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Jul 30, 2015 06:00 am | Harvey Alférez

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Machine analyzes Ted Wilson's post-election sermon

Harvey Alférez

My family and I had the privilege of hearing Elder Ted Wilson's post-election sermon at the Alamodome in San Antonio. While I was listening to his speech, I found myself thinking about the importance of each word, each one given for the most solemn period of this earth's history. In fact, as members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I believe that it is essential for all of us to understand the underlying concepts in this sermon. As a result, we will know where we, as a united body are called to go in the next five years.

The contribution of this article is to show how a computer was able to analyze Wilson’s speech by means of Natural Language Processing (NLP). Natural language refers to a language, such as English, that we use for our daily communication. NLP covers the computer manipulation of natural language. This field of computer science has several real-world applications such as automatic summarization of a chunk of text and automatic translation of text.

This computer program analyzed the transcript of Wilson’s speech in a plain-text document by means of The Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK). NLTK can be used to analyze a variety of bodies of linguistic data (e.g. the US Presidential Inaugural Addresses). I used a MacBook Pro with a 2.9 GHz processor an 8 GB of memory and the results were obtained in less than two seconds.

DIGGING INTO THE SPEECH

We can discover the emphasis of Wilson’s message by utilizing a lexical analysis to identify the most frequently used words. Thanks to lexical analysis it is possible to convert a sequence of characters into a sequence of meaningful character strings.

Figure 1 shows the frequency distributions (i.e., the frequency of each word in a text) obtained by NLP. In this experiment, the computer generated the lexical dispersion of the 40 most frequent words in the speech. These words have a cumulative count of almost 1,200 frequencies. This is around the 19 percent of the whole speech. Frequent non-relevant words for this study were omitted (e.g. prepositions and conjunctions).
Figure 1. Word frequency for the 40 most frequent words in Elder Wilson's speech

Since the central idea of the speech was “Cross the Jordan ... Don’t Retreat”, Figure 1 shows a high number of mentions for the words “Jordan”, “retreat”, “cross”, “Moses”, and “Joshua”. The From the results we are able to organize the emphasis of the speech in five key conceptual groups: 1) a church guided by God; 2) an inclusive church; 3) a set of advices for the church; 4) working in the present for the future without forgetting the past; and 5) focus on the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. These groups are described as follows.

A CHURCH GUIDED BY GOD

Figure 1 shows that the most frequently used word was “God”. In addition, there were several mentions of the words “Jesus”, “Christ”, “Lord”, “He”, “His”, and “Him”.

Figure 2 shows the lexical dispersion plot of these words. Specifically, each stripe indicates the use of a word, and each row indicates its use in an entire text. The high volume of God-related words shows our president’s strong commitment to respect and fulfill God’s will. It is important to notice that the noun “Holy Spirit” appears 13 times in the speech. However, the word “Holy” is also used in other contexts (e.g. “Holy Word”).

AN INCLUSIVE CHURCH

The frequent use of the word “we” indicates a desire for the support of the audience to work as a unified team. This finding goes hand-by-hand with the invitation of Wilson “to press ahead in unity in proclaiming Jesus’ soon return”.

Figure 2. Lexical dispersion plot for the words related to God in Elder Wilson’s speech.
Figure 3 shows the lexical dispersion plot of the word “we” and of two other inclusive words, “us” and “our”.

Figure 3. Lexical dispersion plot for the words “we”, “us” and “our” in Elder Wilson’s speech.

ADVICE FOR GOD’S CHURCH TODAY

Wilson gave advice that began with the word “you” and “your”. You can see the lexical dispersions of these words in Figure 4.
Figure 4. Lexical dispersion plot for the words “you” and “your” in Elder Wilson’s speech.

For instance, Elder Wilson gave the following advice: “You can count on the Word of God”; “I plead with you to have that same love and respect for this Book and the Spirit of Prophecy”; “You can count on God’s Word and His Spirit of Prophecy!”; “Lay members, I challenge you to become involved in the daily mission of the church far more than you ever have before”; “Yes, you do need to be involved in the inner working of the church to keep it moving ahead”; “Tell someone else about your relationship with Christ!”; and “Adapt your methods, but reach out.”

WORKING FOR THE FUTURE TODAY WITHOUT FORGETTING THE PAST

It is interesting to see in Figure 1 that three of the most frequently used words used in the speech are “will”, “was” and “are”. Figure 5 shows the lexical dispersion plot of these words.

Figure 5. Lexical dispersion plot for the words “will”, “was” and “are” in Elder Wilson’s speech.

Emphasis of the present and future tenses indicates that Wilson wants the church to work hard in the present while walking into the future. This fact is described in the following phrase: “We will soon cross the figurative Jordan into that Promised Land”. Also, the speech reminded us to remember the past, as stated by the verb “was”. For example, our president recalled several Bible passages of the Israelites in the desert. In addition, he shared testimonies of previously converted Adventists, and he told the audience what he learned from his grandparents and his father.

FOCUS ON THE BIBLE AND THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

Figure 6 shows the lexical dispersion plot for the words “Bible” with 26 mentions, and “Word” with 21 mentions.
These two words occupied the place number 18 and the place number 21 respectively, among the most frequently used words, as shown in Figure 1. Most of the mentions for “Bible” and “Word” were given between the word offsets 2,000 and 3,000 in which Elder Wilson talked about his Bibles, his plead to read this precious book, and our acceptance of the Bible as God’s inspired Word. It is also important to mention that the Wilson stressed the need to study the “Spirit of Prophecy”. Figure 6 shows the frequency of the word “Prophecy” in the speech with 12 mentions.

![Lexical Dispersion Plot](image)

Figure 6. Lexical dispersion plot for the words “Bible”, “Word”, and “Prophecy” in Elder Wilson’s speech.

**CONCLUSION**

Interestingly, a machine was able to analyze an important milestone in our church: the post-election sermon of our re-elected president. Specifically, thanks to lexical analysis by means of NLP, the machine was able to depict the emphasis of this message. Five key conceptual groups were identified. These groups indicate the Wilson’s deep concern for God’s continued guidance for His church, as well as his advice for inclusiveness and commitment on the part of church members. And finally, there was a strong call for continuation in the work, not forgetting our past, while focusing on the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy.

