Submitting to each other for the sake of unity
Aug 04, 2015 05:07 am | Yvonne Novlesky

My husband quickly learned that curling is a gentleman’s game and that all team members must submit to the skip’s directions for rock placement and for sweeping to curl the rock.

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The Toronto 2015 Pan Am games and the baton of truth
Aug 02, 2015 06:00 am | Owusu-Banahene Francis

In mid-July, Toronto Canada hosted the famous Pan Am Games, the world’s third largest international multi-sport competitive event, where representatives from 41 countries participated in a host of summer sport competitions.

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My husband learned to love curling as a young boy when his father would flood an ice rink in their Manitoba back yard and create “rocks” by freezing old jam cans filled with water. Curling teams were organized in the neighbourhood and my husband’s father was the self-appointed skip (captain) of the family team. As son number three, my husband was invariably relegated to be lead, whose role was to set up defense rocks. He quickly learned that curling is a gentleman’s game and that all team members must submit to the skip’s directions for rock placement and for sweeping to curl the rock. Unfortunately, while a youngster playing lead, he rarely had the opportunity to take out the opponents’ rock. Therefore, submission was not always easy for a young boy whose position rarely allowed his rock to score the winning point.

Like the game of curling, in real life, we are not all called to score the winning point. In fact, the whole concept of submission, whether to authority or to one another, is usually a hard pill to swallow. For most of us, it goes against every fiber of our being. Sadly, I’ve even heard Seventh-day Adventist pastors chuckle about their “heavy foot” and their close encounters with the traffic officer intent on enforcing the speed limit. And we often hear such phrases as, “I told him!” or “She deserved to be put in her place!”

In fact, a Christian who chooses a path directly opposed to the culture of the world is judged to be inherently weak. We all know that television promotes aggressive conflict resolution for entertainment purposes. For example, in the movie “The Quiet Man,” the prototype for masculinity, John Wayne, only gains the respect of his new wife and family when at the end of the film, he gives in against his resolve never to fight, and physically brawls with the antagonist. Indeed, it would be boring to see a family calmly resolve a problem and therefore, the hero pretty much always takes an aggressive approach, scoring when he or she throws in a few winning punches.

However, as Christians, we are called to turn away from this mindset and approach our relationships with an attitude of submission. Submission toward others is first built on a foundation of submission to God. Many years ago before we were married, our pastor counseled my husband and me that problems in a marriage are addressed by first looking to our vertical relationship — that is between God and us. I’ve since learned that when we learn how to submit to God, we learn appropriate submission to others, including our parents, spouse, church family and the authorities who make the laws of the land. However, it is a hard lesson to learn in a world where personal rights trump submission to any authority, including God.

IN OUR STAND AGAINST PREDOMINANT CULTURE, UNDERSTANDING SUBMISSION IS VITAL TO HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

God calls us to “be filled with the Spirit” (New American Standard Bible, Ephesians 5:18). As God’s children we are to “walk as children of Light” (Eph. 5:8) and “learn what is pleasing to the Lord” (Eph. 5:10). These verses explain why it is impossible to submit to God while we are attempting to control our own life and please ourselves. This is why when we are empty of self and filled with God’s Spirit we will have a clearer understanding for the need of submission.

SUBMITTING TO AUTHORITY

God has ordained authority to accomplish His ultimate plan. In the game of curling, for example, the skip stands in the house and determines the delivery of the rock, or the weight, turn and line of the throw. The team players cannot see the far end, and are therefore submissive to the skip, remaining intent on their job, following the skip’s verbal
direction for sweeping, to keep the rock going in the right direction and to speed its delivery. Just as the curling team submits to the skip and to one another in their appointed placement on the team, we also must learn to submit to authority. Just as in a curling game the skip sometimes judges incorrectly, we too may face leaders who make mistakes. But God calls us to submit because all leaders are set up or removed by God, and submission is part of our growing to be more like Jesus.

As Christians, “every person is to be in subjection to the governing authority. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God” (Romans 13:1). Therefore, while at times like Peter and the apostles, we must “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29), we need to recognize that God has ordained such authority.

