June 17, 2011

Highlights from Atoday.org

Sad Chapter at La Sierra University: A round of resignations late last week added a new, serious chapter to the ongoing La Sierra University saga of alleged promotion of evolution in the classroom. Though first explained as non-related to the evolution issue, new data show these resignations are closely tied to the controversy. Follow the growing cache of news items about these resignations at atoday.org. The story is rocking Adventist education, and continuing aftershocks are expected. Read more

A Real Eye-opener, or a Yawning Gap? Cindy Tutsch faces a torrent of criticism as she advocates moderation in immigration policy and support for health-care insurance. Is this descendant of German immigrants selling out to left-wing politics? Some readers think she's doing just that, mixing her usual conservative Christianity with social-gospel political squishiness. What Would Jesus Do? she asks. Help her out, or set her straight. Read more

Adventist Tradition—Getting in the Way of Truth: Don Watson sees a lot of Adventist doctrinal interpretation as based on traditional human bricks and mortar. That's why they call it "traditional

Opinion - La Sierra Debacle: Former Chairman of Adventist Today Foundation expresses his concerns over happenings at La Sierra University. Elwin Dunn writes, “One of the Church’s Universities, La Sierra University, has been particularly taken to task because some members of its faculty have been guilty of doing exactly what a university is supposed to do, namely, teaching students to learn how to think...I am appalled at the manner in which the issues surrounding La Sierra’s stated shortcomings have been dealt with....” Read more

No More Cookie-cutter Careers: College educator Lisa Clark-Diller sees today's Adventist grads as cutting-edge creative in their career planning. Some pine for days when Adventists' options were more cookie-cutter simple. Tough times have changed things, breaking up the Adventist career ghettos and unleashing job-hunting creativity. The worst of times can be the best of times! Take heart! Read more

Sunday-keeper Banned: Preston Foster finds evidence that an anti-Sunday-keeper mentality may be jettisoning traditionally warm relationships between some Sunday-keeping ministers and Adventist pastors
Adventism.” He challenges us to stand back and take note of the diversity of legitimate understandings of various Bible teachings. Far from destroying the church, remodeling our faith to eliminate walls of tradition will open up fresh new insights. Read more

Strings, Worm Holes and Heavenly Mysteries: Larry Downing shares his fascination with quantum mechanics and mysteries of our wondorous universe. He writes, “The theories proposed by quantum mechanics are not theology. They do, however, hold possibilities for thought. Do angels inhabit a parallel universe and participate in a multiple dimension? Angels are unseen and seen. Do they slip from their universe into ours?” Read more

Adventures in Popular Culture: Tanya Cochran compares pop culture with religious themes. As a wise-beyond-her-years student once told me, “I don’t think God causes our pain, but I also don’t think God wastes it. I couldn’t agree more. Though I can’t speak for you readers, I can speak for myself: I need that lesson in empathy. Though we live in a broken world, though sometimes we are made victims because of other people’s choices.” Read more

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**Resignation of Four at La Sierra University - June 14**

Submitted Jun 14, 2011

**Special Report: General Conference and Adventist Today In Possession of La Sierra University Recording**

Ervin Taylor

The General Conference of SDAs has received a copy of a recording of a presentation by General Conference and Union Conference officials to members of the LSU Faculty. Following that presentation, the conversation of four individuals, three of whom have resigned from their LSU administrative and faculty positions and the fourth, who resigned from the LSU Board of Trustees, was also recorded. Adventist Today has received what appears to be an accurate copy of that entire recording which is in the hands of General Conference officials. We understand that there are other copies in existence.

Adventist Today is currently having that recording transcribed into text to be able to evaluate in detail the statements of the GC and Union Conference officials and former LSU administrators, faculty, and board member to determine the substance of what could have required their resignations.

As soon as the transcription of the text is completed, Adventist Today will make a determination of how to report on the GC and Union conference officials' statements.

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From La Sierra University campus-wide email distribution
Sunday, June 12, 2011

The president and the provost of La Sierra University regret to announce the resignations of four members of our university family.

On Friday, June 10, Board Chair Ricardo Graham requested the resignations of Dr. Jeff Kaatz from his position as Vice President for University Advancement, Dr. Jim Beach from his position as Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, Dr. Gary Bradley from his part-time faculty position in the Biology Department, and Mr. Lenny Darnell from the Board of Trustees.

These resignations have been accepted and are effective immediately. Campus administration is unable, at this time, to offer any additional details regarding the decisions of these individuals. Further information will be made available as appropriate.

We invite you to keep our campus in your prayers as we move through this difficult time for the university.

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Monday, June 13, 2011

Last night you received notification of the resignations of four campus leaders. Already we have heard reports of a great deal of speculation taking place on campus and on the internet.

Please understand these resignations have no connection to the biology controversy. There is also no connection with students.

La Sierra University’s President and Provost learned of the situation Friday afternoon. Since then, the administration continues to deal with the matter fully in accordance with internal University policies and our commitments as a Seventh-day Adventist University.

Further information will be made available as appropriate.

