this dualism.

LINCOLN, NE

The "Source"

Thank you for your excellent article on Ellen White, "Who is the Source?" The Adventist Church has persistently refused to face the

pretive authority over Scripture, but in practice, tend actually to side with Ellen White.

JERRY GLADSON
KEENESAW, GA

Close to agnostic

Thank you for Colleen Tinker's article, "Who is the Source?" As I made my way out of the only cultural, religious, and social environment I had ever known, I, too, went through this process. I call it the "Is it real? Or is it Memorex?" moment. It is very unsettling to be thinking about something and then realize, "How do I know that? Is it historical? Biblical? Or is it from Ellen White?" The beliefs that were presented to me as facts were so fundamental to my thinking that it took a while to recognize them and root them out. It was affirming to see that I was not the only one who went through the same paradigm shift.

gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13).

We are saved entirely by the work of God in our hearts. We do not participate in saving ourselves or in staying saved. If we cannot be saved by works, neither can we be lost by works. The concept of taking "steps to Christ" is not a biblical concept. The only thing we can "do" is to respond to the holiness of God and the conviction of the Holy Spirit by prostrating ourselves before Him in repentance and accepting His diagnosis of us as "objects of wrath" (Eph. 2:3) in need of a Savior, receiving the Lord Jesus' already-completed work on our behalf.

Amazing Grace

I have been an Adventist for 30 of my 41 years of life. My journey to discovering God's amazing grace and the glory of Jesus Christ has been more than I could have imagined. I was unsatisfied with my religious experience; I did not know exactly why, so I asked God to help me and to guide me daily to know His Truth. God would fortify my spirit through prayer, through the study of His Word, and through seeking nothing but His Truth presented in His Word. I began to realize I was relying on my day of worship as a type of "saving grace". The truth, as I found out after three years of constant study, is that Jesus Christ Himself was, is, and always will be my Saving Grace.

My struggle began as a journey for truth—not what someone thought to be truth, but what God in His Word states is truth. Through reading the book of Hebrews, it became clear there was a reason for a second more perfect covenant, the pure, sinless perfect gift of God's only begotten Son as the perfect atonement for our sins.

The more I read the more assured I become of the gift of God's salvation. I accepted this gift through His loving mercy He bestows upon each and everyone. My life has not been the same since.

Knowing Christ in this way presented me with some decisions. Should I continue in my Adventist church knowing Christ alone is the complete finished work for my sins, knowing the Sabbath rest is not a day of worship but a rest in Jesus Christ as my Savior? After much prayer and meditation it was clear I had to fully and completely follow Christ and no longer be a member of the Adventist church. This is what has happened, and I praise God for His Word, His Son, and the Joy in living fully only by His perfect gift of grace!

ANCHORAGE, AK

Destructive church doctrine

I recently bought a book written by Martha Beck entitled *Leaving the Saints*. It is about her

I began to realize I was relying on my day of worship as a type of "saving grace". The truth, as I found out after three years of constant study, is that Jesus Christ Himself was, is, and always will be my Saving Grace.

problem of Ellen White's authority, as well as her plagiarism, a related issue. With somewhat equal, competing sources for its theology, contradictions between the Bible and Ellen White will continue to loom menacingly over its theological claims. Mormons and Christian Scientists, facing the same dilemma between para-scriptural and Scriptural sources, have opted officially to prefer the para-scriptural over the Scriptural (Joseph Smith, Jr., Mary Baker Eddy, respectively). Adventists, as you have pointed out, officially deny Ellen White inter-

Although the process of leaving the Adventist cult has left me close to being an agnostic, I remain interested in the issues and am grateful for your ministry.

TOLONO, IL

Steps to Christ

In response to "Who is the Source" by Colleen Tinker: Please share a sentence or paragraph from *Steps to Christ* by Ellen White that is NOT absolutely grounded in Scripture. Please, share specifics as to why the sentence or paragraph is NOT grounded in Scripture. I know that you will not reply, for you cannot give any Biblical reasons.

RICHLAND, WA

Editor's response: The title is the first example of an unbiblical concept: Steps to Christ. According to Scripture, there are no "steps" to Christ: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9). Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailor, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). Jesus told Nicodemus that only those who were born again of the Spirit would see the Kingdom of heaven (Jn. 3:3). Paul explains how this new birth happens: "after listening to the message of truth, the

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MOTTO

Truth needs no other foundation than honest investigation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to follow truth when it is revealed.

MESSAGE

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not of works, that no one should boast." Ephesians 2:8,9

experience of being raised in the Mormon doctrine and how through the years she slowly concluded that it was a false doctrine and was finally able to leave it.

