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**THE METANARRATIVE  
OF A BIBLICAL CURRICULUM**

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## **The Metanarrative of a Biblical Curriculum**

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### **Introduction – Battle for the Mind**

In the world of the young, Blizzard<sup>1</sup> is not a snow storm but is a complex immersive computer game, My Space<sup>2</sup> is no longer my own room but is a multifaceted computer site to entice the young to share their most intimate secrets and a place where life is lived in virtual reality. Today the magic of the screens is a more powerful and seductive force than the stars in the universe therefore it is imperative that we reconsider how we deliver schooling, kindergarten through graduate school in order to connect with the minds of the young. The young are reminding us, by their fascination with learning about worlds far removed from the realms of what we consider reality, that the curriculum is not about schooling but about life. They teach us that education is not only about academic endeavors but about experiencing. Increasingly they are replacing reality with virtual reality.

Let me share an ongoing experience. I am acquainted with a fairly significant number of young adults who spend hours everyday in one or more virtual environments, not including regular word processing involving the sort of work most of us do, nor on television. Rather I am speaking of immersive games such as World of Warcraft<sup>3</sup> produced and marketed by a company named Blizzard, first person shooter games, and similar immersive or participatory games. I mention World of Warcraft because according to my computer friends it is the top of the line immersive game with the best graphics ever developed for online computer gaming. The mostly young men who pay about \$15 monthly in fees to play, are members of guilds within the game and spend hours in a virtual culture and virtual world interacting through the internet with other persons whom they never meet. In this environment they build virtual realities over which they have control, and in which they fight wars, plan governments, religions, and businesses. They form alliances and guilds in which they operate in a world where one has jobs, belief systems, and virtual commercial activities that can consume countless hours. One small guild that I know of has over 120 young men and women. Their leader who formed this group sets rules and the members work through a series of complex steps to advance further and deeper into the game.

The significance of living a virtual life in parallel to what we might consider reality is that these lives are more real and more satisfying than the lives they perceive we live or their

own real lives. It is difficult if not impossible to compete with World of Warcraft graphics and to entice the young to be interested in formal education or religion. Added to the seductive nature of World of Warcraft and similar games is the complexity as well as the sense of power one gains, and the sense of community and belonging the young get through playing immersive games. The unintended consequences of participation are how the game consumes life outside school and work and how it reduces energy for study or work when a person spends much of the night in the game.

A recent entry into the field of video gaming is the *Left Behind* spin off game called LEFT BEHIND: Eternal Forces. This game is designed for Christian young people and has “physical & spiritual warfare : using the power of prayer to strengthen your troops in combat and wield modern military weaponry throughout the game world”<sup>4</sup>. It includes battles as well as angels and demons and projects two levels of players for the games, one for ages 6 and up and others for ages 13 and up. The Christian slant inserts a different language into the game but has many elements other war games have.

Life as we know it is not life as the young are living it, and the disconnect between their reality and ours is profound. Being close to a screen inhabited with virtual people and virtual creatures in a simulated world is alluring and addictive. It is difficult to compete with the power of images sharper and more real than reality. Unfortunately a great deal of time has been spent in recent Adventist history, shattering the foundations for truth and teaching doubts and questions about the Bible, God, Ellen White, origins, and truth. Up against a virtual world, our noetic discussions have no knowledge or epistemological base shared with the lives of the young when lived in a virtual world. Our discussions of truth have no meaning in their postmodern world in which truth can be whatever one wants or designs it to be.

The challenge for people at all levels of education is to examine the curriculum and to be intentional in their methods to make God more real and truth more important in the minds of students and more compelling than the graphics of the games. The intensity of the games, and computer friends, creates the problem for adults of making real living breathing friends more important than the friends in the games or in My Space. Added to the seductive nature of computer and online games is the view of various parents that if they play the games with their children they can have discussions about the fact that what they are playing is not real. These parents are ignoring the actuality that playing a first person shooter game or participating in a

virtual rape still has an impact on the developing brain of their child. It is tantamount to saying if a child drinks at home in front of the parents there is no impact on the child, ignoring the effects of the alcohol itself.

The purpose of beginning with a discussion of virtual reality is not to imply that we can solve these problems at this moment but to remind us that our task in education is greater than the participation in mere intellectual discussion of ideas. It is not often that I agree with Hillary Clinton but one idea which resonates with me is that it takes a village to raise a child<sup>5</sup>. I would submit that it takes an entire church to raise a child. We as intellectual workers have a responsibility to help those educators on the front lines of education make connections between God and the young.

The young speak a new language, as you have no doubt observed if ever you sat in a room with those who keep our computers working. These young people have a vocabulary of words they use every day that did not exist a few years ago. Connecting with them involves a lot of listening and learning, since we are from a different world than the one in which they live. We have a responsibility to build connections with the young. “Yet Christians are not called to be *only* like immigrants, simply preserving a few customs and phrases from the old country. Instead, we are to be like missionaries, actively translating the language of faith into the language of the culture around us.”<sup>6</sup> Particularly should we understand the language and virtual lives of students in order to connect to the language of the young in Adventist schools and churches.