If a mere computer is able to analyze our president’s message for the church, how much more should we, who share a love for God’s truth and one another, understand and follow Wilson’s counsel to keep our heart focused on God’s work for these final days. Let us work in unity to proclaim Jesus’ soon return to a world in need.
Which church is going through?

Floyd Sayler

Faithful believers often say that though the church appears as though it is going to fall, it will go through to the end. We know this is true because Christ promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against His church. But what will the church look like when it appears to fall? Will it retain the same organized structure with its educational and medical institutions, its various levels of conferences and local churches? Will faithful men and women be in charge of the worldwide organization and its facilities?

Though it is good to be optimistic regarding the future of the organized church, we also need to be realistic and consider what inspiration has told us.

We have been warned by Ellen White, in Volume 5 of the Testimonies, that “few know what our churches are to experience...I know that many think far too favorably of the present time...In the mighty sifting soon to take place we shall be better able to measure the strength of Israel” (76, 80).

It is important to understand that inspiration refers to the church in two different ways. Most of the time it refers to the church militant. In fact, the message to the Laodicean church is addressed to the church militant and it is the church militant that is in danger of being spewed out of Christ’s mouth. Finally, it is the church militant that will be “the first to feel the stroke of the wrath of God” (White 211). This is a result of the Seventh-day Adventist church proving unfaithful to the most important, the most solemn truths ever committed to mortals, making it all the more accountable for its infidelity. However, Mrs. White tells us that the church will be riddled with apostasy and great abominations just before the sealing angel goes through its midst. She also says that when the sifting has done its work and the wheat and tares are separated, the church militant will become the church triumphant. This is the victorious church that will go through to the end.

A TIME OF SIFTING RESULTED IN THE FORMATION OF THE EARLY CHURCH

In the days of Jesus and the apostles, there was a mighty sifting in the corporate Jewish church. For many centuries the Jewish church had been God’s chosen vehicle to advance His truth in the earth. It was the object of His supreme regard, though it wasn’t infallible. When Jesus was crucified, the corporate church was rejected as God’s recognized vehicle to carry on His work on the earth. We have this interesting statement by Ellen White. “When Christ cried out, ‘It is finished,’ the Holy Watcher that was an unseen guest at Belshazzar’s feast pronounced the Jewish nation to be a nation unchurched” (5 BC, 1109).

BECOMING UNCHURCHED

We must ask ourselves a question. At what point will the corporate, militant Seventh-day Adventist Church become “unchurched”? Some people believe that will never happen. But we need to remember that our beloved church is soon going to be weighed in the balances of the sanctuary. Judgment begins at the house of God and if the church militant has proven unfaithful to its high and holy calling, on her will be pronounced the sentence, “found wanting”. Therefore, if God’s people prove unfaithful to the truth, the church militant will reap the same consequences as the Jewish nation. We are warned in Volume 8 of the Testimonies, “Jerusalem is a representation of what the church will be if it refuses to walk in the light that God has given” (White 67).

After the sifting, there remained only a few faithful followers from the Jewish nation. Though they made up the nucleus of the newly formed Christian church, they did not inherit the facilities of the apostate church. The temple and synagogues and schools continued to be operated by those who had been rejected as Christ’s chosen people.
Yet the faithful few whom Christ recognized as His church on earth had something far superior than all the facilities that remained with the corporate church. They had the all-inclusive facility of the Holy Spirit that was poured out in mighty power and giving them mighty influence and efficiency to carry out Christ's commission to preach the gospel to the whole world. Indeed, it "was preached to every creature which is under heaven" (King James Version, Colossians 1:23).

GOD’S FAITHFUL WILL ENLIGHTEN THE WORLD WITH HIS TRUTH

In similar manner, the faithful remnant that is separated from the wheat and tares will receive even a more abundant outpouring of spiritual power in the latter rain. With that facility, in a very short time they will be enabled to enlighten the whole world with the glory of God. There will be no time to build and operate schools and hospitals and other institutions that were necessary for the church militant. The work will go like fire in the stubble, without these facilities.

We need to realize that as we near the judgment, both separation and unity will be seen in the ranks of Sabbath keepers. In fact, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the wheat to mingle with the tares. When the two sides are going in the opposite directions, the bonds of unity become more and more strained. The separation between Christ’s true followers and the world used to be applied to association with unbelievers, outside of the church. However, now it is becoming more and more applicable to the church itself. Sadly, there are many unbelievers in the church who profess the same faith and have their names on the church rolls. But some members are worldly and apostates in heart and therefore as dangerous for association as those outside of the church.

One final glimpse of how the church triumphant will appear is found in a special vision given to Ellen White as she foresaw the church during the time of persecution:

I saw the nominal church and nominal Adventists, like Judas, would betray us to the Catholics to obtain their influence to come against the truth. The saints then will be an obscure people, little known to the Catholics; but the churches and nominal Adventists who know of our faith and customs (for they hated us on account of the Sabbath, for they could not refute it) will betray the saints and report them to the Catholics as those who disregard the institutions of the people; that is, that they keep the Sabbath and disregard Sunday. (Spalding-Magan Collection of Ellen G. White Statements, 1)

Today’s Seventh-day Adventist Church is well known to the Catholics. Some of our medical institutions are being run in partnership with the Catholic Health System. Sadly, there is much association and linking up with the fallen churches and much borrowing of ideas and programs. However, those who make up the church triumphant will not be well known to the other churches. The above quote by Ellen White refers to nominal Adventists who, along with the fallen churches, betray the true people of God. These nominal Adventists will be former Seventh-day Adventists who give up the Sabbath when the great, final test comes. In fact, they may very well still be carrying out the functions of the church and operating church institutions and facilities. However, the power and presence of God will be lacking.