**SUBMITTING TO ONE ANOTHER IS PART OF SANCTIFICATION**

Submission to one another is essential to the Christian walk, beginning from childhood. We learn from Luke 2:51,52 that submission to Jesus’ earthly parents contributed to His growth to spiritual maturity. We also learn that it is profitable for grownups to submit, for we are called to do so with “joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13: 17).

Because submission itself is a trait of the Trinity, we grow in unity and godliness as we submit to one another. This is how we grow to be more like Jesus, who not only submitted to His parents, but also to the authorities of His day and suffered unjustly for our sins.

**SUBMITTING TO GAIN WISDOM**

Jesus said, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). When we submit to God’s Word and seek the wisdom and counsel of those who are in authority over us, we can gain God’s wisdom. In fact, it is a serious matter to learn submission for “whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves” (Romans 13:2).

There is no one person who has all the answers. Together we can search the word and learn from God’s word and one another.

**LEARNING HOW TO SUBMIT**

We read in 19 Manuscript Releases that it is the “duty of everyone who professes to believe the truth to do all in his power to remove prejudice, while never lessening the importance of truth by concessions to the world. We are to show by our manners, by our words, by our spirit that we have learned in the school of Christ. We should not manifest harshness of spirit, indulging coarseness of speech. The great Teacher says, 'Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls'” (White 209).

Indeed, the test of whether we are truly united and submissive to one another, as Christ would have us to be, is whether we can submit joyfully. In Eph. 5:18, we are called to be filled with the Spirit, “always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and [to] be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”

It is not easy to submit one to another, and judging by the world’s standards, we rarely score the winning point when by God’s grace we choose not to press our point or engage in confrontation to win an argument. But like the lead on a curling team, our role is to contribute to the overall health of the entire team. As God’s children, we are engaged in a war against evil and God has called us to walk with Him, to represent Him in our relationships, starting in the home and including the church, our colleagues at work and all authorities He has set in place. His call to unity includes submission to one another.
Submitting to each other for the sake of unity — ADvindicate
The Toronto 2015 Pan Am games and the baton of truth

Owusu-Banahene Francis

August 2, 2015

God has called His children to be His representatives in this world and therefore, our privilege and responsibility to share His love must be evident in every aspect of our life. In fact, Jesus’ life on earth proclaims the certainty of this unique call to witness. However, because our calling is in direct opposition to the prince of darkness, as God’s children on earth, we also face the certainty of the devil’s direct attack on us. But through this experience we have the assurance that we will be “blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests on [us]” (New American Standard Bible, 1 Peter 4:14).

PERSECUTION OF GOD’S CHILDREN THROUGH THE AGES

When Jesus said, “The servant is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (King James Version, John 15:20) He wanted them to understand what they would face in the years to come. Indeed, it wasn’t long afterward that Stephen faced death at the hands of a persecuting mob. Later we read that Peter understood how Jesus’ words of warning were not limited to his own generation but would indeed encompass the experience of all God’s people down through the ages, until Jesus’ second coming. This is evident in Peter’s later advice to “think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you” (1 Pet 4:12), thereby describing Satan’s warfare against God’s children during Peter’s generation and for the years to come.

In The Great Controversy, we read “the history of the early church testified to the fulfilment of the Saviour's words [regarding persecution of His people]” (White, 39). In fact, Satan feared the gospel’s triumph and summoned his forces to utterly destroy Christianity. “Beginning under Nero about the time of the martyrdom of Paul, persecution continued with greater or less fury for centuries” (White, 40). However, history testifies that Satan’s efforts to destroy the church of Christ were in vain. Even when facing death by the stake, God faithful children “rejoiced that they were accounted worthy to suffer for the truth, and songs of triumph ascended from the midst of crackling flames” (White, 41).

However, amidst the gloom that settled on the earth during these dark years, God had a remnant who kept the light of the truth from being wholly extinguished, by passing the light of truth from one generation to the next. In fact, in every age there have been witnesses for God, men and women who held the Bible as their rule of life, refusing to compromise even a single truth.

