This Week at *Adventist Today* Online

**Adventism’s Health Legacy to the World**: Perhaps Adventism’s greatest legacy to the world has been its education in the field of healthful living and healing. This contribution is being recognized widely for the boon it has become to humanity, especially in extending longevity.

**GODS KNOT: A Cord of 3 Strands** - by Ed Dickerson
Mighty forces today attempt to pull the denomination in very different directions, and indeed threaten to pull it apart. I submit that one factor may be related to this simple geometric arrangement of needing three points to define a line.

**Adventist Teacher Accused of Molestation**: Yet another tragic episode in an Adventist school. The loss of credibility and trust caused by predation can affect families tragically for generations into the future.

**Rock the Casbah: Rage and Rebellion Across the Islamic World**: What is really going on, right now, in the Middle East, as aged dictatorships fall to youthful protesters? You’ll be surprised by the conclusions of this review. The book was published this month in the wake of the death of Osama bin Laden.

**If you missed these articles last week** ...

**Readers Offer Frank Assessment in Survey Responses**: Results of a survey of *Adventist Today* (AT) subscribers show strong support for continuing an editorial policy that emphasizes probing material, along with coverage of Adventist history and culture.

The survey was written by Edwin A. Schwisow, AT development director, and was analyzed and tabulated by H. LeVerne Bissell, a retired professor who for many years taught survey techniques at the university level.

The results are based on responses of 300 AT readers to a survey by mail returned this past winter.

The survey posed 10 central questions, the first of which addressed what current readers of Adventist Today most enjoy in the journal.

This asked readers to indicate the type of content they prefer—of five options offered,
When the Flock Gets Fleeced: Why do devoted Christian investors so frequently fall prey to con artists who offer huge returns 'for the Lord's work'? Lawrence Downing offers some simple counsel.

Why La Sierra? Why has the La Sierra situation now moved into the arena of the Accreditation associations? Nate Schilt suggests there's something unique about La Sierra University.

Of Writers and Readers: Nathan Brown calls on us to show readers they're actually a lot smarter than television gives them credit for being.

Rise of Tea Party Adventism: Ervin Taylor suggests there is a 'Tea Party' in Adventism as vigorous as the group on Capitol Hill.

they were asked to rate them on a five-point scale.

“Our board and staff have goals and objectives, but for this ministry to grow and succeed, those proposals need to dovetail very closely with the expectations of our readers,” said Schwisow.

In his analysis, Bissell noted that respondents showed a distinct preference for content that is intellectual and controversial rather than on content that is similar to that of other church publications.

* Subscription required
Adventists and What They Mean to You

Submitted Jul 27, 2011
By Atoday News Team

THROUGH EDUCATION WE CAN MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE!

World Life Expectancy is the latest in a series of Educational Experiences developed by LeDuc Media. The Site’s purpose is to stimulate meaningful research on this important subject through leading Academic Institutions worldwide, while displaying the data in ways the less informed visitor can understand and use.

The following is excerpted from World Life Expectancy website - read more, to see what a non-Adventist says about Adventists.

It is simply an irrefutable scientific fact that the uniqueness of the Adventist population has allowed and will continue to allow the discovery of relationships between certain lifestyle behaviors, health and disease that are not easily determined from other populations. It is for this reason we decided to learn more about them and we are pleased to share some of our research with you. We think you'll be as amazed as we were when you discover where so much of what we accept as basic truth about our health comes from and who the people are that provided that information. We also believe that those who give so generously of themselves to help others deserve to be recognized for what they do and the contribution the Adventists have made to global health, over such a long period of time, makes them worthy of being singled out in this regard. We hope you agree and will join us in saluting these healthy, happy people for the contribution they've made to each of our lives.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM THE ADVENTISTS

The first major study of Adventists that benefits us today is known as the Adventist Mortality Study. It began in 1960 and consisted of 22,940 California Adventists. It entailed an intensive 5-year follow-up and a more informal 25-year follow-up. The study (1960–1965) indicated that Adventist men lived 6.2 years longer than non-Adventist men in a concurrent American Cancer Society Study and Adventist women had a 3.7-year advantage over their counterparts.

A PRODUCT OF THEIR RICH HISTORY

From the very beginning, Adventists have focused on the importance of education and healthcare in improving people's lives. They have championed the poor all over the world and were leaders in the early days of the civil rights movement here in the United States. Read more.

Elaine Nelson
2 days ago
Without reading the entire link, the last time reading on this, Adventist men did increase their life
expectancy but women showed no increase in their longevity. Raises lots of questions.

Elaine Nelson 2 days ago  Reply

Correction:

Women had no comparable increase of longevity over men who experienced approximately twice the benefit that women experienced.

You do not have sufficient permissions to post a comment.
In plane geometry, three points define a line. Any two points can be connected by straight line, but it takes three to define a line. I mention this because I have spent several columns concerning the identity and unique purpose of the Adventist movement. Mighty forces today attempt to pull the denomination in very different directions, and indeed threaten to pull it apart. I submit that one factor may be related to this simple geometric arrangement of needing three points to define a line.

