The enigma of evil

Searching for the center of adventist theology

Adam and Eve: Lessons from the old story
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by Roberto Badenas

SEARCHING FOR THE CENTER OF ADVENTIST THEOLOGY
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by Gerald A. Klingbeil

ADAM AND EVE: LESSONS FROM THE OLD STORY
The divine ideal that no person has claim to unique privileges and superiority over others should triumph in God’s church as the vibrant demonstration of God’s will for humankind.
by Dragoslava and Aleksandar S. Santroc

EDITORIAL
The power to serve
by Lisa M. Beardsley-Hardy

FIRST PERSON
Waiting for love
by Adri Ali

LOGOS
The gospel of laughter
by Charles A. Tapp

ACTION REPORT
Beyond walls: Building bridges through public art
by Dale Sherman

PROFILE
Hildebrando and Leah Camacho
Interview by Tiago Mendes Alves
THE POWER TO SERVE

A
ter he was sworn in as President of the United States in 1961, John F. Kennedy gave an inaugural speech that has gone down into history as one that called for a balance of power with responsibility: “For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe—the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God. . . .

“Together let us explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease, tap the ocean depths and encourage the arts and commerce.

“Let both sides unite to heed, in all corners of the earth, the command of Isaiah—to ’undo the heavy burdens . . . [and] let the oppressed go free.’”

He then challenged his hearers to “ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world, ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.”

One of the loftiest reasons to pursue a university education is to develop one’s power to do good. Ellen White reminds us that Christian education “prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.” The aspiration to serve can be realized in many fields and not just the prominent ones of ministry, teaching, and health care.

I had the privilege of knowing Emeritus Professor Malcolm C. Bourne (1926-2016), editor-in-chief of the Journal of Texture Studies, and one of the world’s leading experts in this aspect of food science. He graduated with a BS in chemistry from the University of Adelaide, South Australia, worked for 10 years in industry as a chemist at a food-processing factory in Adelaide, completed a Master’s in Food Science and earned a PhD in chemistry at the University of California, Davis. Dr. Bourne then joined the faculty of Cornell University as a full-time research professor at the Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, New York, where he based his career. He was widely respected in the academic community for his research in rheology and the measurement of food texture. The textbook that he wrote is the definitive standard on food texture and its measurement. His research with more than 30 cultivars of soybeans and methods of processing them led to a better understanding of why soymilk tastes bad (“beany”) and how to improve its taste and texture through various additives (using the boiling water-grind technique to inactivate the lipoxidase that causes the beany taste). He also studied post-harvest food losses and what to do about them. He was especially interested in the problem of international malnutrition and improving the health of low-income populations around the world. His research improved the well-being of untold
numbers of people by developing better-tasting, nutritious soy milk and by reducing post-harvest food losses. A faithful Seventh-day Adventist, he served others and honored God through a lifetime of rigorous scientific research and mentoring of his students.

A special temptation for those with advanced or professional degrees of any kind is to turn inward and thereby serve oneself. Scripture says that, as a principle of economic justice, the ox that treads out the grain should not be muzzled. The greater the education, the higher the income. An education enhances the health and well-being of the whole family and results in higher social status. Along with these things comes the temptation to serve ourselves rather than others. These are earned side benefits, but our real task is to tread grain that can benefit someone else. Power brings with it responsibility. As Kennedy challenged years ago, let us resist the tug of self-service in choosing and pursuing a profession, and resolve to use all our resources to serve others and God, in preparation for the joy of greater service in the world to come.

Lisa M. Beardsley-Hardy
Editor-in-Chief of Dialogue

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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arayas@gc.adventist.org
The Enigma of Evil

ROBERTO BADENAS

Evil is an intruder into God’s perfect creation. We use the term *fallen* to describe the situation of humanity after they used their freedom of choice to do evil, and we use the term *sin* to denote the state of human beings, who are separated from God. We can fight against the consequences of this situation, but escaping them is not an option.

Tragedy strikes us unexpectedly. An accident. A terrorist attack. An earthquake. A terrible illness. When the unexpected and the painful strike us, our immediate reaction is to ask: Why?

**MAJOR THEORIES**

Faced with the question of evil, human beings have come up with various explanations throughout history. Here are some of the most representative:

- **Evil does not exist.** Although evil seems omnipresent, some believe that it does not really exist. For the philosopher Spinoza, and for wide sections of Eastern spirituality, evil is an illusion. From this optimistic view of life, we deduce that there is evil because we cannot understand the universe in its entirety. “Evil is simply an error of perspective that comes from our finiteness and from our limited vision of things.” Thus, the wise man sees beyond immediate reality and understands that what we call “evil” makes up part of the order of the world. “Everything that exists is good.”

Since much is ignored in that line of logic, we can also ask ourselves if cold exists. Of course, we have all felt cold at some time. And yet, according to the laws of physics, cold doesn’t really exist. What we consider to be cold is merely a state produced by the absence of heat.
in a certain object or place. Heat is indeed a measurable reality, resulting from the transfer of energy. People coined the word **cold** to express the various degrees of lack of energy. The same is true of darkness, which also does not exist in itself. “Darkness” is the absence of light. So we can study light, we can measure it and break it down into colors, but we cannot analyze darkness, since it is little more than a word, a term reserved to describe what happens when there is no light. Similarly, we say that evil exists because around us we see countless forms of injustice, violence, and pain. But in reality, like cold and darkness, evil has no objective existence. **Evil** is the name that we have invented to describe the absence of good.

- **Evil is positive.** Others argue that evil exists, but only as it appears to constitute a negative reality, since it is in the service of good. What in a given moment seems bad always is, in the long term, useful and necessary, although we do not understand it. Thomas Aquinas explained evil by its utility, within a comprehensive, divine plan in which even sin turns out to originate a felix culpa (“happy fault”), because it has allowed for the plan of salvation, which includes the work of the Redeemer. God thus uses evil for the sake of the greater good. Still others hold that evil is a consequence of freedom. From a merely human perspective, if we analyze the direct causes of our misfortunes, we find that the majority come from the violation of natural laws or our blatant aggression. When we act freely, we may hurt other people and ourselves. Lack of respect for others, in the shape of a thousand and one injustices, brings misery, economic inequality, social and political oppression. For the believer, if God respects the freedom of His creatures, then He has no choice but to leave the option open for them to act to their own detriment. Our free will is “the abyss that God does not control.”

It is plain that we ourselves cause the greatest part of our suffering with our own selfishness, ignorance, greed, and/or hate. But it is also true that, although the majority of our misfortunes result more or less directly from our acts, there are other forms of suffering that are not so easily explained. Our intelligence insists on trying to explain everything, including the enigma of evil. But our efforts fail. All our theories on the origin of evil fall apart when faced with logical barriers and gray areas, as if evil were ultimately inexplicable. All this unjust pain perplexes us when we try to understand it, because there is always something beyond our analytical capabilities. The “unexplained dimension” of the evil surrounding us constitutes a mystery we can neither keep silent about nor speak lightly of, because we sense that in it, besides that which is human, there is much that is inhuman, and perhaps something superhuman.

- **An impartial universe.** If there is a higher being responsible for the order of the universe, it should be infinitely just and therefore responsible for there being some sort of relationship between what we do and what happens to us. If everything that happens in the world is due to divine will—it is argued—then suffering must make up part of that plan; and therefore, the most reasonable thing to do would not be to fight against it but to endure it stoically, without complaining or rebelling against fate. So, the uncomfortable tension between divine goodness and human suffering would have an explanation and would ultimately be resolved within a universal plan. Within this perspective, comfort for pain should be sought in submission to events, since everything would turn out to be the fruit of divine will. Including the suffering of the innocent. . .?

Before deciding in favor of or against any of these theories, we must agree that the world in which we live is governed by natural laws, inescapable and impartial, that affect us all—the good, the bad, and the average. If I fall off a cliff, the law of gravity accelerates my fall, even if I am a faultless believer and even if I have fallen
unintentionally. If my neighbor gets drunk and drives while intoxicated and loses control of his car, he might crash or hit someone even if he doesn’t want to.

The point about natural laws is that they are universal: They work the same for everyone. Clearly, what happens in the world depends on both the normal workings of those laws and our violation of those basic laws of existence, or on what is referred to as moral standards. Whether it is due to ignorance, stupidity, or malice, we all make mistakes and cause various kinds of damage, willingly or unwillingly. Would a universe be possible in which natural laws acted according to the morality of the person who challenged them? Would it be conceivable—or preferable—if the acts of an aggressor against his victim would have no consequences if that victim were innocent?

From a believer’s perspective, given human freedom, should divine providence intervene to prevent the negative consequences of human actions? Consider an example: A boy spills food on his shirt at breakfast. His mother makes him change his shirt before going to school. The boy hurries out of the house so that he won’t be late and runs to catch the bus. The bus hits the child. Whose fault is it? The child’s, who shouldn’t have stained his shirt? The mother’s, for making him change it? The bus driver’s, for not being attentive?

At what level would we have wanted God to intervene to prevent the accident? Helping the child eat without spilling on himself? Taking away the mother’s obsession with cleanliness? Applying the brakes of the school bus in place of the driver? If the Supreme Being were to intervene at any of these levels, He would not be respecting our freedom. And “without freedom this world wouldn’t be any other than a mechanism.”

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

The movie Bruce Almighty depicts the story of a desperate young man who, because of his many failures in life, wishes he could solve his problems by possessing divine powers. The Almighty allows him to have such powers for a few days. But the results are worse than before. The young man discovers that there are things that not even God Himself can do, because those are the rules of the game for our universe: People’s wills cannot be broken, nor can people be forced to love. This modern parable helps us to understand what happens with evil. Freedom exercised outside of love, that is to say, outside the divine plan, damages our relationships, creating injustice, suffering, and pain.

If God is the Father of us all, and He has made us free beings, it is normal that He lets us act freely, no matter how it hurts Him and hurts us. Without freedom, we cannot speak of love, since true love cannot be forced.

But we could be under the impression that “the world has gotten out of hand” for the Creator, in the sense that He doesn’t control it completely. Not because He can’t, but out of respect for His creatures’ freedom. Created in His image and endowed with sufficient intelligence, we are capable of caring for this world and taking it in the right direction. But we are also capable of destroying it and destroying ourselves. In order to give us our freedom, God must temporarily “renounce being omnipotent.” For this reason, He has little to do with our misfortunes. Perhaps in theory He could spare us the suffering, but, out of respect for our decisions, He doesn’t do it. His omnipotence manifests itself in His capacity to provide a space for the exercise of our freedom.