University administration requests that as you speak with students, you communicate the above information. Please note, too, that university policies are being carefully followed. The university is committed to ensuring that students have a successful final week and an outstanding graduation weekend.

We encourage each of you to keep our campus family and our students in your prayers.

Larry Becker
La Sierra University  |  Executive Director, University Relations
Opinion - La Sierra Debacle

Submitted Jun 15, 2011
By Elwin Dunn

The recent events surrounding the La Sierra University debacle make me appalled and ashamed to be associated with some in the Church who call themselves Christians.

In recent years, a group of religious zealots, in both leadership and membership roles, have sought to lay claim to purity and understanding of the early chapters of Genesis - so much so, that anyone with a differing understanding of these very same scriptures has been told to renounce his or her membership in, and get out of, the church our forefathers founded.

One of the Church's Universities, La Sierra University, has been particularly taken to task because some members of its faculty have been guilty of doing exactly what a university is supposed to do, namely, teaching students to learn how to think.

Based on both their website, "Educate Truth", and their comments in numerous blogs, those associated with this perspective see themselves as the only owners of knowledge and truth in our church. Inasmuch as they, along with others, have a Biblical belief system which is enunciated as "the Bible says it, I believe it, the matter is closed" view, totally removing the question of differing understandings of the same material by others.

Their view of church membership is akin to the wearing of a school uniform. Doing so is a declarative statement of belonging to a specific group and belief system. If you don't wear the uniform in the prescribed manner, you can no longer be part of that group.

I have had the opportunity to serve in numerous capacities over the past 40 years which include the Executive Committees of both the Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, as well as the on the Executive Committee of the North American Division of SDA. Over the years, I have served under leaders who were varied from strongly authoritative to will-of-the wisp, to consensus builders.

I have no inside knowledge of specific events, save as have been made public, on what is, or what has happened at La Sierra University. However, I am appalled at the manner in which the issues surrounding La Sierra's stated shortcomings have been dealt with.

University Administration has allowed itself to be manipulated by a small group of individuals to the extent that finally the University President and Board of Trustees Chair issue a statement which satisfies no one and uses data which clearly is valueless as a basis for their decisions.

Just days ago, with great publicity, but totally without explanation and a week before the end of the current school year, resignations are demanded from four University administrators. Based on unsubstantiated information leakage, this was done based on information found on a privately recorded tape being used without due process.

Leadership has a duty to all its constituents: In this case, the church and its supporting membership, academia and all it represents, and even more so, to the specific individuals involved. The decisions made and taken may have been the only ones thought to be viable by Administration/the Board of Trustees. Only with full transparency and passing of time will one be able to judge this.

What clearly has not been part of the process is transparency.

Elwin Dunn is a retired surgeon. He has served multiple terms on the Southeastern California Conference of SDA Executive Committee and one term on the North American Division of SDA Executive Committee. He has also served as Chair of Adventist Today Foundation.
WWJD and (unfortunately) Politicized Issues

Submitted Jun 10, 2011
By Cindy Tutsch

WWJD = What Would Jesus Do

Last weekend my 92 year- old dad and I attended his high school alumni reunion in the little ranching community of Ritzville, Washington. It’s been 73 years since he graduated, and he and his buddy Chet were the only ones there from his class of 1938. Incidentally, when one of his friends said, “Wow, Adolph, you look really good! You must have great genes,” my vegetarian and exercising dad spoke right up and said, “Actually, I don’t have great genes. Both of my parents died of heart disease when they were only 71 years old. My longevity is due to my lifestyle choices.” (Including, I might add, his choice to love and serve God.)

My dad’s parents emigrated from Bessarabia. Many Germans had been invited by Catherine the Great to settle in Russia and farm. My industrious forefathers and mothers were among those who were given land to cultivate. Ultimately, my grandparents immigrated to the U.S. and ended up with many other German-speaking families in eastern Washington State. My dad spoke German until he went to school. All through school, he attended a German-speaking church. Before he went to college, he was hired at the local hardware store because he was bilingual, and many of the store’s clients still spoke only German.

I married an Austrian—he was a Fulbright Exchange German teacher at PUC. So maybe my family history colors my thinking about immigration. But I have to say, all these anti-immigration emails and blogs and talking heads seem really elitist and OK, downright selfish to me. Unless you’re Native American, you or your not-so-distant ancestors immigrated to the United States. But now some of you want to close or drastically tighten our borders?? (Don’t get me wrong—I’m all for vetting potential immigrants in an effort to keep out the drug czars, gang kingpins, and terrorists. It’s the attitude of “We don’t want people coming in who don’t share my religion, my language, and my color, that ruffles my feathers.”)

Now, I’m not getting all political here. Please, save a tree and don’t write me a letter telling me what Ellen White says about getting involved in politics. As a matter of fact, I do happen to know what EGW says about politics, and I agree. (I am actually a registered independent, and when I vote, it’s on the basis of issues, not party).