The young are still young. They are passionate, devoted and engrossed in what they're interested in. It seems to me that where we may have failed our young people is in not providing them with something to be ardent and fascinated with. They lack idealism about their faith that surrounded people in earlier generations of Adventism. Not a fanatical idealism that leads to excess, but idealism based on rational as well as emotional and subjective commitment to the Adventist worldview. They have been robbed of their feeling that there is a truth for which they can sense an idealistic attachment. In our efforts to avoid looking emotional, we have taken from the young that at which they are best. That is to become engaged and feel strongly about anything important. Our culture has replaced thought with entertainment that distracts the minds of the young from what is important to what is transient and exciting.

In the battle for the minds and hearts of the young I am reminded of a quotation from

Walter Brueggemann's *The Prophetic Imagination*, "The prophet is engaged in a battle for language, in an effort to create a different epistemology out of which another community might be built" (as cited in Purpel and McLaurin).<sup>7</sup> We are teaching and living with a generation whose epistemological base is intimately connected with virtual reality rather than the real. They are building another community in which they experience the life of the mind.

Adding to the problem of reaching the young through the maze of virtual reality is that the curriculum we teach is a confusing curriculum. We focus on the facts from our disciplines and assume the Bible has nothing to say about mathematics, sociology, or biology and too often fail to help students make larger connections. Too often we assume history is just history and has no meaning deeper than the obvious. Recently someone said, the Bible is not a science book, as if the creator said nothing about that aspect of His power. One could also say the Bible is not a psychology book or a curriculum book. But closer examination may reveal that if God is the authority, if the Bible is His message to us, then the most important integration of history and meaning, psychology and living, and curricular imperatives may be in the Bible.

Before proceeding with a discussion of Biblical curriculum, I want to remind us that a discussion of curriculum is fruitless unless the goal is to reach the young. In order to do that we need to have a common understanding of what curriculum is. Let us look at two definitions of curriculum and then scrutinize a shared meaning of curriculum through a biblical lens.

The word curriculum "has its origins in the running/chariot tracks of Greece. It was, literally, a course. In Latin curriculum was a racing chariot; *currere* was to run."<sup>8</sup> The two most common general definitions of curriculum demonstrate how far apart the views of those who study curriculum are today. The first definition of curriculum is that it is the infusion of all learning into life. This definition implies that education does not end at the school door or with a diploma. Therefore all schooling, all of life and all learning are interrelated. All one learns is part of the curriculum of life. The more common definition of curriculum is a planned program or course of study. This definition is what we talk about when we sit on committees and what we discuss when deciding what we want students to know, what courses we will require them to take, and what the courses will consist of. Generally this includes course syllabi, scope and sequence charts, curriculum guides and evaluations.

The differences between these two definitions are profound. Each is built on a view of life, religion, and philosophy. The first is holistic and all encompassing, the second is limited to

what we can plan, control and assess. A biblical description or definition of curriculum is difficult to put together using the second definition largely because the curricula as we see them today are grounded in recent developments in education. This does not mean that there is no Biblical curriculum, rather that the Biblical curriculum is not merely about the disciplines including history, language, science and mathematics as were entrusted to us in American education by the Committee of Ten at the end of the nineteenth and beginning twentieth centuries. The Biblical curriculum as I have come to understand it is more specific and at the same time more general than the eight or so disciplines we teach today.

The definition of curriculum I will use coincides most closely with the view that the curriculum is more about life than about schooling. It recognizes that education is an all encompassing activity every day of life. In this context a definition of Biblical curriculum is a curriculum about God and how he wants humans to live. At its core biblical curriculum is about knowing and doing, knowing God and doing the law. The reason I have connected these two concepts is that when I studied all the texts for education and teaching in the Bible, nearly all of them were about teaching the law.

### **How the research was done**

Four translations of the Bible were selected. The New International Version: for its clarity and ease of reading and understanding. The New American Standard because of its “attempt to adhere as closely as possible to the original languages”<sup>9</sup>. The New Living Translation (NLT) for its simplicity and because it is the version recently adopted by the North American Division for use in Adventist schools for study and memorizing. It is a thought for thought translation rather than a word for word translation and lacked some of the more rigorous meanings of the other three versions in some instances. However its clarity provides a narrative that is easy but not simplistic to follow. The King James Version (KJV) because it is a standard reference and is still widely used throughout the English speaking world.

Using the BibleGateway.com program, it was simple to select all verses containing a phrase or word in a matter of seconds, then in a few minutes to highlight passages containing specific words. The verses were placed in a table side by side across translations for comparison. Then the work began of reading specific verses in their context in order to apply them to the precise topics of the paper and to ensure that a stand alone verse was not misused.

As I read through the texts three overwhelming thoughts occurred to me. One, God is not playing games; this life is a serious endeavor. Two, the law is mentioned nearly every time there was an injunction to teach. Three, God is the focus of biblical learning.

At first glance the Bible could be taken as a history of humans with us as the focus. But one must not let the stories of the people get in the way of the larger message. That is, that the Bible is not about us but about God. It is about what God wants us to know and how he wants us to respond. I own a NIV Rainbow Bible with every verse color coded. Though the color markings are distracting to a reader it has one feature which I appreciate. All the words of God in the Old Testament are underlined. It is amazing to see how much of the Bible is in God's words. I have wondered what one might learn by reading only the underlined portions of scripture. If as I am suggesting, that the Bible is about God and the law, then it follows that his words are probably very important.

There are a number of things we could ask of the Bible about curriculum and learning. One is the obvious, what does God want us to know and teach our children? But before we begin in a Baconian way to look for facts or scientific evidence, we need to know what the big picture is. We need to ask ourselves, what does God want us to understand? Details are important but so is the big picture.