In summary, we must continue to be encouraged that Christ is in charge of His work and His people. He will purify His church as He purified the temple when He was on earth. The wheat and tares will be separated by He who makes no mistake. He will have a church that is “without spot or wrinkle…fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners” (Ephesians 5:27; Song of Solomon 6:10). This church will evangelize the whole world in a very short time. Those who are shaken out will be replaced by the multitudes that will come into a church that will be the pillar and ground of the truth and against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. It will be a church that keeps the commandments of God and has the testimony of Jesus. Thus the way will be prepared for Christ to return to earth in power and glory and make a final end to the great controversy.
The Confederate flag and Christian perfection

Kevin Paulson

Recently, the Confederate battle flag, revered by an alleged shooter, quickly became the focus of controversy and sentiment for revilement and removal after the senseless slaughter of nine innocent worshipers at a historic African-American church in Charleston, South Carolina. Walmart quickly moved to withdraw Confederate-related merchandise from its shelves, and not long after, the state legislature and governor of South Carolina agreed to remove the flag from the State Capitol grounds in Columbia. Debate has since arisen in other states with regard to pursuing a similar course.

HOW A RECENT EVENT DEMONSTRATES WHY OUR FRAIL BEST ISN’T ENOUGH

What could the Confederate flag possibly have to do with the Adventist debate over character perfection? Interestingly, it may be more than we realize. Perhaps the Confederate flag and all that it symbolizes, helps illustrate the manner in which so many of us come to accept the mixture of good and evil in our heroes and therefore in our own lives.

Allen Drury, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning "Advise and Consent," described America in a later book as “always heretofore strong through all her weaknesses, decent through all her indecencies, great through all her faults" (Come Nineveh, Come Tyre: The Presidency of Edward M. Jason, 426). Those defending the use of the Confederate flag seem to view its symbol in much the same way. What causes some to recall a heritage of slavery and injustice causes others to recall a heritage of chivalry, honour, and the defence of one's home and family. The Confederacy, like so much of American history and indeed of life itself, therefore becomes an example of accepting the co-existence of right and wrong.

Some years ago, the TNT television network aired a mini-series on the political career of the Alabama Governor, George Wallace, who in 1963 stood in the schoolhouse door to prevent the admission of African-Americans. Later he publically repented of his racism in a speech to the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Martin Luther King’s former congregation. In reviewing this mini-series, Joel Stein observed for Time, that Wallace was portrayed as “a villain who [chose] his evil not out of malice but out of weakness” (August 25, 1997).

However, whether sin arises from malice or weakness, it is always sin, and the resulting pain and sorrow is no different in either case. In other words, Wallace’s segregationist policies were no easier for African-Americans to bear because they may have been the result of weakness rather than malice.

When Senator George McGovern spoke against the Vietnam War in the 1972 U.S. presidential campaign, his critics claimed that it was accidental when Vietnamese civilians were killed or maimed by American bombs. The Senator correctly responded that whether by accident or design, the suffering and death inflicted were the same.

We all know that the wife-beating husband who claims, “I hate what I’m doing, but I can’t help it,” does just as much harm as the one who vainly attempts to justify his abuse. Either way, the wife gets hurt.

When we attempt to justify sin by inherent weakness, we face a practical problem with a Christian experience that leaves people imperfect. In fact, such a Christian experience explains why the perfection debate is so persistent and divisive in contemporary Adventism. We are challenged to ask two simple questions: Does the Christ of scripture offer an end, here and now, to the bad choices that make life miserable for ourselves and those around us? Or does He merely offer a formula to achieve our frail best, while forcing others to live with our shortcomings?
Many who reject the possibility of sinless obedience here on earth claim they’ve never met a sinless person. (Considering the unpopularity of true holiness throughout the ages, even when manifested perfectly in the life of Christ during His incarnation, one is tempted to ask such objectors if they’re sure they would recognize a sinless person if in fact they did meet one.)

**IS THERE ANY SIN BEYOND HEAVEN’S POWER?**

Perhaps the best answer I have found to such objections is the reminder that all of us, at numerous times, have met men and women who through God’s grace have overcome sins of every stripe. Every time we meet a Christian who through divine power has conquered such sins as: greed, racism, sexual immorality, alcoholism, and tobacco or other drug addictions, we see the fulfillment of the Bible promise of victory over sin. Therefore we must honestly ask ourselves, “If God can give people complete victory over these sins, which sin in my life or another’s is beyond heaven’s power to resolve?”

We would do well to remember the long forgotten pledge, still in the sacred script, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee” (King James Version, Psalm 119:11). The same assurance was penned two thousand years ago by the apostle Paul and is also still in the sacred pages. “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (II Cor. 7:1). It is on the basis of these Biblical teachings that Ellen White traced the following lines:

The Saviour is wounded afresh and put to open shame when His people pay no heed to His word. He came to this world and lived a sinless life, that in His power His people might also live lives of sinlessness. He desires them by practicing the principles of truth to show to the world that God’s grace has power to sanctify the heart. (Review and Herald, April 1, 1902)
Ken Mindoro

NEURAL DEVELOPMENT IS A PROCESS

A baby's brain is a beautiful thing. At birth, a baby's brain contains over 100 billion nerve cells or neurons, constituting almost all that it will ever have. The process of neural development begins with those immediately essential to life outside the womb. Examples of these would be neurons for regulating the heart rate, body temperature or breathing. Later, higher functions such as sexual behavior, attachment, or concrete and abstract thought develop and mature.

Brain development, what we call “learning”, occurs through a process of strengthening, forming and/or breaking down the connections between neurons. In fact, inter-neuron connections, or synapses, form pathways throughout the brain.

Some pathways allow the body to respond to stimuli without conscious thought. These responses, called reflexes, help babies to act in complex ways that would otherwise be impossible at birth. For example, stroking the cheek of a newborn baby elicits the reflex to turn the head in the direction of the cheek that was stroked. This rooting reflex, essential to life, allows a newborn to readily respond to breastfeeding cues. Also, you can touch a spoon to the tip of a baby's tongue and watch how the baby will push it out using the tongue-thrust reflex. This reflex protects babies from choking or ingesting foreign objects and is one of the reasons a mother must wait four to six months before introducing solid food.

