

2006

What Do You Know? (Work Station Two)

Gary B. Swanson

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Swanson, Gary B. (2006) "What Do You Know? (Work Station Two)," *Perspective Digest*: Vol. 11 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd/vol11/iss1/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Adventist Theological Society at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Perspective Digest by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

W O R K S T A T I O N T W O



Gary B. Swanson

In addition to the barrage of e-mails that I receive asking me to act as an agent for the deposit of an astonishing amount of money to my personal bank account (in U.S. dollars, of course) or advising me that I've been approved for refinancing (even though I'm not buying a home and have submitted no application for such funding), I also receive an occasional message that has been sent with a subject line that goes something like this: "Fw: Fw: Fw: Fw: Something to Think About" or "Fw: Fw: Fw: Thought for the Day."

"Apparently for those who don't have any thoughts of their own," I mutter to myself, "and could use a few superficial ideas to fill the void."

By this time I must confess that I'm usually so fed up with all the rapid spam in my Inbox that I've become, well, ill-humored—or at times worse. Fleetinglly I consider the possibility of firing back a withering reply that expresses my, shall we say, euphemistically, lack of appreciation for this unsought-for encroachment

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

into my personal life. But I don't. I know that these little moments in sharing are well-meaning efforts to stay connected.

As Charlie Brown would have said in that world-famous comic strip: "Sigh."

So, OK, I acknowledge that this ill humor is a negative facet of my character that I have to work on. Scripture says very clearly that anger "only causes harm" (Ps. 37:8, NKJV). So, though I believe firmly in righteousness by faith, I also know that "the grace of God . . . teaches us to . . . live self-controlled, upright and godly lives" (Titus 2:11, 12, NIV). So self-control isn't solely or simply a matter of works. Presumably we *are* expected to address it to such things as getting nettled by inane and annoying e-mails.

And all of this because we're living in the so-called age of information.

Postmodernist philosopher Jean Beaudrillard has asserted, I think rightly, that "the media are so satu-

rated with information, and with so many different voices demanding to be heard, that it is no longer possible to know what you either know or want any more.”¹ ESPN, *The National Enquirer*, and *Entertainment Tonight*—all claim to be presenting news and facts. Talk shows and commentators artfully blur the line between opinion and fact. And the Internet provides so much raw data that it boggles the mind.

In an episode of *The Practice*, a serialized television show now in syndication that centered on the personal and professional lives of a group of lawyers in Boston, the practice was unevenly matched in a legal battle with a much more affluent and prestigious firm representing a transnational corporation with pockets so deep that they seemed to defy gravity. When the underdog practice subpoenaed the corporation for certain information, the opposing firm sent them an unnecessarily massive amount of office records in an attempt to discourage them from finding the specific information they needed. It contained so much data and documentation that the smaller firm simply didn’t have the resources

to plumb it.

Whether this strategy is actually employed in the real world of jurisprudence or is just the figment of a script writer’s imagination, it’s still an apt illustration of the fact that it’s possible to bury the truth in information. If Satan has his way, that’s literally what all these media will be doing to us: submerging the truth under a Himalayan range of completely useless—and often destructive—strata.

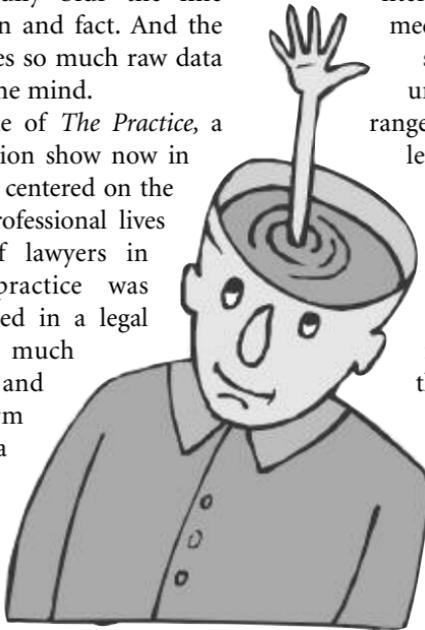
So it’s become an inescapable conclusion that much of the information gathering that we indulge in is motivated by our hunger for more data—not for more truth. In the words of a popular song on the classic radio stations:

“You don’t really need to find out what’s

going on.

“You don’t really want to know just how far it’s gone.”

Christian author Dorothy Sayers grumbled: “The public do not care whether they are being told truth or not.”² And this was 60 years ago! Back in the time machine to a place where there was no such thing as a



blog, a podcast, or an infomercial. In its earlier days, the Internet was hailed in halcyon terms as the most democratic of the media. Because all could access all this valuable information, advocates crowed, we would at last be brought together into a golden future.

But this didn't take into account the human element: The brutal truth is that most of us don't rely on the media to seek a balanced menu in data; we go there to reinforce our presuppositions. It has become an instrument of polarization. The availability of all that fantastic information hasn't changed us for the better at all. Instead, we've become more extreme versions of our former selves. "There is reason to think that the Internet is more likely to increase social fragmentation than it is likely to promote social consensus."³ And none of the rest of the media is any better. Even the information that is supposedly reported as news is based on one ideology or another.

As we expose ourselves to these sources of information in the media, we must be continually asking our-

selves: How important are these facts in the cosmic reckoning? How much time should I be devoting to accessing such facts? Am I devoting time to the receiving of these facts (this so-called news) at the expense of something more timeless, transcendent, or important?

How crucial is it, after all, to be aware that some newly released film has become the third-highest grossing film in history? Or that some someone has just purchased the Pope's limousine in auction at an obscene price? Or that one celebrity is suing another for failing to live up to a contract?

Is it not possible that we may be "poor, blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17, NKJV) when we think we're rich *in information* as well as in material goods?

REFERENCES

¹ Paraphrased in Glenn Ward, *Postmodernism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Educational, 1997), p. 182.

² *The Mind of the Maker* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1941), p. xi.

³ Gordon Graham, *The Internet: A Philosophical Inquiry* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 83.



IF YOU LIKE *PERSPECTIVE DIGEST*, YOU'LL LOVE THE

ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

A dynamic organization dedicated to advancing the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists and strengthening the heart of Adventist theology.

ATS encourages biblical, theological, and historical studies that will help bring about spiritual revival and reformation within the church. It provides a place for its current membership of nearly 2,000 church administrators, scholars, pastors, and lay people to address vital questions of the Adventist faith in the context of



prayer, fellowship, and responsible discussion.

ATS sponsors Conventions, scholarly presentations, Bible conferences, and publications all grounded on two great interests: The authority of Scripture and the responsible principles of biblical interpretation that uphold, rather than compromise, biblical authority.

Your annual membership entitles you to:

- A one-year subscription to the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, or *Perspective Digest*.
- A subscription to the ATS newsletter, carrying announcements and information about ATS conventions, publications, and other activities.
- Voting rights at the society's business sessions held at the spring and fall meetings.
- Satisfaction that you are helping to affirm and advance solid, centrist Adventist belief in a church that is rapidly becoming theologically diverse.

Yes, send me application materials to join the Adventist Theological Society.

Mail to:

ATS, P.O. Box 86,
Berrien Springs,
MI 49103

**Member dues are \$25 for an individual;
\$35 for husband/wife; and \$10 for retirees and students.**

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____