### **History of Education**

Biblical education began in the Garden of Eden when God walked with Adam and Eve and instructed them (Genesis 3). It continues with instructions to parents who were told to teach their children and to have symbols that would help children ask questions (Deuteronomy 6). The schools of the prophets are the first formal schools mentioned in the Bible (I Samuel 19:20 implies a school). Most of the education in the Old Testament consists of injunctions to parents to teach their children. Formal instruction is referred to throughout the Bible in a few places such as: for Moses in Egypt where "Moses was taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he became mighty in both speech and action." (Acts 7:22), for Daniel in Babylon when Ashpenaz was to "Teach these young men the language and literature of the Babylonians" (Daniel 1:4), and for Paul who said "I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. At his feet I learned to follow our Jewish laws and customs very carefully." (Acts 22:3). All of these are for privileged men and do not seem to imply that education was for the common people. Rather

biblical education is about how to live and how the parents or priests were to teach these relevant ideas. When we come to the New Testament teaching was conducted for anyone who wanted to learn as is done by Jesus and the disciples. There may have been more formal schools but they are not focused on heavily.

An overview of education outside the Bible reveals a desire in various cultures to pass on knowledge. Egyptians had temple schools where priests taught religion, writing and science.<sup>10</sup> The Chinese had formal schools beginning about 2000 B.C. and in India priests taught religion writing, philosophy and science. The common thread of these schools is that they were primarily for the prosperous.

Two hindrances to formal education for the masses were that paper was not invented until 105 A.D. in China, and printing presses were only invented in 1450. Because of the difficulty of disseminating information by hard copy, teaching was done by word of mouth so one's formal education depended largely on the knowledge and skill of the teacher or tutor.

Beginning with the Greeks, Sappho, Protagoras, Aristotle, and Socrates, and continuing with the Romans, and the Reformers and we have a history of people who attempted some sort of formal education. In reaction to the growing Protestant movement, Ignatius Loyola organized an educational response to the relatively unorganized schools of the reformers.<sup>11</sup> Evidences of his success are exhibited in the schools still run by Catholics.

The content of education now followed in the United States is based on the work of Charles Elliot, then president of Harvard University, and the Committee of Ten set up by the National Education Association (NEA)<sup>12</sup> to formalize a standard curriculum for secondary schools in order to prepare students for entrance into college. Before the end of the nineteenth century reading, writing, and arithmetic along with the study of the Bible were the core curriculum for elementary schools. Latin, mathematics, literature and the arts were common components of secondary curriculum in the west. Throughout history there was little education outside what the wealthy could provide so much education took place under tutors.

Curriculum in the United States is based in theory on the influences of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Karl Marx, John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Michel Foucault. Rousseau in *Emile* wrote that society was the source of evil and if children were left free and not constrained by society they would grow up in a healthy, moral and socially acceptable way.<sup>13</sup> Karl Marx through neo-Marxism in American education with its emphasis on the effect of materialism on issues of race,

class and gender and the material conditions of the lives of real people continues to influence critical educators in a quest for a just society.<sup>14</sup> John Dewey, who is both blamed and applauded for his work in education, was at the core of his pedagogical philosophy a humanist who has had less influence on American education than one might expect given how often he is quoted. His views are child centered with a goal of transforming society,<sup>15</sup> a view generally ignored in an age of testing and increasingly centralized education. The Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire continues to influence critical educators through his views, on the material positions of the poor and unequal class relations, in a series of books on pedagogies of the oppressed, of the heart, of hope, and freedom. Freire's views are neo-Marxist materialism with a foundation of a naturalistic worldview.<sup>16</sup> Michael Foucault's views of the self helped shape the postmodern thought so prevalent in American education today. His views contribute to a lack of confidence in absolutes of any kind and center on the self as the ultimate arbiter of belief and action.<sup>17</sup> The conflicting and apparently contradictory epistemologies of these major forces in academic thought can leave one wondering what the foundation of an American philosophy of education actually is. While on the surface they seem different from one another, at the core of each is a naturalistic worldview which leaves out any view of a transcendent and personal God. In this paper I chose to strip away the philosophical worldview positions of these men and do a paper with a literal interpretation of the instructions for this symposium. Therefore I grounded the paper primarily in the bible.

These directions gave me an opportunity to do what should have occurred to me years ago – examine the bible to see what it says about curriculum. In over half a life-time on curriculum committees at every level in the North American Division, teaching in local schools and at a university, I have been intimately involved in both the development and implementation of curriculum, in the theoretical planning of curriculum, in development of a philosophy of Christian education, and in the technical praxis of implementation and reflection. This paper presented me with the opportunity to build on what I believe that an academic intellectual is, at all times a student. Therefore, I relished this opportunity to begin a personal examination of a biblical curriculum without beginning with the centuries of philosophers' thoughts, politicians' mandates, and pragmatists' necessities.

## **Overview of Biblical Curriculum**

Moving on from this brief definition and short overview of education and curriculum, let us examine what the Biblical curriculum is. The overarching story, theme, or metanarrative that holds the Biblical worldview together is the Great Controversy or the conflict between God and Satan. In an age when our students are fascinated by the supernatural it seems like this might be a good framework for telling them the Biblical story. It is a story from before our origins to after the restoration of the world. It begins back before the world was created and continues to when the world is recreated. The Bible is the story of God's conversations with humans, how God longs for us to live according to His plan now, and His plan for a way out of this world if we want to escape it.