While these infant reflexes disappear as babies mature, other reflexes stay with us throughout adulthood. For example, if you step on a sharp object while barefoot, the flexion/cross-extension reflex kicks in, pulling your injured foot away while concurrently extending the opposite limb. Or, if you have ever inadvertently placed your hand in scalding hot water, it is the withdrawal reflex that pulls your arm out of harm's way. These reflexes save you the precious microseconds of conscious thought required to think, “Hmmm...that water is really hot and burning my hand...maybe I should try and pull it away really quickly!” In other words, reflexes help us to minimize damage to our body.

Our brains also contain pathways that, while not necessarily common to all people, help us to navigate life more smoothly and enjoyably. For example, we all have learned behaviors that we perform repeatedly. Repetition strengthens our brain connections so that we perform them more easily over time. These learned behaviors, or habits, enable us to play a musical instrument, drive a car, brush our teeth, or type without looking at the keyboard. Imagine if I had to consciously lift each finger and decide on the distance and then the strength needed to depress the key! Therefore, like reflexes, habits also allow us to live our lives safely and efficiently.

In addition to reflexes and habits, we have still more complex ways of responding to stressors in our environment. For example, coping mechanisms are developed responses to internal and external stimuli in an effort to master, tolerate or reduce stressful situations. (Note: not all stress is bad. Eustress, or “good” stress, is the beneficial stress that encourages us to function properly. Examples of eustress would include feeling joy at the birth of a child, excitement when getting married, or hunger before a meal. We can cope with these forms of stress. However, the negative form of stress is distress and occurs when stressors overcome our coping mechanisms.)

The all-important question is how do you respond to distressful situations? How do you deal with emotional pain? Some react to stress by turning to substances that produce physical pleasure, such as tobacco, alcohol, illegal drugs, or food. Pleasurable activities, like sex or exercise, can also distract people from their problems. Sadly, some seek entertainment, spending countless hours on music, movies or electronic games. And some displace their
stress onto others by inflicting verbal or physical abuse.

**PROBLEMS REMAIN UNSOLVED WITH MANMADE COPING MECHANISMS**

Rather than solving problems, these distractions weaken the body, dull the mind and torment the soul. The bottom line is that the problem still remains.

**THE BIBLE TEACHES US A BETTER WAY**

Though these coping mechanisms may fail us, we have a better way to deal with stress. The Bible teaches that optimum physical and mental health is achieved by following God’s plan to “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness...” (Matthew 6:33).

In fact, we learn from Jesus’ example, that even in the most stressful circumstances we must seek God first. Consider how in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus “fell prostrate upon the ground, in an agony of distress” (White, Manuscript 52, 1904). The cumulative effects of millennia of sin committed by all humanity were bound up and given to Him on this dark night. Therefore, the vilest physical or emotional harm ever experienced by humanity cannot compare to the stress and pain that Jesus experienced on our behalf in Gethsemane.

“And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly…” (Luke 22:44). We see from Jesus’ example that He did not pull away from pain as we do when we touch a hot stove. He did not assuage His stress by engaging in mindless entertainment, as we often do. Nor did He seek sleep to anesthetize the deep pain that threatened His very life.

Christ’s habit, the reflex which He developed throughout His entire life, was to earnestly cling to His Father praying, “Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:36). And as Christ submitted His will to the Father, He gained divine strength to overcome. “As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength” (White, Christ’s Object Lessons, 333).

**THE POWER THAT SUSTAINED JESUS ON THAT DARK NIGHT WAS NOT HIS OWN, BUT THAT OF HIS FATHER ABOVE.**

We need look no further than to our Savior for the example we must follow to overcome the stress we face in life. “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Therefore, to overcome as Christ did, we must learn to pray even as our Savior prayed.

We are doomed to failure if we choose to face life’s stress while unconnected to Jesus Christ. However, if we are united with Him, we shall stand through any stress or persecution that this world may lay upon us.

“There is no danger that the Lord will neglect the prayers of His people. The danger is that in temptation and trial they will become discouraged, and fail to persevere in prayer” (White, 175).
Ten questions for Dr. Ken Shaw

David Read

On behalf of the Board of Trustees for Southwestern Adventist University (SWAU), Southwestern Union president Larry Moore was very pleased to announce last year that Dr. Ken Shaw accepted the position of president of the university. Dr. Shaw was formally inaugurated last November and replaced Dr. Eric Anderson who retired after nine years at SWAU's helm. Dr. Shaw is a graduate of Southern Adventist University and holds a doctorate in mathematics education from the University of Georgia. Most of his academic career has been spent at Florida State University (FSU) in Panama City, where he was Dean of the Campus and Dean of the College of Applied Studies. He was also active in fundraising for the campus.

1. Having spent most of your career at a state university, what do you like best about your move into the Adventist educational system?

I have enjoyed the spiritual aspects of the campus. This is very different from a state institution. Observing students leading out in praise and worship services, praying with fellow students, and desiring opportunities where they can minister for others is a real inspiration to me. I also love the rich history of how the school came into existence and realize that this is God’s school. This fact is humbling and instills in me that what we do here is of eternal importance.

2. I am hearing and seeing that you are open to casual interactions with students, on sidewalks, in the cafeteria and elsewhere, and that the students really appreciate your friendliness and approachability. How do these interactions help you in the job?

I have really enjoyed interacting with the students. The students are the reason why this school exists. The student body is diverse and it has been a real privilege getting to know the students. Talking to students helps me understand their concerns and helps me think about what can be done to make their experiences better.

3. For most of the last few years (except for last year) SWAU has had flat or declining enrollment, and is already one of the smallest Seventh-day Adventist colleges in North America. We know from the sad story of Atlantic Union College that it is possible for an Adventist college to cease operations because of lack of students. What are your plans for recruitment and increasing enrollment?

SWAU has seen a modest growth in both fall and spring full time equivalent students this year. The Lord has definitely blessed. We are also blessed with quality faculty and staff and some people from the community have told me that our university is the best-kept secret in North America. Our marketing and public relations department and our enrollment department have been very intentional about sharing this secret. We have also increased our enrollment staff, adding an additional recruiter. Our new five-year strategic plan outlines our intentions to increase our enrollment by 50 students per year. Though I think all of us here enjoy the intimacy of a small campus, we do have the capacity to grow. We desire to better share the good news about SWAU in the years ahead.