Some may wonder why the Creator didn’t put us in a Land of Cockaigne, a kind of Utopia where it would be impossible to suffer, where we would have no choice but to comply with the divine will without thinking or trying. We would live without responsibilities and without suffering. Would that situation be more desirable, as it would mean an existence without freedom, and therefore, without awareness and without love?

If there is freedom, the possibility exists that we will make wrong decisions and act to the detriment of our own good or that of our neighbors. And then we run the risk of suffering or causing others to suffer. But it would seem that a world with freedom, and therefore at risk of suffering, is preferable to an existence without it.

A GREAT COSMIC CONFLICT

The Bible places the enigma of evil in the context of a great cosmic conflict between good and evil. The conflict began with Lucifer, chief of the angels, who led a rebellion in heaven against the Creator God (Isaiah 14:12–15; Revelation 12:7–9). God could have destroyed Satan and his followers instantly, but the rest of the intelligent beings in the universe would have doubted His love and obeyed Him out of fear and not out of love.

It is with this rebellion of Satan that sin had its origin. And Satan introduced sin into this Earth. According to Genesis, Satan tempted Adam and Eve, our first parents, and they fell into disobedience against God’s law (Genesis 3). When God’s law was broken, sin and its resultant disorder and suffering appeared.

Evil is thus an intruder into God’s perfect creation. We use the term fallen to describe the situation of humanity after they used their freedom of choice to do evil, and we use the term sin to denote the state of human beings who are separated from God. We can fight against the consequences of this situation, but escaping them is not an option. As long as the conflict continues, we will suffer its resulting consequences. But one day it will be proven once and for all that our woes are the consequence of our estrangement from God.

This explanation of the great cosmic conflict can be very enlightening, provided that it is not used to jus-
tify suffering. Undoubtedly, suffering of the innocent shows how grievous the results of our follies are, and how much better would be for everybody to respect God’s laws. But to justify suffering on the basis of the Great Controversy would imply that the end justifies the means. Then Elie Wiesel would be right to wonder how much suffering is needed to prove to the inhabitants of the universe that God is love and that the devil is a fake.11 Do we need more than what we already have? How many abused children, how many victims of war, how many people suffering from hunger do we need to convince humanity of our need to put love into practice? Is there not yet enough suffering for God to demonstrate that He is right?

One wonders, indeed, why it is taking so long to end evil. But when we stop to think about it, we realize that this problem concerns us personally, in a certain sense, even more than it concerns God.

How many years do we need to learn something from the story of Cain and Abel? How many people need to starve to death for us to stand in solidarity with those who hunger? How many innocents have to be tortured to convince us that cruelty is a horror?

SUFFERING AND RESPONSIBILITY

It is clear that the degradation of the harmony of our environment points to a mismanagement for which we are all somewhat responsible. What is happening on this Earth, far from being the fruit of the divine will, is the result of the impossible sum of all our wills. If Jesus taught us to ask God in the Lord’s Prayer: “Your will be done on earth” (Matthew 6:10, NKJV), it is because it is not done.

Just by living in the same world with the consequences of our accumulated choices, we create an environment that shapes the situations that we perpetuate. That is to say, each one of us is implicated, from the beginning, in an inevitable context of solidarity, for good and for bad. Although we are the innocent victims of inherited misfortunes, each one of us commits our own iniquities and errors, and so bears part of the “guilt” for the present situation in the world.

I recognize that my answers to the question “Why does evil exist in the world?” are insufficient. I have found that with my students hundreds of times. But before I return to it, I would like to point out that up until now, no one has ever asked me, “Why does good exist?” Our shouts of protest—“Why me?”—when something bad happens to us, suggest that we all consider ourselves, more or less, to be innocent victims of stray bullets.

Significantly, the smallest problem that we have to put up with makes us indignant, but we take for granted all the good in the world. Because we are capable of creating most of the damage that we see around us, the pertinent question is not “Why do we suffer unjustly?” but “Why are we still alive?” If we were to believe that everything come from chance and chaos, we would have to conclude that the greatest mystery is not why evil exists, but why good exists.

If evil is not a parallel power comparable to good, since it did not make up part of the original creation, then it is, in a sense, avoidable. Let’s say that God allows things to happen, like when I let my son ride my bicycle. It is one thing to allow enjoyment, during which a misfortune may occur, and it is another thing to cause or want that misfortune to happen.12 It is dangerous, therefore, to talk of the evil that God “allows” and that He could “prevent” because of His omnipotence because God does not exercise now the fullness of His powers (or is limiting the exercise of them until the end of the Great Controversy), nor are we respecting His laws. That divine attribute will become self-evident at the end of time, since it includes also His power to make His ideal reality.13 So, meanwhile, we should observe what God has done specifically in history, what He is doing, and what He promises to do to solve the problem of suffering. If God continues to respect our freedom, we can choose to respect His as well, and trust Him.

GLIMPSES OF HOPE

Since God is love (1 John 4:8), He can only want the best for His creatures. Therefore, we can trust His goodness and, at the same time, fight the wrongs in the world caused by our distance from His plans. We trust in divine mercy, despite experiencing suffering, because we know that the Creator also abhors pain (Romans 8:31–39), and He has planned its ultimate end (Revelation 21:1–4). Knowing that evil can only be overcome by good (Romans 12:21), we look for temporary solutions, while we wait for the fulfillment of divine promises in the future. What we already know and understand about God allows us to have faith in Him despite what we don’t know or understand.14
Great teachers of spirituality have seen in suffering a path back to solidarity with others, and to the acknowledgement of the goodness of the divine plan. C. S. Lewis, for one, wrote: “God doesn’t mind being the last resort for His creatures.” Many of us would feel our pride offended if people knocked on our door only when they needed something. But God, because He loves us with an absolute love, accepts us anyway.

Religion can indeed bring people the relief or encouragement they need in their state of suffering. But feeling in need of help, including divine help, is not a weakness. Awareness of our limits is not only realistic but also necessary for living a full life. A person who never felt thirst and therefore does not drink water would probably die, because water is essential for survival, and thirst is the protective mechanism that reminds us periodically of our need for water. Since we cannot objectively reach our ultimate destiny without God, our thirst for Him is a sign of spiritual health. Not feeling that need would be a dangerous sign that something isn’t working. The discovery of our need for God is the first step toward getting His help.

That’s why our efforts are better spent, not trying to explain evil, but endeavoring to fight it. In doing so, we join together in that cosmic struggle for good, encouraged by the conviction that the Creator shares our suffering in some way. We wait, awaiting the end of the war, but we know that the crucial battle has already been won, and “that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18, NIV). Meanwhile, while skirmishes continue, with their devastating collateral damage, God says to us: Persevere. Trust in Me. One day the pain will disappear. Behold, I make all things new. Meanwhile, I am with you.

* This article is an edited and abridged version of the original that appeared in the author’s Facing Suffering: Courage and Hope in a Challenging World (Madrid, Spain: Safeliz, 2013). Printed by permission.
Searching for the Center of Adventist Theology:

What can sanctuary, ritual, and theology add to the search?

Gerald A. Klingbeil

Biblical sacrifice is not to be understood as a bribe. It is public and transparent and involves clearly defined participants. It has to be this way since it is an extension (or a dimension) of the Great Controversy, where a public challenge to God’s justice and love required a public divine answer.
The sanctuary played an important role in the religion and history of Israel, and frequent references to it in the Hebrew Bible (HB) are well attested. Countless studies focusing upon its architecture, personnel, utensils, and its associated rites have been published—even if one disregards those studies that focus exclusively upon the “literary construct” of the sanctuary texts over against the material reality. Too often, however, these studies have overlooked the forest by focusing upon the trees. We often look at details (important as they may be) or one element at the expense of others, without considering the larger picture.

Let me illustrate this point. Imagine for a moment the following image: You see two circles, a smaller one and a larger one. Both circles share a common center, thus placing the smaller circle in the center of the bigger circle. Two short, straight horizontal lines connect to the outer circle on opposite sides. Can you see it? Could you draw what I tried to describe in three sentences? Can you guess its meaning?

When we see images (or read texts, which are literary images), we immediately try to decipher and understand. However, interpretation requires context, and there is none for this image. We are not too sure if this is an astronomical mapping of stars or planets with their orbits or if this image represents an architectural or landscape design. I am sure as you look at the image you would be able to come up with many different interpretations (or at least tentative suggestions). That’s how our mind works: We try to make sense of what we see.

Let me tell you what the drawing represents (and here I am indebted to my three daughters and my wife Chantal): It’s a Mexican, wearing a big sombrero, and riding a bicycle—observed from the perspective of a drone hovering above. Now you may wonder, what does this exercise have to do with ritual, the sanctuary, and biblical interpretation? Keep this important question on standby as we delve into the intricacies of sanctuary and ritual studies.

SANCTUARY AND ADVENTIST THEOLOGY

There is a close link between Adventist theology and the sanctuary. After all, following the Great Disappointment in 1844, those Millerites who kept searching understood—through divine guidance and the careful study of Scripture—that the prophetic time of Daniel 8:14, pointing to the cleansing of the sanctuary, was not referring to Jesus’ second coming, but rather to a new phase in His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Obviously, my sentence-long summary represented months and even years of wrestling with the biblical text, prayerful discussion, more study, and often tentative conclusions. As the large picture emerged, more attention was paid to sanctuary details—and questions were raised. The most notorious (or “famous”) in our recent history involved the Glacier View consultation in 1980, dealing with the numerous questions that had been raised by Desmond Ford in his 991-page document Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment.

Since then, Seventh-day Adventist scholars and authors have worked arduously to further understand the significance of the sanctuary and its related elements in the overall context of Adventist theology. Roberto Ouro has suggested that the sanctuary (both the “physical macrostructure” as well as the “theological macroconcept”) may be inductively derived at as the biblical center of the HB. He argues that the sanctuary concept emanates from the biblical text itself and thus does not represent a superimposed external framework or system. His approach is indeed intriguing and follows an important hermeneutical principle: Scripture needs to determine the way and method we read it—not an external system, based on distinct philosophical (or hermeneutical) presuppositions.

However, before attempting to make a judgment call on this proposal, let’s follow Ouro’s methodological suggestion and listen to Scripture itself regarding the significance of the sanctuary.