If as I suggest, biblical curriculum is about God, origins, how to live, what to do, and ultimate endings then one might first look at the kind of person God is as demonstrated through the life of Jesus with the starting point being the reading of the gospels. But in today's world where significant numbers of people have no working knowledge of either God or the Bible, we may have to begin with evidences about origins. One can hardly explain the love of God to a person who has no idea who is being talked about. First we must show who is He, and then tell what He is like.

We are living in an age when increasing numbers of our own students do not have a grasp of what the Bible teaches, what the stories are, or have read much of the Bible at all.

“Consequently, in today's world, beginning evangelism with the message of salvation is like starting a book at the middle—you don't know the characters, and you can't make sense of the plot. Instead, we must begin with Genesis, where the main character, God, establishes himself as the Creator, and the 'plot' of human history unfolds its first crucial episodes...”<sup>18</sup>

## **The Great Controversy**

Since the young are so fascinated with fantasy and the supernatural, as evidenced by the games, movies, and other media they are involved with it seems appropriate to focus on the supernatural in the bible. Unfortunately when using a study Bible, or discussing in a class the possible supernatural occurrences, one can find that the interactions between God and humans, between angels and prophets, or Satan's connections with humans and sin, are downplayed and

questioned. I have chosen to take the Bible as it reads and to embrace the notion of God interacting with us.

To do this I am using the New Living Translation because it is the one the North American Division has chosen to be used in all schools in its territory. It is the one our students and church members will be using for many years to come. If there is any memorizing to be done it will likely be from this version. It will become the version familiar to most Adventist students who attend Adventist schools.

I am assuming in general that the most obvious meaning is the one intended. All observations are my own; I do not lay responsibility for my conclusions on anyone else. As a lifelong Adventist I recognize that I have been influenced by Bible teachers, pastors, and Ellen White. For that I make no apologies. If I read into a text a meaning that may not be obvious I take responsibility along with the good intentions of my teachers for doing so. Also from these influencers I gleaned the beginnings of a view of the supernatural nature of God and his interactions with us that continues to grow and which guides my view of Biblical curriculum.

### **Pre-earth**

To begin our story as humans we must go back to the story from the Bible. Back to when in the heavenly councils (Genesis 1:26; Isaiah 6:8; Ps 82:1 NIV) God presides in the great assembly; and he gives judgment among the “gods”. Then is the pre-earth story which begins with the story of the fall of Lucifer, or the shining star, the son of the morning. This sad lament is from God “how you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning! You have been thrown down to the earth, you who destroyed the nations of the world. For you said to yourself, ‘I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God’s stars. I will preside on the mountain of the gods far away in the north. I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High.’” (Isaiah 14:12-14).

An understanding about the existence of Lucifer rests on an understanding of whether one’s view of knowledge is epistemologically objective or epistemologically subjective or a combination of both. If knowledge is only that which can be proved or disproved through testing of a null hypothesis, then this story may end here. If on the other hand one interprets the biblical narrative as a description of real events based on a belief in an intelligent creator God then the story will continue. In that case one’s views rest entirely on the reliability of the biblical

narrative. This story about supernatural events begins with Lucifer as a real being and continues the story of the king of Tyre as a description of Lucifer turned Satan. What one accepts about a broad view of the overarching theme of the Bible from before the first sin of humans to the restoration of the earth after the restoration of the earth, rests on acceptance of a real being involved in a real conflict over the domination of the earth and the souls of humans. Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally accepted an interpretation of the story of Lucifer in heaven to Satan on earth as the explanation of why sin exists. Therefore this emphasis on the supernatural necessitates a telling of the entire story from before creation to after re-creation.

The story continues with a telling of the disappointment of God over the fall of one of his most brilliant creatures. The message for the king of Tyre is a description of the fall of this magnificent creature, "Son of man, weep for the king of Tyre. Give him this message from the Sovereign LORD: You were the perfection of wisdom and beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God. Your clothing was adorned with every precious stone--red carnelian, chrysolite, white moonstone, beryl, onyx, jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald--all beautifully crafted for you and set in the finest gold. They were given to you on the day you were created. I ordained and anointed you as the mighty angelic guardian. You had access to the holy mountain of God and walked among the stones of fire.

"You were blameless in all you did from the day you were created until the day evil was found in you. Your great wealth filled you with violence, and you sinned. So I banished you from the mountain of God. I expelled you, O mighty guardian, from your place among the stones of fire. Your heart was filled with pride because of all your beauty. You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth and exposed you to the curious gaze of kings." (Ezekiel 28:12-18).

The result of the rebellion of this favored creation was that "there was war in heaven. Michael and the angels under his command fought the dragon and his angels. And the dragon lost the battle and was forced out of heaven. This great dragon--the ancient serpent called the Devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world--was thrown down to the earth with all his angels." (Rev 12:7-9).

Jesus giving encouragement to His disciples told them that he "saw Satan fall from heaven as a flash of lightening... But don't rejoice just because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered as citizens of heaven." (Luke 10:18-20).

**Creation:**

Following the war in heaven was a spectacular demonstration of the power of God: creation of the earth. The Bible, especially in Isaiah, is replete with descriptions of God as the creator. Beginning with Genesis 1:1 is the simple and often contested statement that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Affirming this statement is John 1, “In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and he was God. He was in the beginning with God. He created everything there is. Nothing exists that he didn't make. Life itself was in him, and this life gives light to everyone. The light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. (John 1:1-5).