What I’m concerned about here is not politics, it’s compassion…grace…caring…love. It’s hard for me to comprehend the mentality of a Christian who says, “I don’t want one penny of the money I worked hard for to go to provide health or educational benefits for someone who may not have worked hard like I have.”

First of all, the person some of you accuse of not working hard may in reality have worked very hard to overcome challenges some of us have never faced. But what if indeed some potential health care recipients have not worked as hard as you have? Do you really want to say, “I don’t want them to have health care, because I don’t think they deserve it?”

If Jesus had said, “I don’t want one drop of my holy blood to be given for someone undeserving,” we’d all be without hope and without life, present or eternal. We are all in the same boat, the sinners’ boat, and without the wonderful grace of our Lord, not one of us would have a chance. We don’t deserve a chance to live forever. Jesus offers us salvation, not because of what we have done, where we were born, how hard we have worked, the color of our skin or the language that we speak, but simply because of GRACE. Is there a lesson here, an example, about our attitudes toward those for whom Christ also died?

Commenting on the story of the Prodigal Son, The Interpreter’s Bible states, ‘the elder brother ‘is sometimes an officer in the church, a leader in reform groups, a ‘key citizen. He thinks, or wills to think, that all other races are ‘inferior.’ A man out of work is simply unemployable: ‘I was always able to find work, and always worked hard. A prodigal like the younger son is just a wastrel.‘ I had never thought of the elder brother as being non-inclusive or elitist or caught up in ‘works righteousness’ in this sense, and I found it insightful for the present debates.

Maybe we would be less intolerant if we had personally experienced the pain of being without health coverage or without educational opportunities. Having traveled in many developing countries, I increasingly realize how much we in industrialized, Western nations have. Some stats indicate, for instance, that just 12 countries hold 80% of the wealth of the world. Others indicate that more than two thirds of the world population lives on less than the equivalent of $2 a day. So it seems to me that we should be a little less “me, me, me”— and a little more in the sharing mode, particularly when there are hundreds of references in Scriptures to care for the poor, the marginalized, those who have the least in society.

I’m also perplexed by all the shrieking that making health care available to millions who were formerly without health benefits would be tantamount to a government takeover. My brother Dave reminded me that is pretty much how some folks talked when a guy named Lincoln suggested that slaves deserved the “government handout” of freedom and equality! After all, the corporations that made up the South had lots of cheap labor to lose. Thus, they obfuscated the issues precisely as many business giants are doing today, hiding their supremely selfish goals behind the language of heaven and patriotism.

No wonder it’s so hard to effect real social change; just ask Isaiah and a few other luminaries from the past. And clearly, the closer we get to fairness and justice for all, the more some folks with the biggest “plantations” run wild, squawking up a cacophony of vapid proclamations designed for only one thing, to terrorize the American people into embracing the shameful status quo, all the while preening themselves that indeed they “saved” the republic.

“Justice is driven back …and truth stumbles in the public square” and what are we as Adventists doing about it?

“According to my friends in other countries, snobbery is not exclusively an American vice. The yawning gap between rich and poor is getting wider in many countries besides the U.S. and immigration is a hot topic around the world.”
One of the joys of my job as a university teacher is that I get to see young people finding and making their way in the world. Sometimes I am part of that journey, and sometimes I just smile from afar as students plan how they might use their skills in creative and satisfying ways. As I compare their options and the resulting ventures with the same set of decisions that young people were making when I was an undergraduate, two things, both of which give me great joy, strike me. First, young people are much more creative than they were 20 years ago about what they might spend their lives doing. Second, greater gender equality has resulted in a conspicuous benefit to our church as well as the communities in which we live—and not just in the most obvious way.

The first development, more creativity and breadth of vision, has meant that the most ambitious students are not settling merely for preparing for the holy triad of law, business and medical school. In the early 90s when I was a college student, smart students rarely thought outside the box. Now students are considering a greater variety of graduate school programs such as work in public policy, outdoor leadership or agricultural planning. And the work they are doing directly after completing their bachelor’s degrees is equally adventurous—starting their own non-profits, working in Hollywood, helping shape city development in sustainable ways through their own businesses, and myriad different forms of social work.

These students are not afraid to build on their experiences and relationships from high school and university to develop entrepreneurial communities. They are braver about making connections with members of the community outside their own social circles. They jump feet first into civic society and are very skilled at turning volunteering into job experience as well as a way to identify with whatever community in which they live. Those of us who grew up going to denominational undergraduate schools often found this challenging 20 or 30 years ago. We were nervous about forming friendships and employment relationships with people outside our comfort zone. Today’s university students are much more savvy about this—and the Kingdom of God is being celebrated and strengthened in entirely new spaces.

The second development, greater gender equality, is even more exciting. Not only are the talents and energy of young women much more available to church, businesses, and the community now, but equality has also freed up young men to use their gifts in brave and interesting ways. For instance, when I was a university student, there was pretty constant consternation among church leaders that the “best and the brightest” in our church were no longer going into the pastoral ministry. By this, of course, they meant the smart young men weren’t becoming pastors. Allowing women into the pastoral ministry and giving them paying jobs released an entirely new pool of talent into our church, alongside the concomitant participation of skilled women in the business and non-profit world.