4. AUC’s problem was not only lack of students but also ultimately lack of money, and its debt situation and lack of financial reserves led to its loss of accreditation. One of your duties at FSU was fundraising for an endowment for the university. How can university endowments be used to increase the financial stability of a small school like SWAU?
One of my main efforts is to improve the financial situation with respect to philanthropy, and I'm happy to say our supporters are making a difference. Philanthropic giving has increased from $878,000 last year to nearly $4 million this year. Of that $4 million, I am very pleased with the support from the Adventist Health System who provided a $2,000,000 endowment to support the department of business. In general, interest from endowments provides for faculty salaries, student scholarships, and other important programs. Major universities have very large endowments in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Those endowments provide strength and power to the university. Part of our five-year strategic plan is to increase our endowments to provide continued support for our programs.

5. One of the biggest issues with religious college education is cost. When I was a student at SWAU in the 1980s, students worked part-time at local industries, including Brandoms (kitchen cabinets), Nu-Cushion (stick horses and other toys), Southwestern Colorgraphics (printing), Bascombs (church furniture), and Birdwell (brooms and mops), all of which are gone today. How do we help students defray the cost of higher education without assuming too much Guaranteed Student Loan debt, which is not dischargeable in bankruptcy and will haunt them for much of their working lives? Is there anyone on staff trained to help students find local jobs?

College is a very good lifetime investment. Annual income increases the more education one receives. The Bureau of Labor Statistics shows the median income for those with a high school degree is $34,736, associate’s degree is $41,184, and a bachelor’s degree is $57,252. We have employees who work with students to secure part-time employment, as well as help students with student loans and grants. In addition, we are working to secure additional endowed scholarships that will help students support their college education.

6. When I discussed apologetics and the integration of faith and learning with your predecessor, Dr. Anderson, he stated that he tried to see that our faith was integrated into all academic disciplines. What would you do, what programs or initiatives would you put in place, to see that learning and faith are integrated across the curriculum, so that students are given a really Adventist Christian education, and not an essentially secular education at a nominally Adventist college?

This year, our faculty and staff voted on a new tagline for the university. It is Knowledge, Faith, and Service. Our faculty members are committed to educating a diverse student body in a Christ-centered environment shaped by Seventh-day Adventist Christian beliefs for service and leadership. It is in the environments of the classrooms, offices, cafeteria, gymnasium, dorms, and churches that we desire Christ to be exemplified in our thoughts and actions.

7. Along those lines, SWAU has been famous for its strongly creationist biology/geology professors, including Dr. Arthur Chadwick and Dr. Suzanne Phillips (who, sadly, left for Loma Linda just as you were coming to Keene). Dr. Chadwick has organized and held origins seminars at Keene and elsewhere at which prestigious creationists such as Harvard paleontologist Kurt Wise have been invited to speak. How do you plan to support Dr. Chadwick and the biology faculty in integrating faith and learning on the origins issue? What do you think of an endowed chair on Faith and Science Integration?

Dr. Chadwick and the entire faculty are great assets to the university, providing quality experiences where students can learn. This year we have received grants from the Faith & Science Council and from ASI to support Dr. Chadwick’s research and the completion of a dinosaur museum in the basement of Scales Hall, and are exploring additional sources of funding. We are also continuing the Saxon Lecture Series in Science and Religion, bringing in
guest speakers to address relevant topics.

8. A new building, a University Center, is planned as a matching counterpart to Pechero Hall, on the western lawn of the school. My understanding is that several million dollars has been raised for that purpose; how close are we to being able to erect this building without going into debt? There was also a discussion of a major renovation of Scales Hall, the science building, in part to house Dr. Chadwick’s large and growing collection of dinosaur bones. Have any concrete plans been made to either renovate Scales Hall or construct a totally new science center?

I am not aware of any major plans to build a University Center or renovate Scales Hall, though I would deem these projects as worthy. We are, however, remodeling the lower level in Scales to house a new dinosaur museum to showcase Art Chadwick’s work. Originally there were plans for an academic/performance hall building with a cost close to $17-18 million. This year, the university’s master planning committee and the university’s Board of Trustees made a decision to plan for a nursing and administration building as we have seen a lot of growth in nursing in the last 15 years. The current nursing building is an older structure built in the 1960s. We intend to build a state-of-the-art nursing building for about $10 million, with specialized skills and simulation labs. The administration offices will be on the third floor of that building. We have about $3.4 million to raise by April 15, 2016 to meet the $1 million challenge grant we received from the Mabee Foundation this year. We are very excited about this opportunity.

9. How have you enjoyed interacting with the faculty at SWAU? How important is it to you to have a faculty that sees teaching not as a job, but as a calling or vocation, a form of ministry?

One of the first things we did last summer was to sit down with faculty and staff and identify where we want to go over the next five years. This led to the creation of a strategic planning committee and throughout the year, many planning meetings took place. All of the work of the faculty and staff came together with a unanimous vote of our Board of Trustees to support our new five-year strategic plan. All faculty and staff have an important part to take in the various roles and ministries of our university. This is a mission field and we are entrusted to carry out the work that God has called us to do.

10. What do you think of Texas weather? Isn’t it a wild roller-coaster ride?

I certainly have experienced the extremes this year, a hot summer, the winter snow and ice and the spring storms and floods. I have also found that Texas has some real beauty. Recently, I enjoyed the spring bluebonnets, gorgeous sunsets over our campus, and a relaxing time on Lake Whitney. God has blessed us here in North Texas
What San Antonio Accomplished

Kevin Paulson

A Summary of Positive Achievements by the General Conference Session of 2015

The 60th session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists will be remembered for its cluster of positive accomplishments relative to biblical clarity and faithfulness on the part of the worldwide Adventist body. As the dust settles following this momentous gathering, it behooves us to stop and consider what in fact was achieved by its deliberations. The following actions likely qualify as the most noteworthy in this respect.