We have read this so often that the magnitude of the words is often lost on us. Think of it. Here is a being so powerful, so formidable that He can create the world by His word. He is so mighty that by His word He makes people appear, and body systems function. Looking at the pictures sent back by the Hubble space craft and enhanced by computer technologists we get a small glimpse of what the power of God can do. Recently a picture of a new galaxy was shown and the scientists said it formed millions of years ago. Back before the creation of this world and the light is just now getting to us.

In the Faith and Learning course I teach, I have a PowerPoint presentation that includes several views of the galaxies. I am amazed every time I look at them, as are my students. I use these slides because they are affirming to me as evidence of the power of the Creator, not only to create to but to sustain. “Look up into the heavens. Who created all the stars? He brings them out one after another, calling each by its name. And he counts them to see that none are lost or have strayed away.” (Isaiah 40:16). “God, the LORD, created the heavens and stretched them out. He created the earth and everything in it. He gives breath and life to everyone in all the world...(Isaiah 42:5). “The LORD, your Redeemer and Creator, says: ‘I am the LORD, who made all things. I alone stretched out the heavens. By myself I made the earth and everything in it.’” Isaiah 44:24. Isaiah is the book about creation. Over and over God says I made the earth. I made the stars, I count the stars to see that they don't go astray.

What we as Adventists call the Great Controversy is a metanarrative, story or theme based on the bible alone. It is in fact our worldview or our grand metanarrative as Jean-François Lyotard defines an anti-postmodern position. This grand totalizing theme encompasses the entire

Biblical story. In contains within it origins, struggles, and the solution to the world's problems. The major challenge in the United States to the biblical story of creation is metaphysical naturalism, better known as Darwinian evolution. Better known because what is often missed is the relationship of Darwin's antagonism toward God with the roots of his naturalistic philosophy. There is a stronger fit for the philosophical underpinnings of faith in a six-day creation found in the philosophy of Intelligent Design<sup>19</sup> than in most science books and magazines. While I do not agree with all of the conclusions of the ID movement (many of whom are long age of the earth people), I have found that the philosophy of Phillip Johnson<sup>20</sup> and the mathematical explanations of William Dembski<sup>21</sup> help supply evidences for faith in a Biblical description of creation. It comes from an epistemological position that is generally outside the naturalistic assumptions of science as it has been practiced in academia. Rather it is based on the notion that the complexities of the world could have not been arrived at through incremental developments, rather many functions and process had to exist as a whole before they could function at all.

Intelligent Design offers us an opportunity to think about the philosophical questions that support Adventist views of creation. At the same time they bring a danger because they are not arguing for a short ages of the earth position. Instead they are arguing against Darwinian evolution without a designer. Views about creation are the foundation of our relationship with God and of the Great Controversy worldview. It is interesting to note that Paul in his talk to the Athenians began by talking about creation. (Acts 17).

### **God interacting with humans**

Sadly one of the early events on our diminutive planet was when the people met the cleaver fallen Lucifer and they believed his lies. Once again, and when for the last time God came to the garden for a talk, he told our earliest parents of the consequence of their failure to believe him and their willingness to believe the father of lies. "Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the creatures the LORD God had made. 'Really?' he asked the woman. 'Did God really say you must not eat any of the fruit in the garden?'

"'Of course we may eat it,' the woman told him. 'It's only the fruit from the tree at the center of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God says we must not eat it or even touch it, or we will die.'

“‘You won't die!’ the serpent hissed. ‘God knows that your eyes will be opened when you eat it. You will become just like God, knowing everything, both good and evil.’

“‘The woman was convinced. The fruit looked so fresh and delicious, and it would make her so wise! So she ate some of the fruit. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her. Then he ate it, too. At that moment, their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they strung fig leaves together around their hips to cover themselves.

“‘Toward evening they heard the LORD God walking about in the garden, so they hid themselves among the trees. The LORD God called to Adam, ‘Where are you?’

“‘He replied, ‘I heard you, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.’

“‘Who told you that you were naked?’ the LORD God asked. ‘Have you eaten the fruit I commanded you not to eat?’

“‘Yes,’ Adam admitted, ‘but it was the woman you gave me who brought me the fruit, and I ate it.’

“‘Then the LORD God asked the woman, ‘How could you do such a thing?’

“‘The serpent tricked me,’ she replied. ‘That's why I ate it.’ (Genesis 3:1-12).

Here we have a brief account of one of the most heartbreaking stories in the bible. It is an account of the interaction between God the creator, Satan once one of his most splendid creatures, and the first humans he created on this earth. And from here on the Great Controversy story is a history of God attempting to get us to listen to Him. The spectacular supernatural interactions between God and humans and the friendly visits with God in the garden came to an end.

The next encounter between God and humans occurred between God and the first murderer Cain when Cain was pouting because God did not accept his “fruits of the soil” as an offering. “‘Why are you so angry?’ the LORD asked him. ‘Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you respond in the right way. But if you refuse to respond correctly, then watch out! Sin is waiting to attack and destroy you, and you must subdue it.’

“‘Later Cain suggested to his brother, Abel, ‘Let's go out into the fields.’ And while they were there, Cain attacked and killed his brother.