But that’s not all. Almost every school year I speak to young men who have creative ideas about ministry or service or non-profit work who have been freed up to explore these arenas because of their highly employable wives. They tell me that because their wives are earning such good money, they are free to work part-time at innovative ministries that the church is excited about, but can’t fully fund. Many women have worked in this way through the last century—volunteering for exciting ministries because their husbands supported them financially. Now men can do the same, and we are constantly seeing new and effective initiatives released by the economics of this move towards equality. This equality means that we are looking more at where the skills are that we need with less pressure to fulfill stereotypical gender roles.

Equality in childcare, with men and women both considering the care of their children something to be prioritized, has resulted in stronger families, and more flexibility regarding who does what in our society and church. We are more free to work in the areas of our talents when the scope for who does-what-and-how-much-they-are-paid is widened. Both the young men and the young women in my classroom are considering diversity in the ways they think they’ll balance family and work and volunteering responsibilities. Employers and work spaces are becoming more open to job-sharing and children in the workplace, so that both parents can work less and spend more time with their kids. We all benefit from this.

We benefit as well from the fact that these students know they are going to have to make do with less. Unlike their parents (and my generation), they are consciously living small—choosing smaller homes, sharing resources, buying fewer material positions. They are more mobile. Some of them are even re-thinking the traditional debt-laden ways of constructing their lives. Why not live more in community—a married couple sharing a home with a single person, or a group of people sharing a house or vehicles? They know choices will be hard (though probably not how hard), but sharing financial and domestic arrangements between men and women, and couples and families and singles, releases more time and energy for the Kingdom.

I am often accused of being a Pollyanna. It is not an appellation I reject, and so I understand others in my same situation might have a different view of “young people nowadays.” I work with a rarified group of students. I get to see them at an exciting time of their lives. Human nature has not changed, and so none of these students is any more capable of good or evil than my own generation. However, these developments in our church and society mean there is much to celebrate. The parents and communities and teachers that nurtured these young people can be proud of them. My students keep me optimistic. And even as they are stressed about finding jobs they like and paying off their student loans or getting into grad school, they are also much freer to find a variety of paths to that kind of Kingdom-breathed satisfaction, which is all their parents and mentors really want for them.
Walls of Tradition

Submitted Jun 14, 2011
By Don Watson

We've all got them. Walls of tradition, I mean. And they're made up of foundation stones, bricks, and sometimes mortar. And those stones and bricks are all the doctrines, philosophies, beliefs and practices that are important to us. They are the beliefs and doctrines that define who we think God is or isn't, and how He operates or doesn't. They probably reveal who we think we are as well, and what our relationship with all the beings in this universe looks like. The presence of mortar or lack of it probably reveals how we set we are in those beliefs or how open we might be to change them.

Like I said, we all have our list, our wall. However, we like to think that this wall of stones, bricks, and mortar isn't our wall at all – it's God's wall (Or some superior standard of wisdom and morality). And these things aren't so much traditions as they are principles from God's Word. We have a tendency to think that if it's a tradition, it isn't from God, but human in origin. Few of us feel that our wall is just "our wall." We believe the bricks and stones came from God's rock pile – not ours. But isn't it true that this wall of beliefs, doctrines, and practices is our human perception of what God wants us to believe or do? That someone else can read the exact same words and come up with a belief that is opposite ours? I don't mean to imply that anyone's relationship with God and His Holy Spirit is faulty, but isn't it true that sincere, Godly people from many different churches and denominations have gone to God's rock pile, asking, even begging, the Holy Spirit to show them the "right" rocks and stones (And I've found the same thing to be true of people in the fields of science, philosophy or non-religion) yet no one's wall is exactly the same. It just seems that regardless of the sincerity or intelligence of great scholars or great men and women of God, there is still a human element to these walls of ours? They are still our human perception of what life is about, our human perception of what God wants us to understand about Him?

So for the sake of our discussion, could we simply understand "tradition" to be any belief or practice any of us have, whether it came from God's Word, a philosophy book, Mom or Dad, or the Mail Man. It is our wall, our house; it is the structure of our mind. It is personal, but it can be corporate as well. It can be the wall of beliefs and practices of your business, your church, your denomination, your Kiwanis, your neighborhood owner's association, or your family. It is not bad, it is not good, it just is what it is – your wall, your tradition. It is what you believe.