It seems to me that three points also define our identity. Only one of the three great questions concerns identity directly: “Who am I?” The other two concern history, “Why am I here?”; and destiny, “Where am I going?” Considering that great questions exist concerning history and destiny, we shouldn’t be surprised that we cannot ascertain our identity.

“Why am I here?” has two conflicting answers (and of course innumerable variations). Either I am here because God created the world in six days, and placed humans in charge, or I am here because of a very long series of random events. Either I live in a world of sin and death—where death is the last enemy—because of a Great Controversy between Good and Evil, and my ancestors chose the evil side; or I live in a world where death is necessary and even beneficial because it eliminates maladaptive organisms. You can quarrel with my wording or quibble over the choice of examples, but it would be difficult to deny that these two narratives of our history lead to radically different conclusions about who we are.

Closer to home, we can believe that our denomination came into being as a fulfillment of prophecy, or through a misunderstanding of a too literal reading of an old book. I constantly see both of these positions put forth in the discussions here.

Similarly, our destiny, “Where we are going,” will differ greatly depending upon our view of our origins. And it seems to me that the great tug-of-war concerning our identity--who we are going to be right now--is a contest of where to put the third point that defines our narrative line.

From my perspective, a currently ascendant group wants to take us “Back to the Future,” to attempt to either maintain or return the Adventist movement to some (largely imaginary) earlier, more pristine state. Another large faction don’t really care much about our history, and simply want to chart a “new” course, which strangely echoes quite a few 19th century ideas and concepts.

Both approaches, however, end up with little or no sense of who we should be today, for the simple reason that one or both ends of the narrative line are anchored in thin air. The traditionalists can plot a straight line from what they see as a pristine church to where we are; enthusiasts for the ever emerging church (sorry, but I can’t think of a better term, though I don’t wish it to be considered identical to the “emerging church movement”) , can draw a straight line from where we are to where they think we will eventually emerge. But attempts to align all three are few and often futile.
Both sides view at least some portion of our church history as, shall we say, embarrassing, although they disagree over which portions. Increasingly, people are simply throwing up their hands in exasperation. Again, I see much of that echoed in Atoday discussions.

At least some of this frustration comes from a distinctly utopian approach C.S. Lewis called “chronological prejudice” on the part of both factions. That is to say, all can see the flaws in what actually is and has been done, and imagine, in hindsight, that a perfect course could have been steered, had only the benighted individuals in charge been as wise as we are, at our exalted level of development.

I submit that the only way we’re going to find a coherent identity is to locate our position on that narrative line that begins with our history, how we got here – warts and all, by the way-- and our destiny. My belief is that we are primarily a people of “present truth,” of a dynamic engagement between God’s plan of salvation and the culture where we find ourselves. This explanation lines up with our history, gives us direction for the present, and leads directly to our destiny.

This is a demanding identity, for it requires us to be continually attuned to God, and to attempt to view our current situation through the lens of salvation history. That also requires that we be continually aware of the culture in which we live. Finally, it requires us to be aware that God is drawing this world to a conclusion. As I see it, progressives and traditionalists each tacitly reject one or more of those requirements.

Until we settle these basic questions of existence, we will continue arguing past each other. And more crucially, making arguments that the world we are trying to reach doesn’t care about.

laffal 2 days ago  Reply

Why do you talk so much when you know so little? Now get ready to face me! Can you answer the questions I ask?... I am the LORD All-Powerful, but you have argued that I am wrong. Now you must answer me. Job said to the LORD: Who am I to answer you? I did speak once or twice, but never again. Then out of the storm the LORD said to Job: Face me and answer the questions I ask! Are you trying to prove that you are innocent by accusing me of injustice?... Job said: No one can oppose you, because you have the power to do what you want. You asked why I talk so much when I know so little. I have talked about things that are far beyond my understanding. You told me to listen and answer your questions. I heard about you from others; now I have seen you with my own eyes. That's why I hate myself and sit here in dust and ashes to show my sorrow. (Job 38:1.2; 40:1-6; 42:1-6 CEV)

Thanks Ed

songbird 2 days ago  Reply

Instead of concept, or hypothesis, how about further explanation? Please narrow this down some more and especially elaborate on "present truth". To Ed, who quoted abstracts from Job, what is your point? If personal, never mind.
laffal

Songbird,

The point... We oft times get caught up talking about things we're not humble enough to let the Lord show us... because we're spending to much time talking about what we really don't understand, much less know. I was told once that the most difficult person to deal with is the one who thinks they know something. The problem is that they don't realize that they don't know what they think they know. What makes them so difficult is that they have to unlearn what they think they know, to learn what they thought they knew.

Again, my point, Jesus Himself says of us, "thou sayest... but thou knowest not."