During the time she was a Mormon, she was taught that because of their unique doctrine which was influenced by their prophet Joseph Smith, they are very special people and have “the truth”.

What I find to be so ironic about that mindset is its similarity to what my wife experienced as she was raised in the Adventist doctrine. Like so many others, she was taught that because of their unique doctrine which was influenced by their prophetess, Ellen White, they are very special people and have “the truth”.

Through the leading of the Holy Spirit over several years, my wife was able to conclude that a church denomination is not “the truth” and left the Adventist doctrine behind and embraced the real truth: Jesus. Jesus himself said: “I am the way, the truth and the life.”

What is so destructive about a church doctrine that teaches such heresy is that it leaves some of the members in such a state of confusion that they sometimes throw out the baby with the dirty bath water. Such is the case of Martha Beck, who threw out Jesus along with the Mormon doctrine and now embraces New Age philosophy.

I want to commend you at Life Assurance Ministries and *Proclamation!* You did not throw out the baby (Jesus) with the dirty bath water of the Adventist doctrine. In fact, your articles embrace and lift Him up!

Please continue to send us *Proclamation!* We continue to pray for this ministry and pray that others may find the real “truth”: Jesus.

MILLIKEN, CO

Unholy Bible by Tinker and Ratzlaff

Have you people totally lost your mind—or what’s left of it? I can’t believe the texts you give or use so you do not have to keep the Sabbath. I have checked and cross-checked, and nowhere do any of the texts you use give us permission to use the Sabbath for our own labor....You can’t keep the Sabbath passably by believing that because you believe in Christ, you are keeping the Sabbath...The command by God Himself is that you are to remember and keep it—period. That means you and me. You cannot do it vicariously as you seem to believe.

And again about Sister White. Why don’t you leave her alone. The only reason you attack her is because she constantly points everyone to believe in the Bible and in Christ and you can’t tolerate that because you and the likes of your group twist every Bible text around until it says what you want it to say so then it won’t point a finger at you and the sins you are committing.

I think you should write a Bible. It should be called the *Unholy Bible* by Tinker and Ratzlaff. You seem to “tinker” with any text of the Bible that you cannot overcome or that points out error in your lives. You and your followers are nothing but a farce and a fraud. I don’t see any truth in anything you say or write. You are simply leading many souls to eternal destruction by your falsehoods and deception. By the way, please don’t continue to call those poor souls that follow your false teachings “former Seventh-day Adventists”. They are not nor have they ever been true Adventists, so let’s not try to fool ourselves or others.

AVON PARK, FL

Keep up the great work

What a tremendous publication *Proclamation!* magazine is. Some Christians might think that the work of *Proclamation!* is of little importance, but believe me, it is much needed in the evangelical world today because it exposes Seventh-day Adventism for what it is. I’ve known many Adventists in my life who actually believed they were saved by observing certain dietary laws (something that is never taught in the Bible, and neither is the Seventh-day Adventist fixation with vegetarianism). In fact, I’ve known a few Adventists who

the first one to speak against you to my Heavenly Father for your attack on Mrs. White. That beautiful lady helped save my life in every way because of her perfect Bible teachings. Yes, the truth does set us free. I have told others, and it is true, that in my thirty years of comparing her writings with those of the Holy Bible, I have never found her to err even just once. Some have said that she speaks of common things and they must be separated from the spiritual. I have not found any of her writings to be of the common variety either...Her writings have been sent by God to magnify his Holy Word, and deep down I believe you know that and have benefited....

God sent you such a simple test. All you had to do was accept the person of Jesus, and his truth, in the person of Ellen G. White. But when you shut the door of your heart and home and family against that beautiful lady, I’m afraid, as did Satan, you locked yourself out. No one can blaspheme the Holy Spirit and be guiltless.

No doubt, rather than repent, if you still can, you will turn and rend me. But I will not let Satan have you to believe you are all right in your misguided situation. God can do miracles still. Repent is my prayer for you.

VIA EMAIL

...I cannot for the life of me understand how anyone could write a negative letter to the editor. I would be scared to death to be an Adventist with all the unbiblical doctrine they teach.

actually believed that the words of Ellen White take precedence over what the Bible says.