THE BATON OF TRUTH

In mid-July, Toronto Canada hosted the famous Pan Am Games, the world’s third largest international multi-sport competitive event, where representatives from 41 countries participated in a host of summer sport competitions. In the relay races, one of the competitions at the Pan Am Games, the challenge is not only to run fast and to stay on the course, but also to pass the baton in such a way that the next team member is able to grab it correctly and keep running. A team is disqualified if they drop the baton, or pass it improperly. In fact, many still remember that at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, both the U.S. men’s and women’s teams dropped the baton in the semifinals, and were sadly disqualified from the race.

WHEN WE EMBRACE UNCOMPROMISING ADHERENCE TO THE TRUTH THE BATON IS AUTOMATICALLY PLACED IN OUR HAND

Amazingly, the world’s longest relay race begins in Nagasaki Japan and ends after 1064 km. However, as God’s
people we are engaged in a much longer and more important race. We are not engaged in a competition but rather a war, and we do not pass a wooden baton, but rather, the baton of truth from one generation to the next. In fact, to accept the baton of truth is to automatically join the winning side. Unlike the Pan Am Games in Toronto where 12 of the 41 competing countries felt the humiliation of receiving no gold medals, all of those on God's team are winners and will one day receive the crown of victory from Jesus' own hands.

When we take up the baton of truth we are in direct opposition to God's enemy, who immediately embarks on a plan to disqualify us from the race.

PETER AND JOHN’S EXPERIENCE

In Acts 4, we read that Peter and John were apprehended because they taught the people and preached about the resurrection from the dead. Thus, because they responded to Jesus’ commission to teach the gospel (Matthew 28), they faced persecution. However, while Satan endeavoured to use human agents to halt the disciples' work, their experience actually became a vehicle for spreading the gospel.

Jesus’ assurance that "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20) testified that God was in control. And the apostles' response, “whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19, 20) testified that they would never compromise truth to obey man.

In fact, God has always required strict obedience from His children. For this reason Moses cautioned the Israelites not to "turn aside [from the commandments] to the right hand or to the left" (Deut. 5:32). We read in Lift Him Up that “no lower standard is presented to those who desire salvation today” (White, 139).

Though God permits temptations, we can be assured that He will not permit us to face anything that is not in harmony with His ultimate plan and will. We have the assurance that He knows best and therefore our only hope is to pass the baton by strict obedience to His word, with complete faith in Him.

THE THREE HEBREWS MEN’S EXPERIENCE

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to serve the Babylonian gods or to bow down to the golden image. In Daniel chapter 3, we read that they were therefore summoned before King Nebuchadnezzar. Again, similar to Peter and John, their crime was to refuse to obey the king’s decree at the cost of obedience to God’s word.

Interestingly, even though Daniel described the anger of the king, he also seems to suggest that in an effort to get the three Hebrew men to comply with the law, the king may have appealed to reason and loyalty to himself. Sadly, many of us may be tempted to compromise principle because of respect or honour we hold for parents or someone else in authority. The story of the three Hebrew men shows that the devil is crafty and often pretends to show kindness and even empathy when a more direct and cruel approach proves futile. Finally, we learn from their experience that allegiance is due to God in all circumstances, even at the cost of life, and that ultimately, He is capable to protect His people in persecution.

PERSECUTION CREATES OPPORTUNITY TO PASS THE BATON OF TRUTH

We learn from the history of God’s church that persecution, though feared and dreaded, creates opportunity to pass the baton of truth. In other words, when we obey God’s word, He always uses us to accomplish His purpose to share His truth to others.

Let us not forget that when we grab the baton of truth, our destiny is solely in God’s hands. Like the relay participants at the Pan Am Games, we must keep our eyes focused on the race before us. We must make no assumptions about the results of our obedience, but rather leave the consequences in God’s hands and obey in all
circumstances. Indeed, trusting in God's promises and benevolence will save us from fear for tomorrow. Our loyalty and love for the truth confirms our acceptance and justifies our willingness to carry the baton. Let's not drop the baton now. Let's remember the faith of our fathers who suffered for truth's sake and may God help us to hold tight to the baton and stay the course until Jesus comes.
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).
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.
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.

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)
Reflexes

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, “Hmm...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