Now, since none of us are going to agree on anything, it only makes sense that we address the mortar thing first. A lot of people in the past have been less than tolerant in accepting the beliefs of others. We Christians are certainly no exception. We may not burn dissidents at the stake any longer but we are still not as reflecting the unconditional love and acceptance of Jesus, our founder. Even though it boasts of being open minded, science has had its moments of intolerance and persecution as well – not only in the past but it still struggles with the idea of "academic freedom." (See Ben Stein's documentary, Expelled.) For Christians I would remind us that the religious people of Jesus had a doctrine of what the role the Messiah would be when He arrived, but it did not match with God’s doctrine of the Messiah. These were God's "Remnant," "Chosen" people. They were not rejected as a nation because their doctrine was wrong or their wall was imperfect. They were rejected because that brick, that stone, in their wall was mortared, cemented, and immovable. They compared everybody to their wall of tradition. If your wall didn’t match their wall, you were rejected. So Jesus comes along – God comes along – and offers to replace their brick with His. The Holy Spirit over and over speaks to their hearts, convincing them that every miracle of Jesus was from God, every word that He spoke was from God. But it didn’t look like the brick they had in their wall. So they rejected God’s Messiah, because it didn’t look like their Messiah. In fact, even when Jesus cast out demons to declare His divinity, they decided that He was casting them out by the devil. What more was left for God? God was left with a wall of tradition, and they claimed it’s the devil instead of God, the one who is in control. So if you don’t recognize Jesus as THE Cornerstone to God's entire Kingdom. Please understand, folks, we’re not

By Don Watson
Traditional Off-Ramp

Submitted Jun 15, 2011
By Preston Foster

Recently, an invitation made to evangelist T.D. Jakes to speak at the annual (Regional Adventist) Pastoral and Evangelism Conference (P&EC) was withdrawn. The withdrawal was the result of pressure, including an anti-Jakes web campaign and a petition, to disinvite Jakes.

Although the P&EC has, for decades, featured preachers of other faiths (the term “non-Adventist” is both myopic and insulting to me and, of more importance, to others), it seems the high profile of Bishop Jakes -- including the worldwide reach of his ministry, posed a particular threat to these conservative laypeople. What specifically seemed to rile the Jakes detractors was a video excerpt of Mr. Jakes speaking about the Sabbath and 7th Day Adventists.

The video shows Bishop Jakes respectfully stating -- from his pulpit in his church, that, although he knows the Sabbath is Saturday, he feels no obligation to keep a particular day holy. Jakes states that he would never posit his view on the Sabbath as a doctrine. It is simply, his belief and his interpretation of the New Testament. Of course, if Jakes agreed with the Adventist position on the Sabbath, he would likely be an Adventist.

The video, presumably edited by the anti-Jakes cabal, includes ominous background music, framing Jakes’ words as a threat to Adventism.

On the continuum of Adventist types, I am a traditionalist (some prefer “historical Adventist”). I believe the literal 6-day creation narrative, that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, the 7th day is God’s ordained Sabbath, we are saved by grace (not works), and that it was finished at the cross. I also believe the Great Controversy narrative and interpretation of the final days as described in Revelation. Although it is easy to find many far more conservative than me, I have spent a considerable amount of time in this space, defending traditional positions.

However, this is where I take the off-ramp from the traditional position. The inconsistent, exclusive position of these conservatives threatens to park Adventism in “Cultland.”

The anti-Jakes tribe has positioned themselves as protectors of the (Adventist) faith. Their video intermingles out-of-context quotes from Ellen White, and the Bible to make their point -- which seems to be that Adventists have no business listening to “non-Adventists” in Adventist settings. Their argument hinges on a narrow interpretation of Isaiah 8:20, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, [it is] because [there is] no light in them.”

The not-so-subtle implication is that Adventist ministers are the only Christians who preach according to the “law and the testimony.”

http://www.keepnotsilent.com/Home.aspx

This concern would seem legitimate had Jakes or any other 17 prior “1st day” ministers mounted the P&EC pulpit to advocate the sacredness of Sunday, to make a case against Adventism, or to make some other challenge to our doctrines. That is not so. I have attended the keynote addresses of at least three P&ECs. The guest speakers, all of other Protestant Christian denominations, spoke about Christ, the gospel, and the gift of grace. They spoke of the common ground within the body of Christ. All received loud “Amens” during their sermons and standing ovations at the conclusion. Preachers with enough stature to be invited to the P&EC are sophisticated enough to know their audience and mannered enough not to insult them. They have also demonstrated a unique ability to deliver the “good news.” Jakes, very likely, would have followed suit.

Still, those who stirred up this cause célèbre assume, somehow, that Jakes’ presence at the P&EC would influence pastors to question or abandon Adventism. If our pastors are that easily swayed, we are in trouble anyway.

If we were to be consistent with the position of the defenders of the faith, we would stop singing about 90% of the hymns in the Adventist hymnal, including “Amazing Grace.” “Marching to Zion,” and all Fanny J. Crosby standards, as none of those composers were Adventists in good and regular standing. They were, simply, Christians -- part of the body of Christ.

More to the point, none of these defenders of the faith cited any problems with Adventist preachers being featured in other Protestant or non-denominational settings like the Martin Luther King Board of Preachers (at Morehouse University), TBN, or other prestigious venues. In short, we are good enough for them, but they are not good enough for us. The arrogance of this position is lost on the defenders since they comfortably accept the notion that full set of the remnant is composed of Adventists.

The myopic, exclusionary interpretation of the word (“remnant”) limits Adventist evangelistic efforts -- and creates an easily challenged theological interpretation of the word. Why should someone listen to you when you’ve made it clear that you believe what they have to say is not worth hearing?