BACK TO BASICS

The first explicit reference regarding the purpose and function of the sanctuary in the HB can be found in Exodus 25:8: “Let them build me a sanctuary, so that I may tabernacle in their midst” [my translation]. Right from the outset, divine presence is key to understanding the construction of the sanctuary. Most of the times, biblical interpreters (including, and especially, Adventist interpreters) read on to the following verse 9, which continues the divine command, detailing how this sanctuary is to be constructed, namely “according to all that I will show you, namely [according to] the model/pattern of the tabernacle/tent and [according to] the model/pattern all its utensils and thus they shall
do.” The crux of Exodus 25:9 has been the significance of the Hebrew noun tabnît, which appears 20 times in the HB and can refer to (a) an original miniature model; (b) an architect’s plan; (c) a miniature model that is a copy of an original; (d) an architect’s plan based on an original; or (e) the original itself. All semantic possibilities suggest an observable link between the model and the reality and are in line with ancient Near Eastern (ANE) concepts of divine dwelling places that are parallel to earthly abodes. However, because of our interest in the larger reality behind the earthly sanctuary, we often tend to overlook the key point of Exodus 25:8, i.e., the divine desire to dwell in the midst of Israel (and by extension, the “world”). This sense of divine presence is also visible in the Garden of Eden, which represents a link between creation and the sanctuary. The implications of the divine presence on earth (in the sanctuary) are significant and affect theological concepts of holiness, the continuum of pure—impure (as well as profane—holy) and, following the destruction of the temple (and thus the dwelling place of God on earth), required important theological reflections that radically changed the face of Judaism.

A second highly crucial function of the sanctuary involved the sacrificial system. According to Leviticus 17:8 and 9, sacrifices could only be offered at the sanctuary. Thus, following Scripture, the sanctuary did not only function as the divine dwelling place (a sort of “home away from home”) but also as the only authorized geographical location (which, during the years of wilderness wanderings, was mobile) where atonement could be effected. It is here that understanding of ritual impacts most significantly our understanding and discussion of the sanctuary—at least it should.

RITUAL AND THE SANCTUARY

The past 30 years have witnessed a tremendous increase in studies that deal with biblical ritual, while at the same time making use of ritual theory. This development is based on important methodological developments in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and religious studies, where the study of ritual has always played a major role. Scholars like Catherine Bell, Ron Grimes, Jonathan Smith, Mircea Eliade, Victor Turner, and others have made major contributions to our theoretical understanding of ritual, which, in turn, has also influenced the study of ritual in the area of biblical studies.

Beginning with my doctoral research on the priestly ordination ritual found in Leviticus 8 and the larger issue of understanding texts that are describing a reality so far removed from our own, I have repeatedly argued for a way of reading ritual texts in Scripture that pays attention to the important elements of ritual per se, while, at the same time, also looks at the bigger picture.

In other words, by looking carefully at the tree, we also hope to understand the forest. This reading strategy (distinct from anthropological fieldwork) borrows terminology from linguistics without necessarily utilizing a linguistic model. Key linguistic categories such as morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics provide a way of describing the form of ritual (what does the text describe), the important elements of ritual (involving also their interaction, i.e., syntax), the contextual meaning of the ritual (whereby important building blocks are integrated into a larger semantic unit), which finally leads to the pragmatic perspective, involving functions and dimensions (what was the ritual good for?).

Let’s take a short breather from foreign-sounding ritual theory and think together about what triggers ritual, and particularly, sanctuary-related (i.e., sacrificial) ritual. Several reasons come to mind: rites of passage (as Arnold van Gennep called life-transitioning rituals) involve life transitions, such as coming-of-age rituals, marriages, funerals, ordinations, etc. Feasts and fasts are often life-cycle markers (and the HB is full of divinely appointed feasts, often, though not always, linked to the sanctuary). However, the most important function of ritual activity in the Hebrew Bible involved ritual as a problem solver.

Just imagine yourself in the sandals of an Israelite who had sinned and had just been convicted of his sinful deed. He would have to offer an appropriate sin (or burnt) offering, following a clear sequence of activities that were place- and time-critical (details can be gleaned from Leviticus 1). He would have to lay his hands upon the head of the animal, transferring his sins upon the sacrificial animal. He would have to slaughter the animal in a specific way while the priest collected the draining blood in a vessel and then sprinkled
it around the altar and, in most instances, inside the curtain separating the holy from the holy of holies. The priest would also have to make sure that the offering was appropriately burned upon the altar.

What would this intricately designed ritual do? On a material level, an innocent animal would have to die for a guilty human being. However, ritual always goes beyond the obvious or material. Transferring sin upon the animal, after which the blood of the animal was brought to the sanctuary and sprinkled on the sanctuary furniture, resulted in the sanctuary becoming contaminated, thus requiring the more permanent sin solution/purification that the yearly Yom Kippur ritual afforded once a year (Leviticus 16).

**LINK BETWEEN RITUAL, SANCTUARY, AND THEOLOGY: SOME IMPLICATIONS**

The interpretation of biblical ritual reminds us not to major in minors—a good lesson for anyone seeking to understand the sanctuary. Following semantic theory that challenges us to not infuse words with meaning (or suggest their meaning based on etymology), but rather understand them in their context, ritual theory invites us to look at the bigger picture. It seems as if the often-asked questions regarding the dimension of the heavenly sanctuary would fall into this category: Was the model shown to Moses exactly like the heavenly sanctuary? Was it on a scale? If so, which scale? These are all questions that defy a clear, Scripture-based answer. However, the biblical description of a corresponding heavenly reality that illustrates different elements and phases of the plan of salvation are indeed clear. Ritual theory does not challenge the existence of a bigger reality; it just cautions us not to step outside of the biblical data in fanciful ways that may result in limiting God.

Here is another implication. As we often struggle to understand biblical ritual (often due to its strangeness reflecting distinct cultural, social, linguistic, and religious realities), we remember that we are dealing with a “second language” and pay more attention to detail, without jumping to (premature) conclusions. We listen more carefully. We look twice. We concentrate hard. This approach is not only needed but very healthy when we think about the sanctuary doctrine in Scripture.

The sanctuary (and biblical ritual linked to the sanctuary) reminds us also of the crucial link between heaven and earth. We are not just lonely, disconnected beings on an estranged planet floating through an immense universe. Through the Word (with a capital W) that became flesh and “tabernacled” among us (see John 1:14) we can peek behind the curtain. Matter of fact, Hebrews tells us that we have “an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil” (Hebrews 6:19, NASB), based on the promise of Jesus’ ministry “within the veil,” at the right hand of the Father. Considering the primary explicit purpose of the earthly sanctuary (i.e., that God wanted to be in the midst of His people [Exodus 25:8]), the sanctuary (both earthly and heavenly) becomes the vehicle to achieve this close link.

Here is another important ramification of the intersection of ritual, sanctuary, and theology. The sanctuary and its complex ritual requirements that were necessary to achieve cleansing need to be understood within the larger co-text of the Great Controversy motif. Salvation needs to be objective, verifiable, public, and transparent. Biblical sacrifice is not to be understood as a bribe or something done under the table. It is public and transparent and involves clearly defined participants. It has to be this way since it is an extension (or a dimension) of the Great Controversy, where a public challenge to God’s justice and love required a public divine answer. The investigative judgment is one important element of this public divine answer.

I confess to being both intrigued as well as nervous regarding Ouro’s suggestion of the sanctuary motif being the center of biblical theology. As has been pointed out elsewhere, the notion of a central theme tends to “flatten” the theological landscape and often invites superficial or “twisted” interpretations. However, Ouro’s call to listen to Scripture’s own voice when searching for a center is laudable and right on target. His suggestion may just be this drone-perspective from above that gives us the focus we need to recognize the centrality of the sanctuary to Adventist theology. God did not only provide a way to resolve the issue of sin and separation; He did it publicly, and in a way that was understandable and transparent. His desire to tabernacle in the midst of His people communicates even without words: It speaks of a God who revels in community and intimacy. 

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**Gerald Klingbeil**
(D.Litt., University of Stellenbosch, South-Africa) is Research Professor of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A.; and Associate Editor, Adventist Review and Adventist World magazines, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.
NOTES AND REFERENCES
1. This is a revised and condensed version of a study published originally in Spanish as “El santuario, el ritual y la teología: En busca del centro de la teología adventista,” Theologiaque 27:1 (2012): 66-85.


4. Names such as D. M. Canwright, A. F. Ballenger, or L. R. Conradi come to mind when considering Adventist questions regarding the sanctuary, 1844, Daniel 8:14, and the investigative judgment.


10. Time and space limitations do not allow me to develop this important motif further. See Ouro, Old Testament Theology, pages 38-57, and the numerous bibliographical references provided there.

11. A helpful discussion of the implications and reflections of Judaism regarding the question of the divine presence following the destruction of the temple can be found in Risa Levitt Kohn and Rebecca Moore, “Where Is God? Divine Presence in the Absence of the Temple,” in Milk and Honey: Essays on Ancient Israel and the Bible in Appreciation of the Judaic Studies Program at the University of California, San Diego, Sarah Malena and David Miano, eds. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 133-153.


14. See Klingbeil, Bridging the Gap, 127-146, 205-225; and “Ritus/Ritual,” Das wissenschaftliche Biblilexikon im Internet (2010), [www.wibilex.de].

15. Nine important categories are included: (1) required situation and context; (2) structure of ritual; (3) form, order, and sequence; (4) ritual space; (5) ritual time; (6) ritual objects; (7) ritual action; (8) ritual participants and roles; and (9) ritual sound and language.

16. Following one researchers of ritual, I have suggested to look at different dimensions (such as e.g., interactive, collective, innovative, traditionalizing, communicative, symbolic, etc.) instead of a set of predetermined ritual types (such as, for example, founding rituals, restoration rituals, or maintenance rituals, as suggested by Frank H. Gorman Jr., Ideology of Ritual: Space, Time, and Status in the Priestly Theology (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1990), 53-55.


Adam and Eve: Lessons from the Old Story

Dragoslava and Aleksandar S. Santrac

The divine ideal that no person has claim to unique privileges and superiority over others should triumph in God’s church as the vibrant demonstration of God’s will for humankind.

Adam and Eve are biblical characters of immense complexity and significance. Not only does humankind trace its origin back to them, it also shares a collective destiny marred by sin and its consequences that are directly resultant from their initial disobedience. Adam and Eve figure prominently in the first four chapters of Genesis, but echoes of them are heard throughout the entire Bible (e.g., 1 Chronicles 1:1; Romans 5:14; 2 Corinthians 11:3). Remembering their story rightly will help us live our present more meaningfully.
DIVINE IMAGE AND EARTHLY DESCENT

Adam (Hebrew, ‘adam) is both the proper name of the first man (Genesis 2:20) and a designation for humankind (Genesis 5:2; 7:21). God Himself gave this appellation to Adam and Eve: “Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them ‘Humankind’ when they were created” (Genesis 5:2, NRSV). Adam is identified with all humankind rather than with any particular nationality or race. The country from which the dust was taken is not stated. The rabbis believed it came from all over the earth so no one could say, “My father is greater than yours.”