1. The re-election of Elder Ted N.C. Wilson to the General Conference presidency.

In most cases, General Conference presidents who indicate their willingness to continue in office are routinely chosen to continue at the church’s quinquennial sessions, with little or no visible opposition.

The resistance to Wilson’s re-election by a few Western delegates proved two things: (1) that the revival-and-reformation agenda of Wilson’s presidency has deeply upset certain segments of the worldwide Adventist community; and (2) that those segments comprise an extremely small percentage of the aforesaid community. Global Adventism—and the world beyond—thus witnessed hard evidence of serious theological and spiritual division in the church, together with the reassurance (at least for now) that the worldwide body stands overwhelmingly with what Elder Wilson has sought to do during his first term, and what he seeks to do in the five years to come.

2. The revision of Fundamental Belief No. 6, regarding creation.

Here we witnessed the first concerted and public attempt by so-called “progressive” Adventists to retain language in the SDA Fundamental Beliefs which in their view accommodated deep time and evolutionary processes in the formation of the earth. Prominent figures from Western countries insisted that the newly-proposed language would “exclude” our scientists from acceptance within the church, many of whom have long since made peace with what most call “theistic evolution.” The adoption of language affirming literal days of creation at a “recent” point in time (this point further clarified by reference to the chronology of Genesis 5), in addition to language affirming a global Flood as recorded in Genesis, represents a major and powerful victory for basic biblical and classic Adventist teachings.

3. The revision of Fundamental Belief No. 23, regarding marriage and the family.

Despite efforts by a few European and American delegates to retain the ambiguous phrase “marriage partners” in the former edition of this statement, the world field by vast numbers repudiated any attempt—stated explicitly by at least one delegate—to make room in the church’s fellowship for practicing homosexuals. Another landmark victory for Bible-based Adventism.

In a related development, one must note the attempt during the Church Manual debate by one European delegate to alter language in the manual for the purpose of accommodating couples choosing to live together out of wedlock. As with the attempt to retain language in Fundamental Belief No. 23 perceived to be accommodating to homosexual couples, the effort to accommodate premarital cohabitation also suffered an overwhelming defeat.

4. The defeat of women’s ordination.

Perhaps most significant regarding the July 8 vote forbidding world divisions of the church from proceeding with gender-neutral ordination to the gospel ministry, was the fact that for the first time within the three occasions when this issue has been addressed by the General Conference in session, the authority of Scripture and the writings of Ellen White were explicitly invoked as the basis of the decision. Despite the clearly biblical tone of the arguments employed at both the 1990 and 1995 sessions regarding this issue, the precise language used in the action taken in both cases did not specifically invoke inspired authority.

At San Antonio, it was different. The preamble to the motion before the delegates stated quite plainly that the rationale for voting either yes or no, was to be based on one's personal study of the scriptures and the writings of Ellen G. White. The fact that nearly 60 percent of the delegates voted No, based on inspired grounds is a most significant development.

For those who might still yearn to revisit this issue at a future General Conference session, the question naturally arises: Has the Seventh-day Adventist Church at its highest level ever rendered a decision on the explicitly-stated basis of inspired authority, and then gone back on that decision at a later time?

5. The Statement of Confidence in the Writings of Ellen G. White.

At least one previous General Conference session (1995) has witnessed a similar statement of confidence voted so far as Ellen White’s prophetic gift is concerned. This statement spoke as follows regarding Ellen White’s authority in matters of both doctrine and lifestyle:

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that ‘in His Word God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience’ (Ellen White, The Great Controversy, 7). We consider the biblical canon closed. However, we also believe, as did Ellen G White's contemporaries, that her writings carry divine authority, both for godly living and for doctrine. (General Conference session, Utrecht, Holland, voted June 30, 1995)

The statement voted in San Antonio was significantly stronger, which accounts for the fact that Western advocates of a less decisive understanding of Ellen White’s role in the church protested against the new language so vigorously—one delegate even claiming this statement would transform the Adventist Church into a “cult.” The new language reads as follows:

We reaffirm our conviction that her [Ellen White’s] writings are divinely inspired, truly Christ-centered, and Bible-based. Rather than replacing the Bible, they uplift the normative character of Scripture and correct inaccurate interpretations of it derived from tradition, human reason, personal experience, and modern culture. (General Conference session, San Antonio, Texas, voted July 9, 2015)

This statement not only affirms the doctrinal and moral authority of Ellen White’s writings, but also affirms their role in the interpretation of Scripture—a role strongly criticized and even rejected by many in Western Adventism during recent decades. It was this particular role on Ellen White’s part which Desmond Ford so vigorously opposed when finding fault with the doctrine of the investigative judgment, which led the Glacier View Consensus Statement of 1980 to declare that Ellen White’s authority “transcends that of all noninspired interpreters” (Adventist Review, Sept. 4, 1980).

One European delegate in San Antonio offered an amendment to the Statement of Confidence, asking that the following clause be stricken from the statement: “. . . and correct inaccurate interpretations of it derived from tradition, human reason, personal experience, and modern culture.”

The amendment failed overwhelmingly, and the new language was voted in. This represents what is truly one of the greatest theological victories for classic Adventism in recent times.
6. The recommendation that a new committee be formed by the General Conference to outline the Biblical role of women in ministry.

This recommendation, made in the same manner as the one five years ago in Atlanta which led to the establishment of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC), was both accepted by the chair and makes possible a future clarification of the roles of women in ministry which can address the unfinished business of San Antonio—specifically, the outstanding issues of women serving as ordained local elders and commissioned ministers, the latter including in a number of cases the role of senior pastors.

With this new committee, the way is open for the resolution of these outstanding challenges, whether at an Annual Council (the highest governing body of the church which has approved female elders and commissioned ministers) or a future General Conference session.

Conclusion

Much remains to be done in the wake of San Antonio. Already leaders in certain territories are asserting their right to defy the newly-reaffirmed position of the General Conference, upholding gender-specific ordination to the gospel ministry. Leaders of the worldwide Adventist body will need the prayers and active support of loyal leaders, pastors and laity throughout the globe as they confront these continuing challenges to biblical authority and the structural cohesion of the great Advent movement.