Peace

Ella M Rydzewski

I can only speak for myself, but my feeling is that we spend too much time naval gazing and analyzing ourselves as a church. It's more negative on this site as it has its share of malcontents. But should a fulfilled, mature individual or church with a purpose be so concerned with their identity? Sure, we need to recognize problems and sometimes uncover wrongdoing, but let's not forget that we are all children of God before being Adventists.

Another problem is our self-image as "the chosen ones." the Bible doesn't name the remnant. I don't think it's an organization. (I understand the word means "that which is left" and is not necessarily a term denoting quantity.) I suppose most religions feel they are something special, but ours seems to take this further. With John, we should be saying "I must decrease, but Christ must increase."

I think, it's not so much bringing together traditionalists and "progressives" as it is to respect and love one another and be open to learning from each other. None of this happens without being "attuned to God," and seeking His will in this particular society at this time.

Barry Wecker

In Gallileo's time, he was pushed outside of the church for suggesting that the geocentric concept of the solar system was incorrect despite it being the church's position. The supports of the flat earth idea supported their beliefs from Scripture that said that the earth had four corners. Today the vast majority of us accept that the earth is a sphere. Today we all accept the heliocentric explanation of the universe. The controversy between change resistance and change proponents is not new to the SDA Church. Do we really think that we have such complete knowledge of God and of the origins of the universe and of the plan of salvation that our understanding can never grow.

Yes, these ideas challenge our very understanding of Scripture and of ourselves, but the principle of 'present truth' means that our understanding evolves over time. We should not divide ourselves between progressives and non-progressives. Let's accept our diversity of understanding and
thought and accept each other as part of the very rich fabric which makes up the Seventh-day Adventist church. Unity despite diversity of opinion and understanding.

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**Martin Schrattenholzer** 2 days ago  Reply

I don't think the geometry allegory helps your argument, because you start by being patently wrong about geometry. Lines are in fact defined by two points. Given your second sentence "Any two points can be connected by straight line, but it takes three to define a line", you seem to understand this. But the last part of the sentence make no sense. Did you mean that three points define a plane. I assume you did, but a you seem think in lines rather than planes. Maybe that as the problem.

The options for beliefs are not a linear continuum but are far more multi-dimensional than your description. Ultimately we really only know about here and now. The past, which did not actually involve us, is no more knowable than is our future. This alone make you insistence on agreement impossible. But then you mention the "lens of salvation history"; a lens? How exactly is this lens supposed to operate? Aren't you arguing that we must arbitrarily agree on the history of salvation before we can truly "love" each other? If that is the case then we are certainly doomed.

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**Ella M Rydzewski** 2 days ago  Reply

Ed,

In looking at your third paragraph, I see either/or statements. I don't think the lines can be drawn that strictly. Believing that the world wasn't created in six actual days as we understand them, doesn't mean we think it is random over millions of years of death and sin. nor does it deny a Sabbath. I don't know how God created life, but I know He did. I just don't think that the primitive people of that era (of the writing) had any concept of the earth and its workings. I think they relied on stories passed on from generation to generation. This is evidenced by there being two stories of creation. That does not make them untrue in principle, but they are not based on the knowledge we have today. Yes, we are living the drama of a great controversy between good and evil. And yes the first death is necessary in a sinful world, or the world would have run out of space a long time ago. It is the second death that is the wages of sin and which Christ died for all who do not reject Him and His Holy Spirit.

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**Ymous** 1 day ago  Reply

History is as unknowable as the future? Really? Then should we do away with all "supposed" history? That's pretty scary.

Agreed that history AS IT HAPPENED is unknowable to human beings, in that it includes not only everything ever done, said, or thought by God, angels, human beings, or anyone else, but also everything else that ever happened, whether seen or unseen, known or unknown by any intelligent being (other than God).

History AS WE KNOW IT involves a great deal of intended or unintended selection of events, and,
more problematic, the interpretation of those events and their relationship to each other.

It is true that selection and interpretation of events that happened create problems for KNOWING history. But is it entirely "unknowable?" I hope not. Otherwise there would never be any way to understand anything about cause/effect relationships. Could one know that a cobra bite is highly likely to be fatal without "unknowable???" history?

Isn't history very important to understanding possible and probable consequences of present or future actions? According to the Bible, what happened in the past was recorded for our learning.

While it may be true that history never repeats itself entirely, isn't there at least some truth to the saying that those who fail to learn the lessons of history are likely to repeat it? That can be veryy good. It can also be very bad.

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**Thomas "Vastergotland"**

1 day ago

Could we not all agree to anchor the historical end of this line in the close neighborhood of Jerusalem some 2000 years ago? That might prove a more solid foundation to build agreement upon than the more recent dates mentioned in the article.

**Elaine Nelson**

1 day ago

Thomas,

Good idea. But then there would be no Seventh-day Adventist church, on the beginning of Christianity. So, if we all were "Christians" rather than very discordant groups all claiming to be the "one true church" we could stop fighting over our differences and focus on our many mutual beliefs.