The same generic notion is preserved in the name of the first woman. The Hebrew form of the name Eve (khatuwah) is related to the verb khayaah (“live”), depicting Eve as “the mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20). The biblical creation account thus highlights the truth that all human beings have common ancestors and are brothers and sisters.

Although the first human couple was created on the sixth day of creation week, along with land creatures (Genesis 1:24–31), the creation of humankind is set apart from the previous acts of creation by a series of subtle contrasts. First, the creation of Adam and Eve is introduced by the usual “Then God said” (vs. 26). However, God’s command which follows is not an impersonal “‘Let there be,’” as in other instances (vv. 3, 6, 14), but rather the more personal “‘Let Us make. . . .’” Second, whereas other creatures were created “according to its/their kind” (vv. 11, 12, 21, 24, 25), the man and woman were made in the image of God (vs. 27). Third, the creation of humanity is specifically noted to be a creation of “male and female,” a feature not underlined for other forms of life. Fourth, only human beings are given dominion in God’s creation. This dominion is expressly stated to be over all living creatures. Yet human beings do not possess unrestrained power and authority; the limits of their rule are carefully defined and circumscribed by divine law, so that the given privileges are exercised with responsibility and are subject to accountability (Genesis 2:15–17). The Garden of Eden is depicted as the first sanctuary on earth, and Adam and Eve as priests serving God in it. As those who were created in the image of God, human beings were to live as agents of and witnesses to God’s presence on earth, and so care for the earth.

The glorious portrayal of humankind as “the image of God” in Genesis 1 is coupled with a lowlier origin, namely, the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7). Hebrew wordplay between ‘adam (“man”) and ‘adamah (“ground”) expresses a significant message: Human beings are earth-bound creatures. Yet the distinctiveness and exquisiteness of humankind is preserved in the images of vivid intimacy. The word formed (Hebrew, yatsar) suggests a vigilant work of a potter making a delicate art-piece. Into the nostrils of this earthen vessel God breathed in the breath of life, transforming that lowly creature into a living being. The imagery portrays affection between God and humankind not shared by other creatures. Exceptional intimacy between God and humankind is revealed also in the remarkable creation of the woman (Genesis 2:18–22), God’s promise of redemption (3:15), and later in the portrayal of God as our heavenly Father and His love in Jesus Christ. Human beings have to live with awareness that though they are special creatures in the image of God, they are not divine beings, but earthly creatures. Only when both these aspects are properly understood and lived will human beings exist in happiness.

TWO BUT ONE

The blissful creation account is unexpectedly interrupted by the first negative statement in the Bible: “It is not good that man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18a). This statement anticipates the creation of woman, after which God proclaimed that everything was very good (Genesis 1:31). The idea of man’s aloneness is remarkable. One may wonder why God delayed the creation of woman, and why man felt alone when God was there. The delay was deliberate. God left Adam to experience his own uniqueness, solitariness, and incompleteness that could not be satisfied by anything in the world. That sparkled longing for “a helper comparable to him” (Genesis 2:20).

The creation of woman from man’s rib implies the close connection between them and lays the groundwork for the understanding of marriage in verse 24. "The relationship
of the woman to the ‘rib’ entails no subordination, any more than man’s being created from the ground implies his subordination to it.” Ellen White wrote: “Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him.”

Similar notion is conveyed in the depiction of woman as “a helper” (Genesis 2:18, 20). The Hebrew word ‘ezer (“helper”) describes “one who possesses the desire and the ability or capacity to help another, a partner.” It generally describes God as a Helper (Psalm 30:10; 54:4; 121:1, 2; 146:5), and so has no derogative connotations.

By bringing the woman to the man, God played the role of the wedding attendant (Genesis 2:22). God blessed Adam and Eve to be fertile and multiply, and so sexual intimacy between the husband and wife is viewed as good and desirable (Genesis 1:28; 2:25). “Nakedness carries with it both a physical and psychological openness and vulnerability,” which are the pre-requisites for compassion, trust, and understanding. So long as harmony with God is maintained, the pristine innocence and dignity of sexuality is preserved.

The exclusiveness of the marital relationship is crucial. The man is to leave his father and mother and join with his wife (Genesis 2:24). The marital relationship thus takes precedence over ties to the parents. The husband’s primary devotion is to his wife, with whom he builds a unique relationship of unprecedented intimacy and allegiance. The word join (Hebrew, dabaq) describes intense affection and loyalty. It often portrays one’s longing for and commitment to God (Deuteronomy 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20), and physical things sticking to each other, especially parts of the body (Job 19:20; 41:23). The husband is to cleave to his wife as profoundly as skin sticks to the muscle in a body. Thus they are “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24), which implies more than sexual unity. Their physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental unity was anticipated in Eve’s creation out of Adam’s body (vs. 23). According to rabbinic interpretation, the point of verse 24 is that men are to be different from the males of the animal world, who mate and then move on. A man wishes his wife to be with him always. Promiscuity is thus degradation of God’s intention for humankind. Although polygamy is seen in the Old Testament, verse 24 indicates that the ideal is heterosexual monogamy.

Adam and Eve’s relationship as husband and wife involves a unique equation: They are simultaneously two and one. Interestingly, the Hebrew word that describes Adam and Eve as “one” (ekhad) depicts also the ‘oneness’ of the Godhead (Deuteronomy 6:4), suggesting that the bond between the husband and wife is mysterious and profound. Two distinct beings are united while preserving their separate personalities. This view recognizes the similarities and differences between them as a unit, and stresses the equality of male and female in their standing before God and in their relationship with each other and the rest of creation.

THE FALL

God created human beings as free agents. Sadly, Adam and Eve’s disobedience shattered the potential for good of the gift of free will. Genesis 3 sets the scene for humanity’s moral predicament. Adam fathered children in his own likeness, which now involved the propensity to sin (Genesis 5:3; Romans 5:12).

Humanity’s relationship with God was maintained by trust and obedience to God (Genesis 2:16, 17). So when the tempter promised freedom to be like God, Adam and Eve wished to exceed the limits of creaturehood. “Good and bad” should be understood as “undifferentiated parts of a totality, a merism meaning ‘everything.’” “Opened eyes” (Genesis 3:5, 7) suggests access to hidden realms and possibilities (Genesis 21:19; Numbers 24:16; 2 Kings 6:17, 20). “[T]he knowledge of good and evil is understood as divine knowledge, i.e., knowledge proper to God.” At
the heart of every temptation lies the denial of one’s dependability on God blinded by seeming advantages that appear to be lacking in God’s domain (Matthew 4:1–11; James 1:13, 14).

Yet, sin reverses God’s blessings. Purity is replaced with guilt (Genesis 2:25; 3:7), joy of communing with God with fear and shame (3:8–10), harmonious relationships with accusations and mistreatment (2:22–24; 3:12, 16), blessing of procreation with pain (1:28; 3:16), ruling over nature with constant struggle (1:28; 3:17–19), and eternal life with returning to dust (3:19). Adam and Eve experience immediate judgment in being separated from God by being thrown out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:23, 24).

The fact that they did not die immediately demonstrates that God’s plan of salvation “was foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20; see also Revelation 13:8). In His immense wisdom and love, God ensured that humanity was never left without hope. God’s promise of the woman’s seed who will crush the serpent’s head is the first Messianic prediction (Genesis 3:15). Salvation of humankind rests on God’s initiative and grace, not on human works: God sought for Adam and Eve (vs. 9). The animals sacrificed to provide clothing to cover them died in their place (vs. 21). Here is the first biblical example of superiority and sufficiency of righteousness by faith in the merits of Christ’s sacrifice and the futility of relying on human works to ensure new life.

LORDSHIP AND SUBMISSION?

Genesis 3:16 plays a significant role in theological debates over gender issues because it appears to say that God intended Adam to rule over Eve as her superior after the Fall. Does the text represent God’s curse of Eve?

It is important to realize that the divine address to the woman is the only one that does not contain the word curse, unlike divine addresses to the serpent and to the man (Genesis 3:14, 17). The immediate context and the close literary connections suggest that Genesis 3:16 should be read in the light of verse 15. Both verses have the birth-motif and should be placed in the perspective of salvation: It is through the incarnational process of giving birth to the Messiah, the seed of “the woman,” that God will prevail over evil and save humanity. It should also be noted that the notion of subordination of women to men was never mentioned or implied prior to this text, and was therefore not a part of God’s plan.17 Among the first effects of sin was Adam and Eve’s broken harmony, which infected the whole of humankind (Genesis 3:7, 12, 16). The vicious deeds such as the ruling of the stronger over the weaker and discrimination can be tied to people’s open violation of God’s original plan for humanity.

It is significant that in Genesis, the man and woman are defined first not by their gender but by the fact that they are both created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26, 27). Genesis 1:27 states twice that humankind was created in the image of God, and then that humankind was created “male and female.” The divine plurality in “Let Us make . . .” (Genesis 1:26) seems to anticipate the human plurality of man and woman (vs. 27).

The creation of humankind as male and female is an aspect of the image of God, thus “casting the human relationship between man and woman in the role of reflecting God’s own personal relationship with himself.”19 Significantly, after the Fall, the language of Genesis 1:26 and 27 is repeated in Genesis 5:1 and 2 to stress that God’s original plan had not been changed. In Genesis 5:2, both Adam and Eve are called in Hebrew 'adam (“Humankind,” NRSV), showing that both male and female are considered one and equal, as they both bear the image of God.

Note Paul’s unique take on this oneness and equality of man and woman. In Ephesians 5:22, 25, and 33, he discusses the relationship between the husband and wife in the light of verse 1: “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.” The marriage of a devoted couple should reflect the perfect harmony that exists in the Holy Trinity. Remarkably, the same Hebrew term (‘ekhad) describes both the unity of the husband and wife, and the unity within the Godhead (Genesis 2:24; Deuteronomy 6:4). Ephesians 5:21 and 31 provide another context for marriage: “submitting to one another in the fear of God,” and “the two shall become one flesh.” Furthermore, the image of matrimony elucidates the mutual devotion between Christ and His church (vss. 32, 33).

Harmony between Jesus and His Father should be reflected also in unity of the believers, who are depicted as “one body” (1 Corinthians 10:17; 12:12) and are called to be “one just as We are one” (John 17:22). “One body” and “that they may be one” echo the Edenic standard (Genesis 2:24). The divine ideal that no person has claim to unique privileges and superiority over others should triumph in God’s church as the vibrant demonstration of God’s will for humankind (Luke 22:26; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). The divine ideal not only precludes gender discrimination but also every other kind of mistreatment and oppression including, for example, slavery and racism. Jesus appeals to His people to adhere to the divine will that was revealed “from the beginning,” and not to “the hardness” of the sinful heart (Matthew 19:8).
THE SECOND ADAM

Jesus is regarded as the second Adam, because He in His incarnation lived the perfect life that Adam in his creation was expected to live, but failed to do so. Jesus in His humanity perfectly imaged God on earth (John 12:45; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; Philippians 2:6–9). Jesus passed Satan’s testing (Matthew 4:1–11), and never departed from God’s will (John 17:4; 14:9). Those who believe in Jesus are renewed to live up to the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 2:20; 1 John 3:2, 3).