But without question, the proceedings at San Antonio give the striving faithful genuine cause for relief and rejoicing. Hope and joy possess the hearts of the consecrated as they prosecute both the internal quest for revival and reformation and the outward expansion of the church’s mission to the world. As Winston Churchill said at the Allied leaders’ conference at Casablanca, following what would prove the turning point of World War II, at the battles of Stalingrad, El Alamein, and Guadalcanal: “This is not the end; it is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.”
Where do we go from here?

Mark Paden

At the General Conference (GC) Session, the world church voted against giving divisions the prerogative to decide for themselves whether or not they would ordain women as pastors. Because of this decision, the Seventh-day Adventist official position has defaulted to our original standing that women may not be ordained to the gospel ministry. Clearly, people on all sides of the debate have held strong views and opinions for reasons they sincerely believe to be irrefutable. But what now? How should we respond to the decision made by the world church? Do we persist in believing our own opinions?

In answer to these questions, it is important to remember that no matter which way the vote had gone, we can be assured that God has given us a source of authority in the GC Session. Consider the following quote:

I have often been instructed by the Lord that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any other one man. Never should the mind of one man or the minds of a few men be regarded as sufficient in wisdom and power to control the work and to say what plans shall be followed. But when, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence, contrary to the decision of the general body. (Ellen White, Testimonies to the Church Volume 9, 260)

In other words, regardless of our preconceived ideas and opinions, when the world church votes during the GC Session, we must surrender to that decision as to the will of the Lord.

WE HAVE TWO CHOICES

Therefore, we as a people may choose one of two paths. We may follow the voice of the church, and choose to surrender our opinions and obey. Or we may persist in holding our personal opinions and go contrary to the will of God, even though we have been given clear light through the vote. To choose the former is to choose unity; to choose the latter is to choose war with God.

Therefore, if we believe the inspired words of our prophet, the correct choice is to cease quarrelling and debating about which opinion is correct. God has shown us. As a result, we must walk humbly in the path that He has marked for us in unity, loving others as we love ourselves.

A MESSAGE OF WARNING FOR THOSE WHO REJOICE

Now, for those who are rejoicing at the outcome of this decision, please remember that the "opposition" is still our family. They may have been wrong on this issue, but by condemning them you are playing the role of the accuser of our brethren. This is absolutely NOT the time for "I told you so." Remember that they are people too and just like you, they feel painful emotions. Consider the women pastors who perhaps face an uncertain future. You might be quick to say, "Well, they brought that on themselves by choosing to become a pastor." But you must remember your statement is condemnatory and is not one of grace. In fact, it is Christ who extends grace and it is Satan who condemn. Truly, if God treated you how you deserve to be treated, you would be dead. Therefore, don't treat them as you feel they deserve, but rather, treat them with the same compassion Christ extends to all souls.

In the unity of truth, let us rally around the bloodstained banner. Let us clasp hands with our brothers and sisters across the world in a united front against the enemy of souls. God help us to lay aside our personal opinions and
love each other as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it! And finally, let us esteem all others as better than ourselves by truly, deeply and completely loving our brothers and sisters who voted differently than we.

Arise! Shine! Jesus is coming! Amen.
Lessons of warning from Lucifer's rebellion

Steve Wohlberg

July 16, 2015

We are told that Satan made war against God in heaven and that he continues to make war upon God’s remnant people on earth (Rev. 12:7, 8, 17). Therefore, it makes sense to examine what happened in heaven long ago, so we can resist the devil’s assaults today.

LESSON ONE: WAR BROKE OUT IN HEAVEN

Brothers and sisters, we are at war with Satan and need to “put on the full armor of God” that we “may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11). God’s people will be defeated if they fail to realize that these are days of battle.

LESSON TWO: SATAN IS REBELLING AGAINST GOD

“The history of the great conflict between good and evil, from the time it first began in heaven to the final overthrow of rebellion and the total eradication of sin, is also a demonstration of God’s unchanging love” (Ellen White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 33). Don’t miss that key word, rebellion. It is critical to understand that we are fighting forces that are in rebellion against God’s love, His law, His will, and His ways.

LESSON THREE: REBELLION INITIATED BY AN INTELLIGENT AND HONORED ANGEL

“Sin originated with him who, next to Christ, had been most honored of God and was highest in power and glory among the inhabitants of heaven” (White, 35). Therefore, we who are weak, fallen, and degenerate are NO MATCH for him who was once highest in power in heaven. Our only hope is to humbly rely on God and His word and “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save [our] souls” (James 1:21). If we do, we will be “more than conquerors through Him [Jesus] who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

LESSON FOUR: SELF-EXALTATION LEADS TO REBELLION

“Little by little Lucifer came to indulge the desire for self-exaltation … ‘Thine heart was lifted up’” (White, 35). Pride is insidious and those infected by it usually don’t recognize their own sin because it is hard to detect, especially in one’s own heart. It’s easy to think we are right, when in fact, we are wrong. Therefore, in order to discern our own pride, we need a standard with which to compare ourselves. That standard is God’s Word, His law, and especially, His loving character revealed in Jesus Christ. Only the Holy Spirit can show us our sin (see John 16:8).

LESSON FIVE: DISCONTENT WITH POSITION GIVEN BY GOD

We are told that Lucifer was not content with his position and “though honored above the heavenly host, he ventured to covet homage due alone to the Creator” (White, 35). This was part of Lucifer’s sin. Though Lucifer was an angel, he wanted more. Likewise, our Creator has assigned each of us a position in His sight. We should be content with His will because God knows what is best.

LESSON SIX: LUCIFER DISPUTED AUTHORITY OF JESUS CHRIST

Lucifer’s dispute against the supremacy and the authority of Jesus Christ “[impeached] the wisdom and love of the Creator”, and became “the purpose of this prince of angels” (White, 36). Sadly, Lucifer “was determined never again to acknowledge the authority of Christ” (White, 40-41). Practically speaking, we submit to Jesus Christ’s supremacy
and authority when we submit to His word, the Bible. Jesus said, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine” (NASB, John 8:31).