“‘Afterward the LORD asked Cain, ‘Where is your brother? Where is Abel?’

“‘I don't know!’ Cain retorted. ‘Am I supposed to keep track of him wherever he goes?’

“But the LORD said, ‘What have you done? Listen--your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground! You are hereby banished from the ground you have defiled with your brother's blood. No longer will it yield abundant crops for you, no matter how hard you work! From now on you will be a homeless fugitive on the earth, constantly wandering from place to place.’” (Genesis 5:6-10). This breakdown in the bond between brothers shows the disruption of the relationship between humans which resulted from the influence of Satan.

Fortunately there was light in the darkness of earth when Enoch walked closely with God. “He enjoyed a close relationship with God throughout his life. Then suddenly, he disappeared because God took him.” (Gen 5:22). This brief shining story is one of the few reports of God communicating directly with humans before the flood.

A great difference of opinion over what really happen in the life of Noah continues today. This spectacular flood event is a dividing point in the history of the world. One either believes it or not. One accepts the evidence for a flood or against a flood. We all have the same evidence but the interpretations vary greatly. But for Noah there was no question about what happened. “Now the earth had become corrupt in God’s sight, and it was filled with violence. God observed all this corruption in the world, and he saw violence and depravity everywhere. So God said to Noah, ‘I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. Yes, I will wipe them all from the face of the earth!

“‘Make a boat ...’ because ‘I am about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing. Everything on earth will die! But I solemnly swear to keep you safe in the boat, with your wife and your sons and their wives.’ So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him.” (Genesis 11). God promised not to send another flood and then we have no communication from Him until the tower of Babel.

Following the flood the tower of Babel which was apparently the point at which the migrations around the world began was a major injection into human life by God. People could no longer communicate because God intervened by a supernatural rewiring of their brains so they spoke different languages.

Throughout the years a few individuals had direct communication with God, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. Moses who as a friend of God was willing to listen to Him and to follow his directions, participated in events that were extraordinary. From crossing the red sea to meeting God on Mount Sinai, Moses talked with God. To my mind the most awe filled event

was at Mount Sinai. Here Moses talked to God and brought the law down from the mountain. That beautiful law which says if you want to get along, here is how to do it, stop killing each other, take care of your parents, don't lie or cheat or steal. And oh yes, remember me first. Remember to treat my name with respect, don't worship other gods, and remember to keep the Sabbath I instituted at creation. If you do these things you will live better lives.

After Moses began the centuries of the people rebelling and being called back to God: through his pleadings, threatenings and promises. God sent people messages through prophets who the people alternately listened to or killed. Mixed in with the direct conversations with God, are stories of angels who communicated with various ones, Balaam, Joshua, Gideon, Elijah and others. The prophets heard from God and wrote His instructions. Among the stories of God speaking to humans is the story of Job. The conflicting worldviews are demonstrated here as people looked only at what they could see through naturalistic eyes, and prophets who listened to and provided evidences of the supernatural and unseen.

## **Job**

The story of Job began before Job was involved. In heaven there was a time when "one day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan the Accuser came with them. 'Where have you come from?' the LORD asked Satan.

"And Satan answered the LORD, 'I have been going back and forth across the earth, watching everything that's going on.'

"Then the LORD asked Satan, 'Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth--a man of complete integrity. He fears God and will have nothing to do with evil.'

"Satan replied to the LORD, 'Yes, Job fears God, but not without good reason! You have always protected him and his home and his property from harm. You have made him prosperous in everything he does. Look how rich he is! But take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!'

"'All right, you may test him,' the LORD said to Satan. 'Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don't harm him physically.' So, Satan left the Lord's presence." (Job 1). Thus began the trials of Job and the arguments with his friends.

Near the end of the book of Job is recorded a speech by God to Job in which God challenges Job, "Then the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind: Who is this that questions

my wisdom with such ignorant words? Brace yourself, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much.” (Job 38:1-4). At the conclusion of the book of Job God chastises Job’s friends and “after the LORD had finished speaking to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite: ‘I am angry with you and with your two friends, for you have not been right in what you said about me, as my servant Job was’” (Job 42:7). Job and his friends had differing views of God. The friends saw disasters and hardship as retribution and punishment for sin. Job did not agree with this position and God chastised Job’s friends for not speaking of him what was right as his servant Job had done.

Among the impressive interventions throughout the Old Testament some of the most spectacular are those through which God communicated with Daniel through visions of the future and by angels. Here was a man to whom Gabriel said Daniel you are dearly beloved. “The moment you began praying, a command was given. I am here to tell you what it was, for God loves you very much.” (Daniel 9:23). And later Daniel says, “Just then a hand touched me and lifted me, still trembling, to my hands and knees. And the man said to me, ‘O Daniel, greatly loved of God, listen carefully to what I have to say to you. Stand up, for I have been sent to you.’ When he said this to me, I stood up, still trembling with fear. (Daniel 10:10, 11).

## **Jesus**

The most spectacular supernatural interventions and communications in the Bible began when an angel spoke to a very young woman and said you have been chosen to be the mother of the savior of the world. It appears that she was somewhat frightened and not a little curious about what this all meant. (Luke 1:26-38). In addition “Joseph, her fiancé, being a just man, decided to break the engagement quietly, so as not to disgrace her publicly.” (Matthew 1:19) But when an angel explained the situation to him he married Mary.