Jesus’ work of redemption is contrasted to Adam’s work of apostasy (1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 5:12–21). Through the first Adam’s sin, condemnation, judgment, and death entered the world, but through the second Adam’s righteous life and sacrificial death, the gift of grace, justification, righteousness, and eternal life are offered to humanity. The redemptive work of the second Adam will result in the renewal of relationship with God, fellowship among people, and the natural world. Yet Jesus will not simply restore all God’s blessings, but exceed their abundance by far (Romans 5:15; 8:19–23; Revelation 22).
I grew up in the picturesque Paarl valley in the Western Cape of South Africa. Endowed with bluest mountains, lush green vegetation, and the most striking of night valleys, Paarl is beauty many times over. I was the only child in a Catholic family. We attended church every Sunday, but we never really delved into the Bible. We listened to the sermon each week, and that was the only knowledge of God we received. My parents never studied the Bible with me, or by themselves.

One night, when I was about 8 years old, I dreamed that I was climbing a ladder up to heaven; and when I arrived there, I saw a man standing, dressed in a white robe. He had the softest, purest expression in his eyes. I knew that he loved me. I knew that I could trust him implicitly.

I turned my attention from him, and saw the most evil-looking creature standing directly opposite me. An immense fear gripped me, and I looked to the man in the white robe. His expression was soft, and he told me: “I have given you everything that you need to defeat all evil.” Because I trusted this man instinctively, I believed what he told me, and I felt powerful. I raised my hands in belief, and the frightening creature disappeared. Years later, when I had started to read the Bible, I came upon a promise that has meant a lot to me ever since: “Behold, I give you the authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:19, NKJV).*

From that night on, I was filled with the desire to be close to Jesus in my own childlike way. I wanted to make Him happy, not sad. I knew I loved Him because He loved me first. In my teen years, I was surrounded by friends from secular homes similar to my own, and some of them started reading about and dabbling in the occult. At that point, I still knew I loved Jesus; however, my focus was directed toward other things that seemed like innocent fun. I started playing around with “wicca,” a form of witchcraft and occult practice. During this time, I experienced terrible demonic attacks quite frequently.

One day, as I was sitting in my room, I reached for something on my nightstand and accidentally pushed over the

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* Luke 10:19 (NKJV)
Bible that was sitting there. It fell open to the passage that says: “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21).

How deceived I had been! I was so afraid reading that text, afraid that I had separated myself from the Lord, who had loved me first. I now realized that during my search for a higher form of spirituality, I had been deceived by Satan, who had dressed up something so seemingly innocent that I could not see it as being bad. I repented of the witchcraft immediately and started from then on to read my Bible every night.

My parents, who by then had both become Seventh-day Adventists, attended church regularly on Sabbath. I sometimes would attend with them, but for some reason did not attend one particular Sabbath. My father came home, beaming: “I found your future husband at church today. The young man is from Israel, and he gave a wonderful testimony in the church. His name is Wisam Ali!” I did not take the news very seriously because I thought that my father’s choice of a husband or boyfriend for me probably would not appeal to me.

Months later, during my last year of high school, I befriended the sons of the pastor of the Adventist church where my parents attended. As we were visiting, I told them that I loved foreign countries and would love to travel all over the world. They said that they would like to introduce me to someone from Israel—Wism Al. I was very surprised to hear this name again, and wondered if God was trying to communicate something to me. My friends dated often, but I was always declining casual requests by various young men. In my heart I knew I wanted more for myself and to belong to only one person.

One night, as I lay in my bed, I asked God about Wisam, about who he was. That night, I had a dream in which I was searching for a man named Wisam, and I finally met him. He told me in the dream how he had suffered and that the path he took to becoming a child of God had not always been easy.

After a few weeks, Wisam and I spoke on the telephone and set up a meeting. As I was waiting for him to arrive, my cell phone rang. I looked up as I answered, and Wisam was standing there looking at me. Both of us were laughing as we held our phones to our ears. I was shocked, because the Wisam who stood before me looked exactly like the Wisam in the dream I had had. That was strange, as I had never seen a photo of him.

We spent the afternoon getting to know more about each other. On our third date, Wisam asked me to wait for him while he finished his Master’s degree in theology at Southern Adventist University in the United States. In his culture, this meant becoming his wife. I thought about it and agreed. We were not engaged in the conventional Western way with a ring, but we made a promise to each other.

Right after I graduated from high school, Wisam had to leave South Africa for the United States to complete his degree. Parting ways was a sad experience for me. I had to cling to the Lord then, more than ever before, to give me inner peace while I was waiting. I found strength in the command and the promise: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). I knew I had to remember my first love—Jesus.

I found peace in knowing that no matter what happened in the almost two years Wisam and I would be apart, if I loved the One who loved me first, He would give me what was good for me. I remembered the text: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:18, 19).

Meanwhile, I started law school. Wisam and I stayed in touch via e-mail and through phone calls. Two months before his graduation, he called and asked again if I would still like to marry him as soon as he graduated. I told him of course I would. I was so happy, I knew I found the answer to my prayers. Soon we got married.

All through that time I had waited for love, I remember looking at the drawing I painted on my closet door while we were apart—a pyramid with God at the top, and me and my beloved at the bottom. If I were never close to God, Wisam and I would never have been brought closer together. This still rings true today. I feel that the deeper my bond with Jesus, the deeper the love grows between Wisam and me. I am Adri, the child of God who loved me first, and then I am the wife of my husband. As human beings we are all sinful, but through the perfect One, we are united as one.∞

*All Scripture passages in this article are quoted from the New King James Version of the Bible.

Adri Ali
is an Assistant to the Director of the Life and Hope Center in Nazareth, Israel. She performs community outreach in the form of presenting English classes to non-native speakers and healthy lifestyle and cooking programs at the center in order to introduce Seventh-day Adventist to the community.
The Gospel of Laughter

CHARLES A. TAPP

“Laughter is the best medicine.” Although this maxim may seem to be just another catchy-sounding saying, studies have shown that there is a great deal of truth to this ancient adage. In fact, studies have revealed that our ability to laugh can at times serve as a powerful antidote to conditions such as stress, depression, and even conflict. Nothing has proved to work faster and more reliably to restore a healthy balance between one’s mind and body than a good hearty laugh.

But have you ever stopped to ask yourself, Where does laughter come from? Is the ability to laugh a learned behavior or something that we are just born with? Did you know that infants experience laughter almost from the moment they are born? And if laughter is with us from birth, does this mean that it is an innate gift from God? In other words, is the ability to laugh hardwired into our very DNA as the result of having been created in the image of our Creator? If this is the case, does it mean that God laughs as well?

Solomon, the wise man, acknowledged that laughter is not something that is out of the ordinary, but viewed it as a regular part of human experience. Observe what he wrote: “To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted; A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up; A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance” (Ecclesiastes 3:1–4, NKJV).

When you take into account what Solomon said, laughter is not something that has to be manufactured or artificially stimulated; it should just happen. Throughout Scripture, laughter, for the most part, is mentioned in the context of joy or rejoicing. Despite all that Job had to endure in his life, with the loss of family, property, and...
prestige, one of his friends assured him that “He [God] will yet fill your mouth with laughing and your lips with rejoicing” (Job 8:21). If this is true, and we know that joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), then it means that laughter truly is a precious gift from God. As with every gift that God imparts, it is never given to benefit solely the lives of the recipients, but as a means for us to positively impact the lives of others.

But have you ever noticed just how contagious laughter can be? The story is told of three schoolgirls in Tanzania who began to laugh on January 30, 1962. The laughter turned uncontrollable and continuous. Within a few short months, nearly three-fifths of the students had contracted these same symptoms, and the school had to be shut down. This contagion which came to be known as omunepo, the Swahili word for “laughing disease,” eventually spread until it affected approximately one thousand people in Tanzania and neighboring Uganda.

When you and I laugh, it is not merely a means of self-expression, but it also can trigger positive feelings in others. Ted Loder, pastor and author, once remarked, “Laughter is like a prayer, like a bridge over which creatures tiptoe to meet each other.”

Can you ever imagine a world without laughter? This audible expression is not only a powerful demonstration of joy, but also at times has a way of producing it as well. Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States, once stated that “With the fearful strain that is on me night and day, if I did not laugh I should die.” How many of us have had such a feeling before? Lincoln understood in a very real sense that within laughter there is the power to bring life as well as healing to our souls.

God has instilled within us the ability to laugh as a way to express, as well as to produce, joy. But have you considered what happens when God laughs? Look at one example of God’s laughter in Psalm 37:12, 13: “The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs at him, for He sees that his day is coming.” When God looks at humans’ futile plans against Him and His people, He laughs at such folly. In other words, God “laughs” when the wicked believe that their plans are able to somehow override the plans of the almighty Ruler of the universe. And God still laughs today when He sees people with power and position live under the delusion that they are somehow ultimately in charge of the affairs of this world. God laughs when we attempt to orchestrate our affairs without first acknowledging His sovereignty over our lives. It reminds me of what comedian Woody Allen once said: “If you want to make God laugh, tell him about your plans.”

Now, don’t get me wrong. God does have a sense of humor. I’m sure that some may find this hard to believe, but when you read stories, both in the Old and New Testaments, you see God’s humorous nature on display. For instance, when God appeared to Abraham and Sarah, well past childbearing age, and assured them that Sarah would give birth to a son, Sarah laughed (Genesis 18:12). I guess you could say that she had an LOL (Laughing Out Loud) moment. Sarah found God’s words to be somewhat humorous.

I’m sure that many of us have had at one time or another an Abraham-and-Sarah moment; when the only response that we could produce while attempting to comprehend the awesomeness of God is one of astonishment or amusement. If someone had told me as a youth, who had an issue of stuttering, that I would one day work in the field of radio and television as an announcer and voiceover talent, I’m sure I would have found it somewhat amusing as well. Not “ha-ha” funny, but humorous in the sense that I was under the delusion that God’s plan for me would be contingent upon my ability to contribute to its success.

Just think about your own journey with God. If God had told you the plans He had for your life, I’m certain that many of you would have found them hard to believe. But that’s because we are under the assumption that the success of God’s plan for our lives is based on our present abilities and station in life. Nothing could be farther from the truth. As in the case of many of the heroes of Scripture, such as Moses, David, and Esther, all that is needed is a willingness to be used by God.