**Ron Corson**

1 day ago

Ed wrote:
"My belief is that we are primarily a people of “present truth,” of a dynamic engagement between God’s plan of salvation and the culture where we find ourselves."

The problem is that present truth is really just a propaganda term, it has no real meaning but Adventists keep using it because it sounds so good to them sort of like the communist who uses the term "social justice" and the atheists or religious traditionalist who uses the term. They don't define it so it means whatever they want it to mean, they can't define of they find it does not mean what they want it to mean. And we Adventists have our own special term present truth, though like social justice it is used by others also, we just ignore it. See the article Defining and Redefining Present Truth
In the early history of the church, "present truth" referred especially and primarily to observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. Is that still "present truth?"
Adventist Teacher Accused of Molestation

Napa Patch - July 26, 2011

Mike Copithorne, 36, has been charged with three counts of lewd acts and one count of oral copulation. The victim in all four counts is under 16, according to court records.

Copithorne has been teaching for nine years at the private K-12 school Napa Christian, which is operated by the Seventh-day Adventist church, court records show.

Napa County Chief Deputy District Attorney Michael O'Reilly declined to confirm if there is more than one victim, and if the victim(s) were students at Napa Christian... Read more

There are no comments.
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In the aftermath of the 9/11 aerial attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City, the narrative emerged—especially among conservative Christians—that a preamble to Armageddon had occurred, pitting Islam against Christ in a final showdown.

In her just-released book, “Rock the Casbah” (the word Casbah or Kasbah refers to the fortified administrative center of a traditional Middle Eastern city), international journalist Robin Wright sees the 9/11 attacks as the high-water mark of a now-failed reform movement (Al Qaeda) in the Middle East, and she documents a new approach to reform based on the examples of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

Far from representing Islam as a whole, she says, Al Qaeda encapsulated a particularly virulent interpretation of “jihad,” or Holy War—a view that God required deadly force to purify Middle Eastern governments and religious practice, and that this purification process required the economic destruction of the presumed puppet-master, the United States.

The current Middle Eastern Spring is a continuation of that struggle (jihad), but without the emphasis on deadly force, she says. In fact, Muslims are well aware that during its long and deadly decade of struggle, Al Qaeda killed far more Muslims than Christians or foreigners.

The author notes that the Middle Eastern Spring is by no means an Islamic movement, nor has it pitted Christians against Muslims. The fall of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, for example, was the product of efforts entered into jointly by a host of younger people, with Muslims and Coptic Christians demonstrating at times side by side.

Adventists in particular have watched the Middle East for harbingers of the Second Coming, and would do well to read “Rock the Casbah” for an up-to-the-minute contemporary understanding of the nuances of what is currently happening there. The author particularly focuses on the rapid advances of Muslim women in the Middle East.

The book’s main points can be summarized as follows: (1) September 11, 2001, was the high-water-mark of a now discredited view that armed conflict offers the only solution for reformation in the Middle East; (2) Hard-line Islam has been extensively promoted and used by corrupt governments, as a way of holding onto power in the Middle East; (3) The current successful Reformation movement in the Middle East, while favoring Democracy, is not pro-Western but primarily pro-moderation.
"Every reliable poll since 2007 shows steadily declining support for the destructive and disruptive jihadis, even in communities where politics are partly shaped by the Arab-Israeli conflict," she writes. This fall from grace is particularly evident among Sunni Muslims, which account for more than 80 percent of the Islamic world.

"For a decade, the outside world was so preoccupied with its ‘war on terrorism’ that it gave little credence to efforts among Muslims to deal with the overlapping problems—autocratic regimes and extremist movements—that fed off each other. Extremism emerged largely to challenge autocrats in countries where the opposition was outlawed, exiled, under house arrest, or executed. And autocrats justified not opening up politically on grounds that extremists would take over.” Now, the stalemate is broken and lightning-fast chess moves are the rule.

Though secular in viewpoint, the book contains vast amounts of factual information well worth the study of anyone interested in understanding the big picture, as well as the finer nuances, of the Middle East’s continuing struggle for religious and political reform—and how Christians can best relate with the emerging realities.

There are no comments.
“You can’t lose. They have a gold mine in South America that will produce enough gold to cover any money investors put in. It’s a sure fire deal.” With these words, spoken to me by a close relative, I was introduced to yet another get-rich-scheme foisted on gullible and trusting Adventists. The principals in the venture, my relative explained, were all Adventists. One of them, a well-known musician on the camp meeting circuit, I had known since childhood. Another, an Adventist college administrator, had been my relative’s long-time friend. As the investment opportunity unfolded I asked why, if there was a gold mine, they needed our money. The clincher: they want their friends to benefit from this investment. They know when we make money the Lord’s work will benefit. I did not invest. My relative and all others who invested lost everything and the promoters went to prison for fraud. There was no gold mine.