Clearly, we should not lend our pulpits to those whose agenda is to undercut our doctrines from that pulpit. This was not the case with Bishop Jakes.
Rivka Galchen’s article “Dream Machine” (THE NEW YORKER, May 2, 2011) takes the reader into the world of quantum computing via the work of David Deutsch, the man she terms “the founding father of quantum computing.” It was not quantum computing that caught my attention. I was more interested in the author’s foray into quantum mechanics.

Galchen’s article is not my first venture into the “new” physics and each reading has been a fascinating and mind-expanding endeavor. I am not a scientist! Despite this lack, I find it of interest to consider the theories that arise from a science that disrupts Newtonian physics and ponder implications these theories may assist those of us who are puzzled by biblical mysteries. Examples: How does one explain angels? Scripture writers report an angel’s sudden appearance, sent from heaven to earth at their, or others, pleasure. Daniel prays and in a matter of minutes an angel is sent to assist his understanding of a complex matter. Gideon prepares a meal for an angel of God. The angel sets the meal afire and ascends up in the flames. After Resurrection, Jesus is not limited by matter, he can enter locked rooms. He ascends in a cloud into heaven. Care to calculate the time to reach the first known heavenly planet via an ascending mist?

Physicists ponder multi-dimensions, multiple and parallel universes, strings, worm holes, and other esoteric matters that once would have been considered the product of an over-active imagination. If a theologian, rather than a scientist, proposed the Many Worlds Interpretation it is doubtful colleagues would applaud. In contrast, a number of high-powered scientists, including Deutsch, affirm the Many Worlds theory.

Quantum mechanics, like theology, advocates absurdities. Examples: particles can be in two places at once. Physicists call this quality superposition. Two particles can be entangled to the extent that they can instantly coordinate their properties, regardless of their distance in space and time. The particles can instantly communicate, regardless of the distance. They share information that an observer cannot perceive is there. If we look at the particles we will alter them. When applied to a quantum computer, it is possible to input information into the computer that is then dispersed among the entangled qubits, thus allowing the processing of that information to be spread out as well. (A qubit is like a bit in a regular computer, and like a bit it can be zero or one, but a qubit can also be zero and one, at the same time! It can hold more information than a bit.) Input into a quantum computer can be spread among entangled qubits, which lets the processing of that information be spread out as well. The information that a particle is given will be instantly spread among all the other particles with which it is entangled. (If you wish examples of “absurdities,” i.e. contrary to all reason, we find in theology, think Trinity. Incarnation. Resurrection. God’s omnipresence. The list can be expanded, but these listed may be sufficient to document the point that many of the accounts we find in scripture cannot be reconciled with Newtonian physics.) Quantum mechanics may offer a viable alternative.

In 1957 Hugh Everett published his, The Many Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics. He proposed that “every time there is more than one possible outcome, all of them occur. So if a radioactive atom might or might not decay at any given second, it both does and doesn’t; in one universe it does, and in another it doesn’t.” There is more. The possibilities ripple out until everything that is possible in fact is possible. The many Worlds theory proposes that, instead of a single history there are innumerable branching. In one universe your cat has died, in another the cat is alive, in the
third universe, you died in an accident at age seven and never had a cat in the first place, and so it
goes. In this scenario, the Many Worlds Interpretation, according to Deutsch, “the quantum theory
of parallel universes in not the problem—it is the solution...it is the explanation—the only one that is
tenable—of a remarkable and counterintuitive reality.”

The theories proposed by quantum mechanics are not theology. They do, however, hold possibilities
for thought. Do angels inhabit a parallel universe and participate in a multiple dimension? Angels are
unseen and seen. Do they slip from their universe into ours? The parallel universe theory holds that
the state of being might be different or opposite in one universe than in another. How might this
theory add to our understanding of resurrection, immortality or heaven? Does the theory that there is
instantaneous communication between entangled particles have anything to teach us about how
prayer might function? When we abide (entangle) with God, what might the implications be? The
qubit is at the same time negative and positive. And the Christian faith posits that Jesus is at once
human and divine; that the Trinity is three in one.

It is not my intent to employ a set of equations or scientific theories to verify scripture. I do find it
fascinating to consider the theories and findings from those who seek to understand and explain the
mysteries of our complex and wondrous universe and ponder how the information may relate to
biblical conundrums. Telescopes take us to the far reaches of space. Why is there no evidence of
heaven’s place? Add the option of parallel universes and the possibilities multiply.