So what is the gospel or the “good news” of laughter? As has been said countless times before, laughter can be the best medicine, but only if it is used as a way to express the joy as well as the hope that is ours as we place our confidence in God—the God who not only created us with the ability to respond with such an amazing audible expression of joy, but also to share it with all who may be in need of this amazing gift. 

Charles A. Tapp
(MDiv, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A.) is the Senior Pastor of the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church, located on the campus of Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Maryland, U.S.A.
E-mail: ctapp@sligochurch.org.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

2. All Scripture references in this article are quoted from the New King James Version of the Bible.
I am a TCK—Third Culture Kid. I was brought up in Kenya through my teenage years before moving to the United States. In 2006, I was hired to work in the art department of an Adventist university. I was awarded an individual research grant to study culture through the lens of drawing, which I did for two summers. In 2009, I received another research grant to go to rural villages on a walking tour of Yemen. During that trip, I generated many portrait sketches of people I met that opened doors of hospitality and friendship.

It may sound idealistic, but I was trying to experience the effectiveness of art to circumvent cultural barriers. I was groping for something more, and found that I was able to focus on dialogue with people by starting with a visual sketch. I had an American friend who spoke Arabic, and we developed a simple method of engagement: I would sketch people while he conversed with them and moved the conversation past stereotypes to more meaningful subjects. Our goal was to transcend cultural and religious stereotypes. That trip to Yemen overlapped the week Barak Obama was elected president, and people were so optimistic. It was post-9/11, and there was a sense that America was coming around. We were able to gain positive momentum with our experiment because of that reality.

NOAH’S ARK

In 2010, I was back in the Middle East, documenting findings by drawing for an archeological project. At the conclusion of the project, I accompanied our students on “Abraham’s Path,” a walking tour of northern Jordan that is part of an experiment in ecotourism. We walked through rural areas each day and ate with the local people. One day was set aside for community service. Options for community service were to pick up trash in the community or to paint a mural for an orphanage. I had little experience painting murals but praying that night, I felt impressed to do it.

Located in a conservative Muslim town, the orphanage was operated by Argentinean Catholics, who provided the paint. I told our crew that we had eight hours to produce something Muslim-sensitive, kid-friendly, and Catholic-approved. We agreed on Noah’s ark, and the students started sketching it out. Our painting crew included a dozen students—a mix from a public university in the U.S. and a group from an Adventist campus, plus the Argentinian nuns and the children themselves.

What happened next was a miracle. It was an odd mix of cultures, and yet they all entered a beautiful liminal space that seemed to distract them from the things that normally kept them apart. The priest said the Muslim housekeepers and Catholic nuns never talked to one another, but that day, they were talking and laughing and painting together. That simple activity enabled them to truly enjoy being together.
WALL PAINTING

I thought, Maybe there is something about public art—the act of creating together—that is a unique opportunity for bridge building beyond the visual experience of art. I started praying, determined to do it again, but this time in a totally Muslim community.

One year passed. A Mennonite college gave me some seed money toward that project. In November 2011, I met the country director for the Jordan chapter of the International Youth Foundation. The door opened to collaborate with their organization to accomplish the project.

In the summer of 2012, a team of 12 university students and my colleague from Yemen traveled to Jordan to accomplish the project. We had a 350-meter wall to fill in three weeks. We separated the females onto their own area of the wall so that local women would feel comfortable to join the work. We then filled that wall with Arabesque patterns, approved by the local community. We painted in the heat of the day, and we connected with the children. At noon, we sometimes ate in the home of a local participant. There were many challenges involved in completing that project, but we were inspired to interact with Muslim young people and make positive connections.

STAIRWAY PAINTING

One day while we were working, the microphone crackled in the local mosque for the call to prayer. One of the boys said in Arabic, “We should stop and pray.” “But these Christians aren’t going to stop and go pray,” another boy responded.

“No, these are different Christians and they know how to pray,” a third boy chipped in.

In the projects that followed, we have experimented with a number of methods to build bridges cross-culturally. In many ways, it comes down to an exchange of positive values. We always try to leave a good footprint in the community: socially, culturally, spiritually, and artistically.

Having completed smaller projects successfully, we have moved to more challenging ones: in Cyprus with disabled teenagers, in Tunisia with university art students, in Egypt with Sudanese high school students, and in Iraq with a Kurdish girls’ school. God used each project to bless the community and develop positive relationships between Adventist and Muslim young people. In the process, we have developed three core values for our projects: youth motivation, civic engagement, and cross-cultural exchange.

Currently, I serve as an artist in residence at a university in the Middle East where I try to engage students in these kind of projects as missional awareness and not just cultural exchange, especially in Muslim communities. I am driven by the desire to benefit and build up Middle Eastern young people. I see the weight that young people carry post-9/11, and the weight of a fatalistic worldview. My goal is to direct energy to benefit the community and make it more beautiful. I am motivated by the potential that I see in these young people and want them to understand they have choices and can benefit their societies. I want to see them catch a passion to take personal initiative. I want to impact Middle Eastern young people in a positive way. Beyond Walls is just one way to do this.

Dale Sherman
is Coordinator for Total Employment SDA, the tentmaker initiative for the Middle East and North Africa region. He writes under a pseudonym.
HILDEBRANDO & LEAH CAMACHO
A dialogue with a Portuguese Adventist couple who use art as a tool for evangelism

INTERVIEW BY TIAGO MENDES ALVES

Leah is a third-generation Seventh-day Adventist, born in South Africa. When she was five years old, she moved with her parents to Portugal. Now a trained nurse, she is serving as the clinic coordinator in Greece for Adventist Help, working in a refugee camp. She is also an artist and has been using her artistic talents to accomplish Jesus’ Great Commission.

Hildebrando was not a born Seventh-day Adventist, but came to know the Adventist Church through its Pathfinder organization. When he was 8—the year his father passed away—he began to take part in some of the Pathfinder activities, and in time he felt the desire to know Jesus better. Hilde lived in a social housing complex with his mother and six younger siblings. He is the only Adventist in his family, but hopes that someday they will surrender their lives to Christ and join him. Hilde studied architecture until one day he felt a call to become a full-time missionary. Right now he is the coordinator in Greece for Adventist Help. An artist by profession, Hilde believes that he had to use his talents to carry the message of Jesus forward, using every means necessary in order to reach as many people as possible.

Hilde and Leah married in 2011. Both have artistic talents. While they have their professions and are involved in the ministry of Adventist Help in Greece, they also work together, utilizing their talents as artists. To them, art can be a powerful tool for evangelism.

Leah and Hilde are deeply involved both at regional and national levels in youth ministry, taking part in different activities. Last summer, for instance, they assisted in a weeklong National Camporee that brought in close to 900 young people. More recently, the couple was involved in a project of urban intervention and social interaction, painting a mural in Lisbon, Portugal, in the largest social housing complex in all the Peninsula Iberia. They had the opportunity of creating a large painting on a 16-meter-high wall. That wall painting includes the phrase, “If you know the Truth, it will set you free!” While painting the mural, they took time to share Jesus and what He means to them. “This kind of witness,” Leah and Hilde are convinced, “helps sharing the message with many people who otherwise would never hear about Jesus.”
How did you come up with the idea of using art in evangelism?

We have always been connected to arts—exploring various materials and trying out the most diverse techniques in creativity and experimentation. In time, we began to think of how to use our talents to serve God and His church. Gradually, we began exploring some of our artistic techniques, trying to incorporate some activities, mainly in youth events. And then one day when reading Ellen G. White’s *The Great Controversy*, we came across the following passage: “[T]here arrived in Prague two strangers from England . . . . Being artists as well as preachers, they proceeded to exercise their skill. In a place open to the public they drew two pictures. One represented the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem, ‘meek, and sitting upon an ass’ (Matthew 21:5), and followed by His disciples in travel-worn garments and with naked feet. The other picture portrayed a pontifical procession—the pope arrayed in his rich robes and triple crown, mounted upon a horse magnificently adorned, preceded by trumpeters and followed by cardinals and prelates in dazzling array.

“Here was a sermon which arrested the attention of all classes. Crowds came to gaze upon the drawings. None could fail to read the moral, and many were deeply impressed by the contrast between the meekness and humility of Christ the Master and the pride and arrogance of the pope, His professed servant. There was great commotion in Prague, and the strangers after a time found it necessary, for their own safety, to depart. But the lesson they had taught was not forgotten.”

That passage changed our perspective about how to use our artistic gifts for God and how to use art as a means of spreading the Word.

Did you begin work on a specific project?

Yes, the passage we just shared from *The Great Controversy* inspired us to develop a project we named “GO!” or “Gospel Option!” And this is basically what we are doing and exploring today in the field of creative and urban evangelism.

What is “GO!” or “Gospel Option!”?

In essence, it entails using creatively our God-given talents, with the goal of sharing our message of hope with all those who do not know Him. We attempt to translate the gospel into a language that can be understood by our contemporary culture, here and now, without compromising the message. Jesus made creative use of parables, and we must follow His example, so that people may understand the message we want to share with them.

Witnessing through art allows us to show, explore, develop, and create opportunities for reaching places that otherwise we could never reach. People need to have an opportunity to know the gospel so they can adopt and make it part of their lives, living it out every day. “GO!” implies using those talents we borrowed from the Lord, for the glory and honor of the One who lent them to us in the first place!
What do you aim to achieve through “Gospel Option!”?
Our primary goal is to share the gospel through art. This kind of evangelism is creative, urban, and personal. In this evangelism we use images—video, photography, paintings, etc.—as a powerful, efficient, and effective means of sharing the gospel wherever we are. We want to use all the resources at our disposal to reach all of those who still do not know God or who have misconceptions about His redemptive plan. Soon we hope to have an online platform to reach a wider audience.

What kind of feedback have you received so far?
While there is always someone with a suspicious outlook, by and large reactions have been positive. Generally, young people have been curious and positive. They want to know how our mission through art began, what we do, how we do it, and how they can help us and be part of it. The last reaction is perhaps the most result-oriented, as it indicates a desire to get involved in the mission.

Tell us about your evangelistic initiatives.
Before we moved to our present assignments in Greece, we were evangelism coordinators for Amazing Facts Center of Evangelism—Europe (AFCOE-Europe). It was a great blessing. We were involved with all kinds of youth activities, especially Pathfinders, and we supported the church in various activities and programs such as:

- The Evangelistic Initiative to the Big Cities, in the city of Porto, Portugal, in 2014. Our involvement started before the evangelistic campaign, announcing the meetings with a 9x12 meter canvas painting by the highway. Once the meetings began and during the initiative we placed canvas paintings daily at the entrance of the church to coincide with the topic of the day. On the final day, a large painting illustrating the second coming of Jesus.
- The “Youth in Mission” Congress sponsored by the South Germany Conference in 2015 featured a giant puzzle with an image painted by the young people attending the event, which later was used for advertising.