The person who had provided special music the previous Sabbath called me with this question: “Why did you have (and he gave the name) offer prayer last Sabbath? Do you know he has taken my father and others in your congregation for hundreds of thousands of dollars?” The question caught me off guard. I did not know. I had known the individual some years before but had not seen him for more than 20 years. I explained I had no idea he was into investments.

The son gave further details. The family had attempted to discover where the money had gone but the person said he did not really know. Neither he nor the father had any records, except for canceled checks. I checked the story the son told and found it to be true. Many other Adventists had been taken in by this super pious swindler. He had a lot going for him. He was a recognized leader in the Prayer Warrior groups. He conducted prayer seminars. He could pray you under the rug and bath the his investment pitches in spiritual jargon. He told his investors he was using his God-given gifts to create wealth so he could further God’s work and urged them to follow his example. The ‘investors’ lost all of their money. He to this point has avoided the legal system. His investors are reluctant to file charges. They still have hope he may yet come through.

These examples of affinity fraud can be multiplied over and over. A smooth talker who knows the vocabulary and understands human greed, gullibility and their victims, can lead even the most astute down the primrose path and Adventist are not the only ones to walk this calamitous journey.

“Fleecing the Faithful — Again” is an article in the June 2011 Christianity Today (p. 54). Kristian Westergard, a well respected churchman, managed to entice fellow believers out of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Westergard developed close ties with people who operated well-known and respected Christian organizations. These individuals, while not promoting
Westergard’s investment schemes, provided him credibility. The investors do not expect to recover their funds.

Those who study affinity fraud report that difficult economic times, like now grips America, are a boon to unscrupulous investment promoters. People become desperate and grasp toward even the most improbable investment schemes in hope of a payoff. When it is a church member who offers the ‘can’t miss deal,’ the risk of being taken for a ride increases. Keep your ears open. Listen for statements couched in religious jargon, “I’ve felt the Lord leading.” “I really feel called to share this with God’s people.” “Think of the blessings this investment can be to the Lord’s work.” “We know we’re in the last times, it is vital that we have funds to further the Work.” When you hear these phrases, get out your running shoes and get those feet going away as fast as you can! Put up your beware flag when the person assures you of a steady return, double that beware notice if the promised return is above ordinary, and ordinary returns in today’s market are in the range of 1.5% to 3%. An assurance of 10% or more is a clue to put on those running shoes!

Demand full financial disclosure, including an audited statement and a written contract that you can show to an attorney for review.

If you do invest, do not put in any more money than you are willing or able to lose and do not tap your retirement funds to invest in a ‘can’t lose’ investment scheme. People who pull out their retirement nest egg and put it into some investment project court economic calamity. Think Bernie Madoff — itself an example of affinity fraud — if you need documentation. To those who are inclined to seek shady investment opportunities, may I interest you in a sure fire chance to double your...on second thought, under the mattress may not be such a bad idea after all.

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**Guidelines for Productive & Courteous Comments:**

- This is the writer’s court & play – no upstaging please
- Stay on topic – don’t wander off chasing butterflies
- Be brief – no more than 3 modest paragraphs – if longer, you are too windy
- We ask you to be considerate & courteous – the golden rule, remember
- Absolutely no denigrating of individuals – to err, earns banishment
- Make this a stimulating encounter & come back often

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Elaine Nelson

A very timely article. With the economy today people are being offered all sorts of "lifetime" opportunities to make big money. That's a sure sign, as you say, to get your running shoes.

Elders are often more vulnerable because they grew up in a world where a man's word was his bond and are far too trusting--especially if the "pitch" comes from a well-known church member are
prominent one.

A close relative lost several thousands in a somewhat similar scheme: someone called, claiming to be a good friend of the grandson who had been in an accident and needed money (the amount was even suggested) to pay or medical bills. This relative sent the money and of course, never heard from the person again--nor did the grandson know him.

There are so many schemes on the internet today, but while most folks know to delete them, when a "member of the Adventist Club" has a proposition too good to miss--it's best to let it pass by.

Elaine Nelson

There was no mention in this article of the greatest SDA "investment scheme" conducted by the official church: The Davenport scandal. There were many faithful, often senior members, who, based on the church affiliation with this scheme, put most, or all of their savings into this "church-blessed" endeavor--only to lose everything.

There have been others: The literature evangelism scheme in the Columbia Union to have children's videos to distribute, similar to "Veggie Tales." After several million dollars had been put into this (repeatedly the video company needed "more" to complete the project), it turned out to be a loss for the conferences involved.

Remember: when the church needs you money for such projects, like Wall St: the profits are privatized; the losses are socialized. Your tithe money reimburses the church for its inept business practices.

Not to mention Harris Mills: a profitable company until the church "took it over" and immediately ran up great losses. There are more, and someone reading this can supply more info.

Patti Grant

These two cases and more are exhaustively documented by Douglas Hackleman in his book "Who Watches? Who Cares?" Every Adventist should read this book and keep her/his running shoes handy.