Paul well said, “We see through a glass darkly.” The Light, however, still shines.
theology that others have such a hard time comprehending. It might even have something to say about creation and the misunderstandings about it. God is so great and mighty, we know only a small portion of His universe and its workings. Yet human science believes it has all the answers in their search for "certainty" and the arrogant belief they shall find it. I have a collection of books on the subject which I occasionally take down and a few of the CDs for the university series. I also took a course about five years ago called "Quantum mechanics for poets." It didn't deal with the math much, but I learned a good bit about the possibilities. Thanks for helping us think outside the "glass."
Adventures in Popular Culture: Veronica Mars and God’s Good Pleasure

Submitted Jun 13, 2011
By Tanya R. Cochran

One of my favorite, cut-short-too-soon television series is the teen detective show *Veronica Mars* (2004-2007). A fatality of low ratings and the Writers Guild of America strike (2007-2008), the series ended after only three seasons on the UPN/CW networks. And it didn’t close with a particularly satisfying ending, according to many, many fans. Too many loose ends. A season but not a series finale. In a chapter for *Investigating Veronica Mars* (McFarland, 2010), I talk about the fan response to the series’ demise and why that response is noteworthy. Here I extend a small part of that discussion to focus on some important ideas raised by the show. I speak specifically to you *Adventist Today* readers who understand how the texts of popular culture (from any time period) can inspire spiritual thinking, thinking that can, in turn, catalyze spiritual acts.

[SPOILER ALERT: If you have not watched *Veronica Mars* and plan to do so, you may wish to read this commentary at another time as I share specific plot details.]

In the very first episode of the series, we learn that Veronica has had a tough couple of years. She tells us so herself—in voiceover. Her best friend Meg has been murdered by a killer who has never been found. Veronica’s mom has walked out on her and her dad Keith. Once the local sheriff but now a private investigator (because he failed to solve Meg’s case), Keith is doing his best to make ends meet, raise and support his daughter, survive the loneliness of his wife’s abandonment, and face the small-town social and political pressures of the powerful elite. Later in the episode, Veronica gets even more personal. With matter-of-factness (and a strong hint of cynicism), she tells us, “You wanna know how I lost virginity? So do I.” We then see in snippets of foggy flashback only what Veronica herself remembers from the night she crashed a raucous high school party at classmate Shelly Pomeroy’s mansion. Her best guess: someone drugged her drink. The image of 16-year-old Veronica—still in her white sundress with golden curls cascading over her shoulders—waking up in someone’s else bed, her underclothing crumpled on the floor, is poignant. Tears stream down her cheeks. In a very terrifying way, her mind has been made up for her. No one asked her permission. No one considered her will.

Over the course of three seasons, loss of innocence becomes a central theme on *Veronica Mars*. However, the teen heroine channels her fears and anxieties—usually masked by anger—into a justice quest as she pursues what exactly happened to her the night of Shelley’s party and, more importantly, who violated her. This pursuit simultaneously toughens her up and deepens her compassion for others—especially the “othered” others. As a rape survivor, it also makes sense that Veronica’s teen sleuthing (she follows in her P.I. father’s footsteps, sometimes to his dismay) often involves the plight of other wronged young women. Even when she graduates high school and starts college in Season Three, the story arch involves an unsolved series of sexual assaults on her university campus.

I know. The storylines sound dark, disturbing, and too adult for a teenage girl and her mostly teen audience. They are. Yet they are also compelling and thought-provoking, mostly because Veronica never allows victimhood to define her. The various cases Veronica takes on and the narrative threads that run through the seasons always point viewers toward empathy and choice. Toward hope. Not only does Veronica’s life go on after that fateful high school party, but also Veronica solves mystery after mystery, defends victim after victim. She makes peace with her mother’s absence. Her
relationship with her dad, though tested, grows deeper and deeper. She grieves her losses and creates new opportunities for herself. In “Life on Mars,” Jim McDermott explains that Veronica Mars teaches us a meaningful lesson, the lesson that “with suffering comes empathy and new, unexpected possibilities.” McDermott provides several examples:

When the Latino gang members at [Veronica’s high] school bind an African-American student [Wallace] naked to a flagpole with duct tape, only Veronica moves to help him. He in turn will reach out to her and become her first reliable friend. In another episode the rich kid Caitlin Ford . . . treats Veronica with that strange combination of vacuity and disdain one only experiences in high school. But when Caitlin is herself suddenly rejected by the in-crowd, Veronica looks on with pity.

As a wise-beyond-her-years student once told me, “I don’t think God causes our pain, but I also don’t think God wastes it.” I couldn’t agree more. Though I can’t speak for you readers, I can speak for myself: I need that lesson in empathy. Though we live in a broken world, though sometimes we are made victims because of other people’s choices, though we suffer—something beautiful and amazing and redemptive can arise out of our pain: a new friend, a richer understanding of God’s love, a fresh start.

I also need the reminder that I have the power of choice, that I have been given a will. In fact, according to one wise woman, “Everything depends on the right action of the will” (White, Steps to Christ). Noting television’s trend toward eschatology via natural disaster, alien invasion, or spiritual depravity, McDermott draws on The Truce of God by Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams to caution readers that “catastrophe fantasies . . . tend to absolve us of responsibility for our situation. Something outside of and far more powerful than ourselves causes a disaster; our responses (often violent) are justified by the extraordinary circumstances.” Certainly, the catastrophes need not be asteroids, aliens, or paranormal activity. We humans have a knack for unhealthy, even destructive, hyperbole. For instance, look at the United States’ political arena. Americans use terms such as Nazi and Anti-Christ to talk about politicians!