What about your current activities?
As part of our work with AFCOE-Europe, we had to use our creativity to develop programs for community interaction engaging young people, motivating them to think out of the box, to leave their comfort zone and to use their various talents. But now in our current work with refugees we have also to be creative and sensitive in the way we approach them. We have also taken part in some initiatives involving public artistic creation. We have prepared some exhibitions, and we have been working as freelance visual artists. We also created a project called “Our [p]ART,” which was developed to interact with the communities we are trying to reach. We offer workshops, teach the basics in arts, and then create a mural painting with the young
people from these communities. One of the organizations we have worked with is ADRA Portugal, with whom we have prepared 45 paintings, using some images from projects developed and supported by ADRA. The profit from these paintings go to assist ADRA Portugal.

We are also involved in a project called “What’s the Difference?” which involves young artists who use various techniques to portray the difference between a life with God and a life without Him. We have explored different topics, and published different illustrations in a blog and in a Facebook page.

Great and varied opportunities beckon us, and we are challenged again and again to use the talents we have and we encourage the youth to do the same with a mission perspective. As Ellen White tells us, “The Lord has a place for everyone in His great plan. Talents that are not needed are not bestowed. To every man God gives talents, which are to be improved according to His several ability. Supposing the talent is small, God has a place for it; and that one talent, if used, will do the very work God designed that it should do.”

From your experience, how would you define evangelism?

We make use of the varied approaches in the arts to take the gospel to every person, every race, every nation, each of the social classes, as much as we are able to. Evangelism involves everything and everyone. Evangelism means knowing how to identify ourselves with every person within our own existential state. It takes into account the example of Jesus who lived among us, walked our cities, went down our roads, experienced our joys, felt our pain, and understood our world. It means building bridges as well as new links between us and all those we have not yet met, those who still do not know the Truth as found in Jesus!

Evangelism is not an option. It is not a hobby, something we do when there is nothing else to do. It is not a mean to ease our conscience. It is a way of being, a way of living in this world—in short, a lifestyle! It is our witness, our mission!
As aliens in a strange land, we as Christians are called upon to live honorable and morally upright lives so that people will glorify God, and so that we will fulfill our mission to those around us.
When I was 12, my parents decided to emigrate. We left the safe environment of the country of my birth and moved halfway around the world. It was a big change for me on many levels. After swimming a final time in the sea, we boarded a plane in hot summer weather and landed in a frozen world. We had exchanged summer for winter. The next day I went to a new school, feeling liberated at not having to wear a school uniform, but alienated because I did not speak or understand a word of the foreign language my classmates and teachers used.

The biggest change, however, was a religious one. Growing up in South Africa, I went to an Adventist school on weekdays and an Adventist church on Sabbaths. Almost everyone I knew was Adventist. In the Netherlands, suddenly I was the only Adventist around. In fact, in our entire city we were the only Adventist family. Suddenly religious life was very different. My Adventist identity, something that had always given me a feeling of safety, had become something that made me alien.

**EARLY CHRISTIANS**

Recently I taught a postgraduate seminar on the short letters at the end of the New Testament: the so-called Catholic Epistles. These little books are often overlooked in the church, as we tend to focus on the “important” letters like those of Paul. It is hard to find books written about these shorter letters, which is strange when we consider that one of the foundations of the Reformation was *Tota Scriptura* (the whole of Scripture).

This lack of emphasis is unfortunate, because these letters give us insights into living the Christian life that are different from those in other New Testament Epistles. They are focused on how to live a moral life, based on our theological convictions. So, how does the reality of our life relate to Christ’s already-achieved triumph over dark spiritual powers? The first letter of Peter tries to answer that. How does our life, with all its woes, relate to Jesus’ soon return, which always seems to take longer than the believers would like? James discusses how Jesus’s “new commandment” to love one another should inform our daily lives. Read First John, where love is linked to the confession of Christ. Does God’s grace mean we can do whatever we like, as we will be forgiven anyway? Not at all, explains Jude.

These are small books, often forgotten, which focus on the reality of living a Christian life. While all these aspects are useful for us, one of them struck a particular chord with me in the light of my own experiences: First Peter’s discussion of aliens and strangers. For someone who was an alien and a stranger for most of my teens, this letter really resonates.

**ALIENS AND STRANGERS**

First Peter addresses God’s chosen: “the exiles” (1 Peter 1:1, NRSV). This is a word (and theme) that occurs regularly throughout the book. Traditionally, the concept of “exiles” has been understood metaphorically. We are all exiles here on Earth. More recently, theologians have noticed that Peter was probably first and foremost being literal. The first Christians were exiles. Their newfound religion had made them aliens in their own land, strangers among friends. In fact, reading “exiles” metaphorically trivializes the religious experience of the first Christians as socially and politically oppressed.

For us modern-day believers, many similarities can be drawn to the social and political contexts of the early Christians. While there is much variation between countries worldwide, Christians—and certainly Adventists—are generally a minority. Even the historically Christian countries are becoming more and more secular. As Christians, we often are, as I was as an Adventist in my teens, strangers.

**ADVICE FOR STRANGERS**

Peter’s advice to exiles is very interesting. While most of Peter’s letters revolve around this theme, in the second chapter of his second Epistle, Peter gets to the meat of his message. He writes: “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge” (1 Peter 2:11, 12).

Peter’s message is immediate and to the point. We Christians, as aliens and exiles, should live honorable lives. The reason is simple: not because God will judge us, not because of the Ten Commandments, not because Jesus told us to love our neighbors. All of these are important, but for Peter as he introduces living the Christian life, something else is much more important. We should live honorable lives so that people will glorify God. We should live a good life because we have a mission to those around us.

Later, Peter takes up this theme again. This is a very difficult piece of Scripture. Peter writes: “Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh. For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval” (1 Peter 2:18–20). Taking this passage at face value, a modern reader might well be horrified. Slavery is a terrible evil, and calling slaves to suffer honorably is a terrible thing to read in the Bible. Indeed, this passage is often taken by atheists to show why Christianity cannot be good.
Tom de Bruin (PhD, Leiden University, Netherlands) is a Lecturer in New Testament at Newbold College of Higher Education, Binfield, Berkshire, England.

However, reading this passage in its context, and taking more time to mull over what is being said, gives a different story. Peter is worried about the downtrodden in society: exiles, strangers, slaves, women. He speaks to those who are suffering unjustly. Maybe they suffer in terrible ways, like the slaves do, and maybe they suffer somewhat less horrifically. Peter cannot change their lot; he cannot stop their suffering. But he can keep them focused on what is important. And as such, these examples function as models for all of us—even though, in general, we are better off. If slaves can live honorably despite their great suffering, surely we can live honorably with our lesser difficulties.

Remaining true, living honorably, being an example is the best way for us to be witness to those around.

THAT IS THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

Peter was writing were probably born slaves and would die slaves. They could not do much about that, but they could live honorably. They could show that Christians are different. They could be a witness.

Every person, through his or her life, can be a witness. Not necessarily in what he or she says, but in what he or she does. Slaves can suffer in deference, so that others may see their actions and may glorify God (1 Peter 2:19). Wives can accept the authority of their husbands so that others may see their actions and may glorify God (1 Peter 3:1). Everyone can live honorably, so that others may see their actions and may glorify God (1 Peter 2:12). We aliens can live the Christian life as a witness to all around.

SUFFERING ALIENS CHANGE THE WORLD

I introduced First Peter as a book that discusses how the reality of our life relates to Christ’s triumph over evil. This is a reality where others and we suffer unjustly: as aliens, as strangers, as exiles, as slaves, as the downtrodden. Peter shows us the power of a good life despite suffering: that it is precisely the aliens who can witness through honorable lives. But we needn’t take Peter’s word for it, because Peter is not done with his argument. He continues with the ultimate example, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:21–23).

Living honorably, despite suffering, is not just our lot. Jesus lived and died that same lot. Our Messiah’s suffering has secured our place with God in the new creation, and in a similar way, our suffering can help others in this creation and the next. Remaining true, living honorably, being an example is the best way for us to be witness to those around. That is the Christian life.

*All Scripture texts in this article are quoted from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.
The problem of the existence of evil and what it says about God are the themes of this book. Dr. Sigve Tonstad, a professor in the School of Religion at Loma Linda University (California, U.S.A.), engages various theological and interpretative traditions that have attempted to address the presence of evil in a world created by a good God. Stories of the inhumane treatment of Jews in the Holocaust frame the beginning and end of the book. Of all human atrocities, the Holocaust defies any sense and challenges the very existence of God. In fact, a recurrent question is whether God was responsible for this and all other evil. The title of the book implies that many answers to the presence of evil provided so far are part of traditions of irrational non-sense that have smeared the character of God. The answers they provide lack an adequate rational explanation or don’t really answer the problem, but transpose it to another plane.

The first five chapters of the book deal with what has been said about the problem of evil. These chapters set the stage for the conversation about evil and the irrational answers provided by theologians and philosophers. This section requires a fairly good knowledge of literature, ancient and modern, on the subject of evil, and friends of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s The Brothers Karamazov will be delighted by Tonstad’s detailed analyses of the section on the Grand Inquisitor. Ancient authors such as Celsus, Origen, and Augustine find themselves contrasted with more modern authors, such as Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. Tonstad analyzes and comments on the difficulties with the common answers provided so far.

In the second section of the book (Chapters 6 to 17), Tonstad offers some reflections and glimpses of sense from some biblical stories for what he believes they bring to the overall question of evil. Most of the stories are chosen because they relate to key events or exceptional individuals in the Bible. (More on this section below.)

In the third section (Chapters 18 to 21), Tonstad completes his reflection by turning his attention to some non-biblical voices, and concludes with a vision of the Book of Revelation, which encapsulates the major themes outlined in Tonstad’s book.

What stands out most for me in this book is the second section, in which the author delves into some biblical narratives and seeks to find in them some notions of sense regarding the presence of evil and God’s answer to evil. These 12 chapters discuss well-known, less-known, and even troublesome narratives. The section begins with the fall of humankind in Genesis 3 (Chapter 6), then proceeds to the murder of Abel by his brother Cain in Genesis 4 (Chapter 7), the story of Abraham bargaining with God for the preservation of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18 (Chapter 8), Abraham and the binding of Isaac (the Akedah) in Genesis 22 (Chapter 9), the revelation of God to Moses (Chapter 10), the rape and murder of the Levite’s concubine in Judges 17 and 18 (Chapter 11), the prophet Elijah’s experience of God’s presence in 1 Kings 17 to 19 (Chapter 12), king Jeroboam and the two prophets in 1 Kings 13 (Chapter 13), the Book of Job (Chapter 14), the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness in Matthew 4 and Mark 1 (Chapter 15), the revelation of Jesus in the Gospel of John (Chapter 16), and Paul’s letters (Chapter 17).