Lawrence G. Downing

You're correct, Elaine, the number of fraudulent schemes perpetrated among Adventists is extensive. Unfortunate that church administrators are not free from guilt in some of these matters.

Elaine Nelson
Patti, there are several others detailing such schemes: "Fatal Accounts" "Truth Decay" come to mind. These were not allowed to be advertised at the Adventist Today Booth at the Atlanta G.C. Wonder why?

Elaine Nelson

Also, the conference "Trust Services" where "trust" means nothing. A favorite: the daughter of a faithful SDA couple who had left their home to the conference came to oversee the conference's possession of the home.

When the Trust Officer came to take possession, the daughter asked what was the house appraised at, and the officer said "$400K." Previously, the daughter had checked with local realtors and got an appraisal for $800K. She immediately said, "I will buy the house for $400K." The officer was trapped with his fallacious appraisal and she bought the house!

Randy Gerber

This sort of fraud is perpetrated on the flock far too often. While the Davenport fiasco is probably one of the most famous ones in Adventist circles, up in British Columbia about 300 church "investors" were fleeced to the tune of over $10,000,000 in what is known in these parts as the Gary Stanhiser fraud. Sometimes a former SDA Pastor still has the ability to manipulate and influence the flock. Many in my family got burned by this fraud.
Why La Sierra?

Submitted Jul 21, 2011
By Nate Schilt

I have a question? Why, among all the colleges and universities in North America, does La Sierra University (LSU) seem to be feeling heat from its accrediting bodies (Adventist Accrediting Association [AAA] and Western Association of Schools & Colleges [WASC])? Many of you understand the accrediting process and standards. I do not, so I would love your perspectives. Allow me to TENTATIVELY offer mine. I wonder if WASC really cares that much about the substance of what is taught or what the biology professors actually believe about evolution and geo/bio chronology. Isn’t the primary concern of WASC, at least on this issue, that the faculty should have control over classroom curriculum and content?

If I am correct, then we can readily understand why other Adventist universities might not be feeling the heat from their accrediting bodies. There is no palpable conflict over curriculum between science faculty and their Boards in those universities. I infer from the relative absence of conflict that biology professors at other SDA universities are doing a better job, from the Church’s perspective, of presenting the best of creation theory and science along with traditional, conservative Darwinian theory and science. Is that an unreasonable inference? The faculty at La Sierra apparently is not real enthused about doing it the way other Adventist universities do it, and, according to accreditation standards, that should be a faculty prerogative.

So as I see it, the real problem for the Church and La Sierra isn’t how biology is being taught, but the criteria by which faculty are vetted and selected. La Sierra has, over time, evolved a considerably more liberal/progressive academic culture than other universities in the Adventist system. It would be interesting for a historian to trace that process. Faculty governance, mandated by accrediting bodies, leads to inbreeding. So La Sierra has, in virtually all its departments, including the biology department, cloned liberal/progressive faculty. The Church and the Board cannot simply step in and say “Whoa, you’ve gone too far,” when constituent members rise up in protest. Like federal judges, faculty members are appointed for life, unless they violate clearly defined standards and policies, most of which have nothing to do with classroom curriculum or viewpoint advocacy.

The Humpty Dumpty of traditional Adventist orthodoxy has fallen off the wall at LSU, and at some other SDA universities he is teetering badly. I strongly suspect that putting Humpty together again must come, if it is to come at all, from inside LSU, through faculty governance, not from Board or Church action. External pressures will only serve to make changes induced thereby more suspect. In a very real sense, the faculty holds LSU hostage to faculty values and priorities. From the perspective of WASC, this is as it should be.

If faculty freely decided to teach and advocate all 28 Fundamental beliefs, would WASC have a problem with that? I doubt it. So it is not quite accurate to think that La Sierra is totally at the mercy of WASC. The responsibility, or credit, depending on how you see it, for the WASC concerns lies squarely with the faculty. The future of LSU, for better or for worse, is in the hands of its faculty, and that faculty cannot be changed to accommodate the winds of popular opinion and political power in the Church. Once all sides to the controversy clearly understand and accept this reality, options and resolutions will be much easier to perceive and implement.
Creation theory? Creation science? Oxymorons. So Nate design a set of experiments yielding data sets where we can infer from the data the existence of a God. With Dr. Greer and other faculty LSU has done the best job on presenting modern biology. The other schools are not teaching "creation science" in the classroom.

AAA is a meaningless accrediting agency. Yes, WASC wants the faculty to be able to determine the curricula and that is part of governance at SDA institutions that WASC has an ongoing problem with over the years.

You may be aware, Nate, that Walla Walla University (nee College) experienced a similar Time of Jacob's Trouble back in the late 1990s, with focus on its School of Religion.

The primary catalyst seemed to be a widely held view that prominent School of Religion teachers were leading their students away from Adventism, by allowing challenges to the faith to be openly discussed in the classroom. Furthermore, the good professors were said to be acknowledging that the Church didn't always have water-tight defenses for some of those challenges.