The sequence of events surrounding the birth of Jesus is extraordinary. An angel spoke to Mary, Joseph, and Zechariah. At the birth of the child Jesus, a cloud of angels became a star to lead the wise men. In the fields angels formed a cloud and sang to shepherds. This story is told so often that the magnitude of the event fails to reveal just how impressive this occasion was. Angels, a cloud of angels, came to sing with joy over the news that the Savior was born.

“That night some shepherds were in the fields outside the village, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terribly frightened, but the angel reassured them. ‘Don't be afraid!’ he said. ‘I bring you good news of great joy for everyone! The Savior--yes, the Messiah, the Lord--has been born tonight in Bethlehem, the city of David! And this is how you will recognize him: You will find a baby lying in a manger, wrapped snugly in strips of cloth!’” (Luke 2:8-12).

“Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others--the armies of heaven--praising God: ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to all whom God favors.’ When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, ‘Come on, let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this wonderful thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’ (Luke 2:15). If this were not such a familiar story we would be as amazed as the shepherds. Imagine, angels came in large numbers to communicate the birth of the Savior, the creator, in the form of a tiny baby, to save the world.

### **The Baptism of Jesus**

At the baptism of Jesus, the entire Godhead was there. God the Father spoke, the Holy Spirit descended as a dove and Jesus was being baptized. Luke tells us that “One day when the crowds were being baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. As he was praying, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove. And a voice from heaven said, ‘You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you.’” (Luke 3:21).

The most remarkable demonstration of God in the Bible is from the life of Christ as he intermingled healing people and teaching and making large meals from very small amounts of food, and His becoming one of the poor, and one of us. That coming to earth by the creator of the universe is in my mind the most supernatural and magnificent demonstration of the character and attributes of God in the Bible. These amazing events are overshadowed only by His second coming.

The entire text of the four gospels would have to be quoted in order to show the supernatural interactions between God and man through the work and life of Jesus. But I have chosen to move on to the last words and final acts of Jesus on earth. It is in these we see the foreshadowing of the end of His life on earth and His impending return. As Jesus said, “‘For when the Son of Man returns, you will know it beyond all doubt. It will be as evident as the

lightning that flashes across the sky.” (Luke 17:24). “Then everyone will see the Son of Man arrive on the clouds with great power and glory. And he will send forth his angels to gather together his chosen ones from all over the world--from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven.” (Mark 13:26, 27).

After His resurrection Jesus appeared to Mary, the people on the road to Emmaus, the disciples, and many others. People were resurrected at his resurrection. And then he went to heaven and people saw it happen. No wonder they were excited. No wonder they were willing to give their lives for their trust in Him. No wonder they were thought to be drunk.

If these stories were not so familiar, I suspect we would be much more astonished than we are. If we were astonished and believing, maybe we could convey more of their magnitude to the young. Consider again this list of events: angels cast out of heaven, war in the universe, a God who can create the earth and stars, angels communicating with people, a God who sent a flood to cover the earth over the tops of the highest mountains, God becoming man, people being resurrected from the dead, blind people being healed, prophets being spoken to, a religion which spans the earth, and a God who promises to come again. Maybe humans try to remove the supernatural from the Bible story because it is so hard for us to grasp.

Now we are at the end of this spectacular story. Or as I would prefer, at the end of this short interlude on the continuum of time in the universe. All I can say is what the Bible says. Jesus, the God who came here, who died and lived again, says he will come again. (John 14:1-3). When he comes every one on earth will see him. Mountains will move around. Islands will sink, monster ice blocks will fall, oceans will turn to blood, and people will die of diseases.

Then a trumpet will sound. The dead will come to life again. The joy of people at seeing Jesus will be greater than any joy before. Mothers will be reunited with their children, Fathers will rejoice over seeing their sons. But nothing will be greater than the spectacular scene in the sky. Then people will be lifted up to meet Jesus. They will be introduced for the first time to their angels, the ones who have walked by their sides from birth to death.

Together Jesus, God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, the angels and the rescued people will fly through the universe at speeds we cannot even imagine. When they reach their destination, a place we call heaven or the throne of God, they will encounter a sight of light, goodness, beauty and love greater than anything on earth.

The Biblical description of heaven and of the city with a street of gold (Revelation 21:21), and walls of precious stones is only a description using human words, not the language of heaven. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Corinthians. 2:9). A river of life, fruit on the tree of life, a banquet, crowns, homes and beauty unimagined are descriptions of things we dimly understand.

The description of Adam the first human, meeting the second Adam as old friends who embrace each other after a very long separation completes the story of this little world and its time in sin, at least until after the millennium when sin is put to an end. The supernatural description of that event, when the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven, when the world is burned by fire brings us to the creation of the world once again. And here I must confess I add the imagination of myself and others.

I can imagine that Jesus with a smile on His face, would say to all the people, but particularly to the scientists who love to learn new things and understand the world, “stand back, let me show you how I did it the first time.” And then he makes all things new. From this time on “all the treasures of the universe will be open to the study of God’s redeemed. Unfettered by mortality, they wing their tireless flight to worlds afar...”<sup>22</sup>

At this point “the great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom, to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy declare that God is Love.”<sup>23</sup>

Moving on to the restored earth, Isaiah 11:6-9 says “In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard and the goat will be at peace. Calves and yearlings will be safe among lions, and a little child will lead them all. The cattle will graze among bears. Cubs and calves will lie down together. And lions will eat grass as the livestock do. Babies will crawl safely among poisonous snakes. Yes, a little child will put its hand in a nest of deadly snakes and pull it out unharmed. Nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain. And as the waters fill the sea, so the earth will be filled with people who know the LORD.