LESSON SEVEN: LUCIFER ATTACKS THE SIMPLE WORDS OF GOD

“Everything that was simple he shrouded in mystery, and by artful perversion cast doubt upon the plainest statements of Jehovah” (White, 41). Therefore, it is essential that Seventh-day Adventists remain people of the Book. “God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms … Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support” (Ellen White, The Great Controversy, 595).

LESSON EIGHT: REBELLION OFTEN PRETENDS LOYALTY

Rebellion against God often conceals itself under a pretense of loyalty to God. “While claiming for himself perfect loyalty to God, he [Satan] urged that changes in the order and laws of heaven were necessary for the stability of the divine government” (Ellen White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 38). “Satan had made it appear that he himself was seeking to promote the good of the universe” (White, 42). This is critical information. “I'm not rebelling,” states the rebel. Our only hope is that we must not be ignorant of his Satan’s devices (2 Corinthians 2:11).

LESSON NINE: EVEN PERFECT ANGELS WERE DECEIVED

“Many of the angels were, however, blinded by Lucifer’s deceptions … His power to deceive was very great” (White, 38,41). Think about it. If sinless, super-intelligent angels were deceived by “the bewildering sophistry by which rebellion would seek to justify itself” (White, 36), what chance do we have? Again, our only hope is in trusting God and His Word first and foremost. “It is written,” was Christ's method of conquering the devil (see Matthew 4:1-11). This is our safeguard too.

LESSON TEN: LUCIFER SAID HE WAS DEFENDING THE ANGELS’ RIGHTS

Satan positioned himself as defender of angelic rights. “Rejecting with disdain the arguments and entreaties of the loyal angels, he denounced them as deluded slaves. The preference shown to Christ he declared an act of injustice both to himself and to all the heavenly host, and announced that he would no longer submit to this invasion of his rights and theirs … The only course remaining for him and his followers, he said, was to assert their liberty, and gain by force the rights which had not been willingly accorded them” (White, 40).

LESSON ELEVEN: WAVERING ANGELS WERE WARNED

Loyal angels “warned all [angels] to close their ears against Lucifer’s deceptive reasoning, and urged him [Lucifer] and his followers to seek the presence of God without delay and confess the error of questioning His wisdom and authority” (White, 40). None of us — not even pastors, administrators or even those with doctorate degrees in theology — are a match for Lucifer’s mind. Therefore, some books should never be read and some people should never be reasoned with. At times, we should close our ears “to escape from the snare of the devil” (2 Timothy 2:26). One of Eve’s first mistakes was talking to the snake in the tree.

Suffer not yourselves to open the lids of a book that is questionable. There is a hellish fascination in the literature of Satan. It is the powerful battery by which he tears down a simple religious faith. Never feel that you are strong enough to read infidel books; for they contain a poison like that of asps … In reading them, you are inhaling the miasmas of hell. (Ellen White, Fundamentals of Christian Education, 93).

LESSON TWELVE: GOD BORE LONG BUT PRIDE RUINED LUCIFER
Infinite wisdom showed Lucifer his error, but his pride ruined him. "In great mercy, according to His divine character, God bore long with Lucifer … such efforts as infinite love and wisdom only could devise, were made to convince him of his error … Lucifer was convinced that he was in the wrong … He nearly reached the decision to return, but pride forbade him" (Ellen White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 39). Friends, if God shows us our error, we must humble ourselves and forsake that error forever, no matter the sacrifice.

**LESSON THIRTEEN: WHEN UNITY WAS IMPOSSIBLE**

When a third of the angels finally settled permanently on Lucifer’s side, unity with them was impossible because unity must be based on truth (see John 17:17,21). Paul asks us 2 Corinthians 6:14, "What communion does light have with darkness?" The obvious answer is none.

**LESSON FOURTEEN: EVERY ONE IS A PARTICIPANT**

Once every angel became settled, either on God’s side, or on Lucifer’s side, war resulted, and every angel was involved. "And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought" (Revelation 12:7). Significantly, it was not God alone against Lucifer and his comrades; but holy angels engaged in battle too. "Michael and his angels fought." The same is true today. God's people must decidedly resist every satanic attempt to undermine God's remnant movement and His Three Angels’ Messages (Revelation 14:6-12). Neutrality is impossible. False charity is a mistake. We must actively stand for truth.

**LESSON FIFTEEN: GOD’S PEOPLE EMPLOY GOD’S METHODS**

"God could employ only such means as were consistent with truth and righteousness. Satan could use what God could not — flattery and deceit" (White, 42). In our efforts to counter Satan’s falsehoods, we must practice the truth, speak the truth, live the truth, and reveal Jesus Christ's love for sinners. Empowered by His pardoning grace, true commandment-keepers must love God, and their neighbors as themselves (Matthew 22:36-40). If we ourselves manifest hard-heartedness, coldness and pride, we reflect the devil, no matter what we profess. Then we too must repent, before it is too late. Remember, “The history of the great conflict between good and evil, from the time it first began in heaven to the final overthrow of rebellion and the total eradication of sin, is also a demonstration of God's unchanging love" (White, 33). Jesus wants us to reflect that love which led Him to sacrifice His very life for “the sins of the whole world” to save sinners (see John 3:16; 1 John 2:2).

**THE LAST CAMPAIGN IS YET TO COME**

"The enemy is preparing for his last campaign against the church. He has so concealed himself from view that many can hardly believe that he exists, much less can they be convinced of his amazing activity and power. They have to a great extent forgotten his past record; and when he makes another advance move, they will not recognize him as their enemy, that old serpent, but they will consider him a friend, one who is doing a good work" (5T, 294). It already happened in heaven. Those deceived by Lucifer thought the devil was their best friend. Such misguided confidence destroyed them. "Clad in the armor of Christ's righteousness, the church is to enter upon her final conflict" (Prophets and Kings, 725).

The signs of the times reveal that this “final conflict” is upon us. May God humble us, forgive us, purify us, clothe us in Christ's righteousness, and then use us as polished instruments to lift Jesus and save souls, before earth’s last sunset.