The then-youthful, energetic Union president, set up an investigative commission that initially created a strongly adversarial situation on campus, during a time when the college was up for re-accreditation.

It seems now that Yogi Berra has returned from the tomb all over again. If the parallels continue, the Pacific Union will at some point establish an investigative committee of conference administrators and some faculty, leading to the reassigning of some faculty and their replacement by more traditional instructors brought in from afar.
It's interesting that in the case of Walla Walla, the one theologian the union president seemed most determined to dethrone was able to sail through the process unscathed, to retire a number of years later with honors and valedictories.

Did the process work? Yes, it worked. Badly. But it worked because the composition of the investigative commission turned out to behave in a relatively balanced way, and the faculty sensed that their concerns and convictions would not be steamrolled at a rubber-stamp judgment bar.

At Walla Walla, I believe those hurt most, ultimately, were the students, some of whom lost a great deal of respect for conference workers, at times when the conference contingent behaved inexplicably poorly in public forum. The process was not necessarily flawed, but the actors failed to find a script that instilled confidence and respect in the galleries. Perhaps a more skillful board chairman could have guided the process more adroitly and avoided the cringe factor that still makes it hard for some of us to admit that, yes, we actually worked for the church during that tortured time.

It may also be of passing interest that during my years working for the North Pacific Union Conference, the PRIMARY reason given for the existence of the unions was to keep the colleges and universities on track. There is a perception that the task of keeping the colleges connected to the church is so demanding, that only an institution of supernormal political power, such as the unions, are capable to holding them to task. It's an expensive maintenance program the unions provide, but there's no doubt in my mind that this is one of the PRIMARY reasons the church is so slow to envision elimination of this layer of administration.

Doctorf Doctorf1 1 week ago Reply

Nate,

You say "If faculty freely decided to teach and advocate all 28 Fundamental beliefs, would WASC have a problem with that? I doubt it." First your naivete of WASC is astounding and you are simply wrong. WASC goes over academic courses with a fine tooth comb to make sure they are properly catalogued. Thus, as long as the fundamental beliefs are taught in a religion or theology course NOT a science course they would have no problem. If LSU tried to teach the 28 beliefs as systematized knowledge they would have a big problem with it. Furthermore, these fundamentals are taught in religion courses at LSU and LLU. But, they are religion courses. Do not think for a moment that WASC or LCME does not look at the curriculum and makes judgements as to whether a class is appropriately called science. To take the flip side if we presented a neuropharmacology course as a religion course they would question that designation. Myth topics such as creationism belong under the purview of theological/religion departments not science departments and WASC would not sign onto calling a religious topic a scientific one.

You also throw around the word proof a lot as if you were in a court of law. Science does not prove it falsifies. If a theory can explain a body of data then it is valid but if new data falls outside of being explained by a theory the science enterprise devises a new one which will explain both preceding and current data. The replacement of the oxidative theory of phosphorylation (Kornburg/Crick theory) was replaced by the chemiosmotic theory (Mitchell theory) to explain oxidative phosphorylation. New data falsified the previous theory. Such is the progressive nature of truth. Nothing is proven
absolutely in science.

Ned 1 week ago Reply

Why Nat Schilt continues to say so much about this issue when he admittedly knows so little is a source of wonderment and dismay!

T. Joe & Barbara Willey 1 week ago Reply

I agree with others here on the blog Nate...for one thing begin by reading the WASC Handbook and learn about accreditation (its on the Internet copyright free). It details the accreditation process. I've notice all along how naive you have been about certain important aspects of accreditation and this does surprise me because lawyers are known for investigation of evidence at trial so well that when they appear in court or taking of depositions they know the answers to the questions beforehand and have data to support the interrogation of witnesses.

The next thing is to go to the Internet and read the Self Study of each Adventist college in responses to put to them by the regional accreditation association. Not all are published but they reveal the depth (if available) that tells you considerable insights about each department, the choice of textbooks, instructor loads, difficulty in hiring qualified faculty, tuition issues, accounting practices, pressing administrative margins where the school needs to place greater diligence, etc. This accreditation issue is very important for the future of Adventist post-secondary education.

The "truthers" downplay regional accreditation because they do not understand the benefits or the future of Adventist education (at least that is my impression). Anyway, I don't mean to criticize, just do your homework and then write the column so we don't have to spend time back on Accredition 101. Loma Linda University has a very well-done self-study document and the depth of its educational programs prepared for WASC.