As Greg Boyd, author of the well-known book God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict (InterVarsity Press, 1997), point out elsewhere, four major themes stand out in the answer Tonstad seeks to provide from this biblical material in the second section. First, the biblical narrative of stories about evil didn’t assume that God’s character and will were inscrutable; in fact, they invited dialogue with God about His actions or will. The story of Job stands out in this paradigm, as well as Abraham’s conversation with the three visitors regarding the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. A second important biblical theme is the importance given to human freedom and how God respects this freedom. Without genuine human freedom there cannot be genuine love. Thus, this important concept of the nature and character of God emphasizes that God
rules the universe by means of loving influence, not coercion. These two themes challenge the very core of the Augustinian view of evil as embraced by many Christian traditions, in which an all-powerful and sovereign God controls all events of human and universal history. This paradigm ultimately makes God responsible for evil. According to Tonstad, of all the paradigms offered to answer the problem of evil, this one generates the most nonsense and lack of cohesion. Into these two themes, Tonstad also weaves the concept of the cosmic conflict between good and evil, between God on one side and Satan on the other. This narrative theme is crucial in the New Testament and provides a context for our understanding of evil in which God respects freedom and seeks to win humanity out of love, not coercion. One last important concept to Tonstad’s answer is the deceptiveness of Satan and his arguments, and how humans have been deceived about the character of God, which Jesus came to reveal.

Readers of Ellen White’s Great Controversy narrative will be familiar with these biblical themes in Adventist theology, which are demonstrated and supported in this book through the study of numerous theologians, philosophers, and biblical narratives.

Tonstad’s profound knowledge of a vast array of authors is admirable and can be intimidating at times. Yet, the book provides new insights into a fundamental and indispensable paradigm for understanding the presence of evil in a world created by a good God. Any student of theodicy should read this book, and any future work on theodicy will have to take this book seriously. With others who have reviewed and discussed this book in the past few months, I have to agree that it is one of the most significant Adventist contributions to biblical theology to have been written and published by a major press.

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**Denis Fortin**
(PhD, Université Laval, Quebec)
Professor of Theology, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A.

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**Facing Suffering: Courage and Hope in a Challenging World**

Roberto Badenas, tr. Darlene Stillman (Madrid, Spain: Safeliz, 2013), 248 pages, paperback. Available also in French, Portuguese (Portugal) and Spanish.

**Reviewed by John M. Fowler**

“Few human experiences are as universal as pain.” So begins Robert Badenas in his book *Facing Suffering: Courage and Hope in a Challenging World*. Pain and suffering have been a part of the human story ever since the Fall. The king on the throne and the pauper at the street corner, the millionaire who has everything at his command and the one who knows not where her next meal will come from, the soaring scientist and the ordinary laborer, the physician who dispenses healing and the patient who suffers the mystery of pain—all are victims of suffering. Suffering and pain know no frontier, age, culture, reason, or religion. As Badenas quotes Sartre, the French existential philosopher, “‘Human reality by nature is doomed to suffering’” (p. 10).

Doomed all right. But why? asks Badenas. Why is suffering a perpetual part of human life? How does one understand suffering—its pain and pangs? How does one face it when suffering hits one individually or collectively at a most unexpected time? How can one find strength to bear pain, and find the path to an upward look of hope and healing?

Robert Badenas, a lifelong pastor, an accomplished theologian and scholar, and a well-known educational leader in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Europe, takes up
these and other questions related to the complex issue of suffering, and gives us a penetrating analysis of the mystery of suffering and the meaning of facing it with hope.

The author offers neither a theology nor a philosophy of suffering, although the book contains plenty of both. He has chosen to approach the topic in a practical and helpful manner, dividing the book into three major sections. First, an outline of the “awareness of the complexity of the issue.” Second, a practical reflection regarding the ultimate why of suffering. Third, a presentation of various steps to face or help face suffering with compassion, effectiveness, and consideration.

Badenas writes not as a theoretical expert on suffering, but as a witness, as a “suffering subject.” That personal touch fills the book with empathy, understanding, and practical help. As allies in his contemplation on suffering, he calls upon great figures of history—from Epicurus to Sartre to biblical witnesses—to share how they handled suffering and what counsel they have left for the never-ceasing wrestling match with pain. He calls upon Solomon to share the wisdom in suffering, deals with the patience of Job in facing the overwhelming pile-up of adversity, and finds in Jesus much of his answer to pain. Badenas’s approach to Job is classic and needs more than a mention: Here is a lesson book for all time, in which Job blames no one for his misery but pleads with God to give him patience to bear the adversity. At the same time, Job asks God for the strength to affirm that his Redeemer ever lives, and to believe that in the last day, the things that cannot be known now will be known. Patience and hope, faith and endurance, point a way—however narrow—to bear one’s pain. Is that not a biblical dimension onto one needs to cling?

It is this biblical scope that provides Badenas the key to unravel the “enigma of pain,” and the unraveling is done by the author’s skillful arguments rooted in Adventism’s primary understanding of life and its battles, both personal and cosmic. With a smooth prose and constant reference to biblical roots, Badenas traces the origin of suffering to the mind of the evil one—to the villain of history who sowed the seeds of conflict and tears in a way that tore the very heart of God. The author’s search for the cause of suffering lands him in the great controversy between good and evil—a thesis that is central to the Adventist understanding of life in its varied contours. What tore the heart of God, Badenas argues, is ultimately resolved by His Son, who let His blood bring about the great reconciliation: “By His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5, NKJV).*

Hence, at the center of the book’s argument, the author places the light beaming from the Light of the World—Jesus. A major section of the book deals with how Jesus answered the question of suffering in His parables and miracles. Jesus did not suggest that suffering is punishment from God to correct us, improve us, or teach us a lesson. Nor did He advocate that God is a silent observer or an unsympathetic outsider. Among the many instances Badenas selects from the Gospels to focus on how Jesus related to suffering, the case of the blind man in John 9 makes a powerful point. When the disciples asked the question, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him” (John 9:2, 3). Out of Jesus’ answer, Badenas points out the most intimate and ultimate understanding of how a Christian should relate to suffering—that the works of God may be revealed: “The works of God are the ones that Jesus does—healing, teaching, and encouraging. In short, doing well. Jesus is less interested in theoretical clarification than in practical help. For Him, when faced with misfortune, more important than who’s to blame (What caused the flood? How did she get AIDS?, etc.) is to start helping. More useful than asking ourselves why it happened would be to ask ourselves, ‘What do we do now?’ Helping the one who is suffering is more important—at the moment—than understanding the ultimate origin of the problem” (p. 96). (This one argument is worth more than the price of the book.)

In addition, those who accept the biblical design of the origin and destiny of human beings should accept that pain is an intrusion that is on its way toward ultimate elimination. That suffering exists is undeniable; that hope bids us look up is our healing touch. Hence Badenas’s penetrating thought: “The most useful question about pain is not why we suffer or why God allows us to suffer or why those who don’t deserve it suffer...[but] how do we respond to pain in an unjust world” (p. 93).

The book is not just an essay on the why of suffering; it is also a call to prepare for future events that may sow their own uncertainties: the mental and physical insecurities of the aging process; loneliness; financial uncertainties; facing death. Badenas’s closing chapters provide details of how each person and his or her dear ones should prepare for the pain, suffering, and separations that life’s approaching end brings about. “Be prepared” is a message well choreographed as the book comes to a close.

The book is a good read—intellectually challenging, spiritually comforting, and communally faith-affirming. Both the pulpit and the parish, the teacher and the taught spiritually comforting, and communally faith-affirming. Both the pulpit and the parish, the teacher and the taught will immensely benefit by it.*

*Scripture quotations in this book review are quoted from the New King James Version of the Bible.

Facing Suffering is also available in Spanish, French, and Spanish and may be found at http://www.publicacionesadventistas.com.

John M. Fowler

(MA, EdD, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A. MS, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, U.S.A.) is a retired Associate Director of Education at the General Conference and currently serves as Editor of Dialogue.
Give me a minute to tell you about a global church project that needs your participation. The Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists (ESDA) is a five-year project that will produce the church’s first online reference work, comprised of about 10,000 brand-new articles on all aspects of Adventist history: people, schools, hospitals, media, development of doctrines, and engagement with world events, politics, and culture. These articles will be written by hundreds of Adventists across all demographics, including students like you—and hopefully you! The church’s largest scholarly project to date, the articles on the free ESDA Website will be read by church members and the public alike, the go-to source for information about Adventists. Each article will feature downloadable original documents, images, media, and memory statements about its subject.

The ESDA is under the direction of the General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, the official archives of the General Conference and North American Division, as well as the producer of the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook and Annual Statistical Report. There are 14 ESDA editorial offices around the world, managed by assistant editors who are experts in Adventist history in their region, as well as an additional four editors managing thematic articles. An editorial board, comprised of world church leaders, provides counsel and guidance to the project; while the editorial committee, consisting of editors, professionals, and students, deals with the actual production of the Encyclopedia. The management structure of the ESDA project was designed to include representatives from every constituency and demographic of the church.

So how can you participate in this project? Our greatest need is for writers. As stated above, there will be articles on every aspect of Adventist history, so consider:

1. On what topic(s) could you write? It may be a forgotten person about whom you think people should have more information. It may be the Adventist work in the country, state, or city in which you were born. You may want to write an article on a school or ministry, or about Adventists’ engagement with an issue about which you feel passionate, such as social activism, technology, or the environment. Each ESDA article will have an assigned word length, be based on primary sources, include endnotes and a bibliography, and undergo a double-blind peer-review process. Here is an opportunity to write about our church in an honest, open, and thorough way.

2. Thousands of articles need to be written for the ESDA, and although there is no pay for writing them, there are many other incentives:

   1. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to participate in a global church project in which thousands of others are joining;
   2. The articles will be signed, so you will be listed as the authority on the subject;
   3. This will count as a scholarly publication, and thus will look good on your CV;
   4. You will add to the body of knowledge about our church that is accessible on the Web; and
   5. You will fulfill the inspired admonition to remember, record, and rehearse God’s leading. (see Deuteronomy 4:9, Joshua 4:1-7)

Benjamin Baker
(PhD, Howard University, Washington, D.C., U.S.A.) is Managing Editor of the Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.
E-mail: bakerb@gc.adventist.org.

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