God bless you, and keep up the great work.
LEROY, NY

Changed my views

I’d love to receive a copy of your magazine. The last year and a half has been an amazing journey of discovery. The local Adventist pastor had actively sought to recruit us into his fellowship. I am extremely wary of any new fellowship that my family might attend, and so always do my due diligence. The experience has changed my views, strengthened our faith, and caused us to look for a deeper understanding of the Adventist beliefs. We now pray for the pastor and his family, that they might come to a saving faith in Christ, and that they would be honest as to their motives in attending and participating in the local pastors’ association. Thanks for your ministry.

FORT JONES, CA

Repent is my prayer

I am a former Catholic turned Seventh-day Adventist. I do not go to the church, but I will be

Thank you for *Proclamation!*

I want to thank you [Dale Ratzlaff] for your publication *Proclamation!* as well as all the many books you have written.

Four years ago my knowledge of Adventism was that it was a denomination that went to church on Saturday; that’s it. But after reading their fundamental beliefs, *The Great Controversy* (1911), *Early Writings* (1894), some of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, and *Letter to the Little Flock* by Ellen G. White, then numerous books by Dale Ratzlaff, Jerry Gladson, Mark Martin, Greg Taylor, Sidney Cleveland and others (just to find out why so many became ex-Adventists), I cannot for the life of me understand how anyone could write a negative letter to the editor. I would be scared to death to be an Adventist with all the unbiblical doctrine they teach...

FRANKFORD, DE

MAIL LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TO:
Editor, *Proclamation!* Magazine
P.O. Box 905
Redlands, CA 92373
OR EMAIL EDITOR: proclamation@gmail.com

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

LifeAssuranceMinistries.org

The life **A F T E R** with Chris Lee

In the Fall, 2009, issue of *Proclamation!* we talked about the need to be in fellowship with a local body of believers. Of course, I realize that is easier said than done. We have been conditioned to seek a denomination which embodies “the truth”. We have a history of majoring in the minors, so we tend to attach more importance to secondary beliefs than we probably should. This “denominational thinking” becomes counterproductive when it causes us to think that our particular congregation or denomination is superior to all others, when it divides us from other Christians, or when it prevents us from fellowshipping with any congregation at all.

Augustine is credited with saying, “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity”. Augustine was basically saying that there are a few very clear things in Scripture that unify us and define what real Christianity is. There are a lot of other things that are less clear. We can lovingly disagree on these things. It’s unlikely that you will find a church where you agree on every single non-essential. That’s okay. Total agreement on the minor issues isn’t necessary.

In searching for a church home, it can be helpful to speak with the pastor or attend a “welcome” class to ask a few questions about the essentials. Does the congregation believe that the Bible is the sole authoritative source of doctrinal truth? Does the leadership clearly teach that there is only

one God; that the Father, Son, and Spirit are God; and that the Father, Son, and Spirit are eternally personally distinct and yet one being in essence and substance? Does the church teach that man is both physical and spiritual and that both aspects have been utterly corrupted by sin? Does the church proclaim Jesus to be



God and man, born sinless of a virgin as the new Adam, our representative and substitute? Do they teach that by virtue of His perfect life, atoning sacrifice, and resurrection, He is the only way to be saved? Do they affirm that the risen Christ is returning to this earth and that every believer has a place in His kingdom while every unbeliever will experience eternal damnation? Do they very clearly affirm that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, plus nothing? Does the leadership affirm that the Church is comprised of

all true born again believers, even though those believers may have different opinions on non-essentials?*

If a church is confused on any of the essentials, you are probably dealing with a cult-like group which is likely steeped in works-based religion. However, if a congregation is solid in all the essentials, allows liberty in various non-essentials, and is loving in its teaching and practices, then you’ve found a church you can learn and grow in, even if there are a few things with which you disagree. As an example, I’ve talked to people who have ruled out some of the best Bible teaching churches in their area over issues like the sequencing of when we will be “caught up” to meet the Lord. Belief in the second coming is an essential belief that binds us together in unity. All Christians believe we will be raptured (from the Latin word meaning “caught up”) to meet the Lord at some point. We may differ in the word we use or in our views of the timing, but those aren’t valid reasons to divide. Dividing based on nonessentials is destructive to Christian unity and deleterious to our own spiritual growth. It’s time to get past majoring in the minors and begin to look for those things that bind us all together. It’s time to experience the adventure of the “life after”. †

*See www.equip.org for a list of essential Christian doctrines.



Chris Lee lives in Lincoln, Nebraska with his wife, Carmen, and daughters, Ashlyn and Alyssa. They attend the Lincoln Berean Church. Chris is a self-described “theology junkie” whose mission is to proclaim the unfathomable grace of Christ in a clear, understandable, and Biblical way. He leads a Life Group Bible study for former Adventists at Lincoln Berean.