### **The Defeat of Satan**

There is another part to this story. It is a very sad ending to the once powerful and beautiful Son of the Morning. “Then I saw an angel come down from heaven with the key to the bottomless pit and a heavy chain in his hand. He seized the dragon--that old serpent, the Devil, Satan--and bound him in chains for a thousand years. The angel threw him into the bottomless pit, which he then shut and locked so Satan could not deceive the nations anymore until the thousand years were finished. Afterward he would be released again for a little while.

“Then I saw thrones, and the people sitting on them had been given the authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony about Jesus, for proclaiming the word of God. And I saw the souls of those who had not worshiped the beast or his statue, nor accepted his mark on their forehead or their hands. They came to life again, and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years. This is the first resurrection.

“When the thousand years end, Satan will be let out of his prison. He will go out to deceive the nations from every corner of the earth, which are called Gog and Magog. He will gather them together for battle--a mighty host, as numberless as sand along the shore. And I saw them as they went up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded God's people and the beloved city. But fire from heaven came down on the attacking armies and consumed them.

“Then the Devil, who betrayed them, was thrown into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur, joining the beast and the false prophet.” (Revelation 20:1-10). The rest of this chapter speaks of the second death. It implies that those who do not live forever will die forever (Revelation 10:6, 14).

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a beautiful bride prepared for her husband.

“I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, ‘Look, the home of God is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever.’” “Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth--so wonderful that no one will even think about the old ones anymore.” (Rev 21: 1-4. Isaiah 65:17).

Jesus reassured his disciples and us when he said, “Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's home, and I am going to prepare a place for you. If this were not so, I would tell you plainly. When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know where I am going and how to get there.” (John 14:1-4.)

## **Conclusion**

Back to the beginning of this paper and to why I think this Great Controversy and spectacular intervention is important. When the minds of the young and our minds too, become clouded with the things of this world whether immersive games or some other experience gets in the way of our perceptions of the supernatural, we are in danger. Time continues to give us opportunities for fixing the way we live our lives so that the still small voice can speak to us and to our young, to the small humans who trust us and to the young adult students in our care. They are so vulnerable and the power to deceive by the Father of Lies is great. But the power of “The Word” who creates is greater and His supernatural power is greater, and His promises are sure.

Humans sometimes apologize for the supernatural aspects of the Bible. For example some say healing a blind man couldn't have happened because of the complexity of rewiring the brain that would be required. Others say that Lazarus could not have been raised from the dead. But the young are not afraid of the supernatural. If supernatural occurrences happen in immersive games or in movies it is acceptable because they know it is not real. At least intellectually they know it is not real.

Throughout the Old Testament when people went astray and God found it necessary to shout, He in fact had to remind them of the rules, do not kill each other, do not steal each others goods or wives, and do not lie, among other things. Somehow we have communicated to our students that the law is bad, that personal responsibility is unnecessary in the face of grace. Students perceive that there are no longer any requirements for our behavior or our thoughts. So it becomes alright to kill others if it is only a game. There is no problem in planning wars if it is only in a game. Participation in pagan rites has no influence if done only in a game. Simulated rape as required in Grand Theft Auto is alright if the other player is one's father. The law of God has no relevance if it is only a game and a person has no personal responsibility.

Many of the young have been taught that committing crimes is alright if they are simulated crimes and their parents argue that if they are playing the game with their child they can explain that it is only a game. They forget that it does not matter whether a student plays the game alone or with the parent, the influence is the same, in fact may be worse because it has the endorsement of the parent. Someone said it is similar to parents who tell their children if they are going to drink with their friends they should do it at home so the parents can see what is going on. They forget that alcohol has the same effect whether or not the parent is around.

Students need to know that the battle is real and not all of the beings involved can we see. "For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12). "Christ is the one through whom God created everything in heaven and earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see--kings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. Everything has been created through him and for him." (Colossians 1:16).

In my view we are in an intense battle for the minds and hearts of the young people of the world. The stakes are high, life or death. We need a curriculum that entices Virtual Kids to know God. How do we communicate with them? The story of Elijah comes to mind.

"But the LORD said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

"Elijah replied, "I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I alone am left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

"Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the LORD told him. And as Elijah stood there, the LORD passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (I King 19: 9 – 13).

Could I be so bold as to suggest a restating of the story of Elijah?

The teacher went home and hid in her study. But the LORD said to her, "What are you doing here, teacher?"

The teacher replied, "I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the Adventist students have broken their covenant with you, torn down your Bible, and ridiculed your prophets. I alone am left, and now they are mocking me, too."

"Go in and stand before me at the computer," the LORD told her. And as the teacher stood there, the LORD passed by, and a mighty Blizzard hit the computer. It was such a terrible blast that the programs were torn loose, but the LORD was not in the Blizzard. After the Blizzard there was a computer virus, but the LORD was not in the computer virus.

And after the computer virus there was a computer crash, but the LORD was not in the computer crash. And after the computer crash there was the sound of a gentle whisper. When the teacher heard it, she wrapped her face in her cloak and went out and stood at the door of her office.

And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Teacher?"

And the teacher softly replied, helping your students one by one to listen to the gentle whisper.

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