The problem with these self-created and self-perpetuating hyperboles of everyday life—in entertainment, in politics, and, yes, in religion—is that we can quickly lead ourselves into the valley of the shadow of death, the one where we do fear evil and we are helpless as well as blameless. As McDermott puts it, “Portraying us as both powerless and innocent, these stories encourage fatalism and ‘impenitence,’ an unwillingness to consider our own part in the sinful world in which we live, indeed an unwillingness to see the world as sinful. Something [or someone] ‘out there’ is causing our troubles; it’s not our fault.” Veronica Mars, he says, embraces the very opposite notion. And so should we.

In church last Sabbath, my friend and colleague Mike Mennard shared insight into the parable of the sheep and the goats, one of the few stories wherein Jesus directly addresses the Judgment. I really appreciate Mike’s gloss; he drew our attention to the fact that intentionality (or the right action of the will) ultimately differentiates the livestock—in other words, us. It is only with intention and, therefore, planning that one feeds and clothes those in need, visits those in prison, and comforts those who are grieving. It is only with intention and, therefore, education that one understands the meaning of and acts required to bring about biblical peace and social justice. McDermott continues, “We are not powerless, Veronica Mars tells us. Our society is built upon the choices we make. The catastrophe is the world that we have created, a reality in which some people’s wants overwhelm everyone’s needs . . . [Veronica Mars] cries out like the prophets of old . . . We must change our ways.” This line of reasoning could easily sound as if I’m advocating righteousness by works. I’m not.
Herein lies the beauty and freedom of the Gospel: Jesus is that Change in our ways. He is Love and Logos, Peace and Justice made flesh. He dwells among us and, with our permission, dwells in us. Our pain and suffering, though not the ideal, are never wasted because they produce empathy—a tiny, tiny taste of what God must feel for us to give us Jesus. In turn, our empathy should produce action. This moment between Veronica and Wallace deftly captures my point (the Neptune High students are having lunch in the quad):

WALLACE. Girl, you should hear what people say about you.
VERONICA. So then what are you doing sitting here?
WALLACE. You sat next to me.
VERONICA. This is my table.
WALLACE. And what a fine table it is. What do you suppose this is made of? Oak?
VERONICA. Look, if people are saying such awful things . . .
WALLACE. Well, I figure I've got a choice. I can either go hang out with the punks who laughed at me, took pictures of me while I was taped to that flagpole, or I can hang out with the chick who cut me down.

Thus begins one of the most notable friendships on teen television, one that makes me pause and consider: catastrophe fantasies or still waters, gods of unrest and unmerited privilege or the God of peace and unreserved equity? As strange as it may sound to some readers, Veronica Mars reminds me that "it is God who is at work in [me], both to will and to work for [God's] good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13, NASB). And that good pleasure is to love God with all that I am and love others—all others—as God has loved me.

NOTE TO READERS: This entry ends my year-long focus on Adventures in Popular Culture. I have not yet decided if I will continue with this theme or turn my attentions to other topics—Adventism and singlehood or identities or the politics of privilege or the moral imagination. My interests and lines of inquiry are far-reaching. Regardless, I hope that over the past twelve months I have stimulated your thinking and prodded you into action. In the meantime, I welcome your feedback about future musings.

1 Though I don’t have space to discuss other issues, class struggles and inequities, power and privilege play a major role in the series—another reason I enjoy Veronica Mars and consider it Quality Television.
2 In The Chronicle of Higher Education, see Sasha Abramsky’s “Look Ahead in Anger: Hyperbolic Rhetoric Threatens to Swamp Politics” and the subsequent comments for a lively discussion of this issue.
Lisa, I think that I enjoy the symbolic journey through the television series exactly because Veronica is flawed. As you say, our dark nights can actually turn us inward. But that's okay for a time, isn't it? For a time. A way of attending to the plank in our own eye, maybe? Yes, Veronica is not always other-focused. She's a teenage girl learning how life works—the ugly and the beautiful bits. And yes, she does have some trustworthy people to guide her. Another reason I like this show so much is the father-daughter relationship portrayed. Her father, though himself quite down-trodden, remains a principled man throughout the series. They have a loving and trusting and honest relationship. It is rare and very upsetting when she chooses to disobey or lie to him. She learns some powerful lessons about true love when she damages that tie to her dad. I can't say that Veronica has a faith tradition to guide her, not in the traditional Judeo-Christian sense. In many ways, her faith lies simply in truth and justice. Getting there—well, she was still working on that when the show was canceled. But that is realistic, I believe. I'm still working on that too. Certainly, I'm not making a plug for watching this series in order to explore these ideas. These same ideas are found many other places. I'm just interested in thoughts that arise out of those texts we find ourselves in the midst of. Thanks for reading and engaging. :)

It is a paradox: some people who have a devastating experience become more patient and understanding of others; while others may become withdrawn, angry and less patient with others. Who can determine why the difference? It is one's personality, or what?