Why does LSU suffer the teaching of biology? That is a good question. In the first place if you were a biology teacher in another Adventist college or university you would feel the same heat that LSU has these past few years (maybe not every day, but often enough to recognize that poorly educated individuals cause the most trouble in the subject area). Being a biologist myself I have friends in nearly every Adventist school enjoying the friendship of some gifted intellect scientists. Nearly everyone who is on the cutting edge of biology have had to appear in the president's office or represented by the department chairman to defend the teaching of biology against some parent that is complaining...not so much from students. Typically this is how it begins. A student (let's say at Andrews) taking biology is not performing well in biology (spends too much time practicing basketball) and begins to see that his ambition to go to medicine is not likely. Maybe they are getting a C or lower average and during the Spring break come home and have to tell their parents the sad news that under current learning practices they will not make it into LLU School of Medicine or any medical school in Kansas City either. So they might tell of the pressure to cope in biology and the student complains of having to learn all that evolution which is confusing. In the academy the teacher was afraid to even mention the word so they entered college ill-prepared...you know the rest of the story. The parent calls the president of the college...the president calls over the teacher or...
department chairman...and the conversation attempts to settle down the parent and explain the role of evolution in the whole scheme of how things work in biology.

Maybe next time I can tell you more specifically why the "truthers" focused on LSU, besides the fact that the two individuals most responsible for Adventist McCarthyism live nearby. Ultimately this controversy will not be solved by WASC standards. It will take persons like you Nate trained in law (and other endeavors) with the ability to reason and use critical thinking skills and methods to step forward and provide understanding of how science works without apology or reservations. Right now Adventism has kidnapped the progressive assimilation of biological knowledge in the debate over evolution without any obligation to believe on the basis of evidence or reasons.

Cheers

tjoe

Doctorf Doctorf1

TJoe,

Thank you for illuminating the terrain to Nathan and helping him to understand what WASC and LCME really do. Nathan has some very good points but he does not understand how accreditation works. On the last LCME and WASC accreditation at LLU I sat through endless external self-study groups as they quizzed our departments about our academic standards in science and they do the same with the religion departments. Of course LCME only concerns itself with the School of Medicine but WASC deals with the entire university and all programs. Our last WASC accreditation went well because we addressed so many issues before hand such as the publication rates of our PhD and combined degree students in scholarly journals, how we follow the progress of students post degree, how we assess learning outcomes (I wrote those documents). They also went over our Basic Science Seminar topics and content as each seminar is recorded. We have some of the finest people in biomedical sciences come in once a week and discuss topics relevant to biology and medicine. We even had Rich Cardulo from UCR discussing the evolution and function of ion channels. Remarkable how those gene sequences for particular ion channels are conserved almost identically in lower and higher order animals just as evolutionary theory predicts. After looking at our seminar topics, and what we teach we were given high marks for teaching rigorous sciences. They also liked that fact that the theology department brought on a new course called "Conflicts in Religion and Science." This class is so popular that we have to run it multiple times a year! The WASC and LCME representatives were pleased that these contentious topics can be discussed in a serious and respectful way and that this type of topic belongs in a religion/theology class, not a science class. As you know there is also a whole laundry list of other issues that WASC and LCME deal with including, governance of the faculty. I know you have been through many of these also and they are exhausting and so time consuming. Thank Godddd they only happen every 7 yrs if done right. I suspect LSU will be in for a series of invasive probes by WASC given the current climate at that institution. I really feel for the faculty and administration.
Connie Severin

T. Joe,

I do find it sad that some parent would be able to influence or pressure teachers at the college level. I remember with some fondness the 70s at AU and at LLU and I must say I don't recall my parents ever discussing students' parents having input into how classes at the college and post-grad level were taught. My dad was faculty, my mom in administration, specifically working with the academic VP. She would have known if a parent were trying to get a professor sanctioned. My dad was fairly close friends with the bio teacher that prided himself on weeding out pre-med students, had done his student-teaching under him, but he never would have interceded on my behalf whilst I was taking the class. (I did, however, have to live up to the bragging he'd done previously). Neither would he or any of my professors have knuckled under pressure from any student's parent regarding material presented in any of my science classes.

I don't remember learning a lot of natural history per se, but in comparison to the science classes our kids have had at University of Hawaii and Cal Poly SLO, I think Andrews did a pretty good job. The instructors I had were always open to discussion and never came across as dogmatic or closed minded.

Now if you're talking academy teachers feeling the heat from parents... absolutely. Some of our best teachers took heat all the time for being "too difficult" and some of our worst teachers were the parents' favorites.

T. Joe & Barbara Willey

What remains troubling is that leadership back in Silver Springs is discussing why not use our own accreditation agency, namely the Adventist Accreditation Association...why have this duplicity with WASC? And you wonder at times if the same conversation takes place in the ministry leadership at LSU outside the hearing of the rotating board members that are elected (and generally not given the same respect as seen in the leadership of the different board committees). Someone in the know claims that the individual in charge of post-secondary education (all colleges and universities) in the North American Division has never had the experience of teaching in a college or university or participated in an administrative role. He has taught at the high school level, and was good at that.

Your remarks about WASC self-study at LLU remind me back in the 70s when I was a professor in the school of medicine and a group of us in science decided that we should be able to qualify for chapter status in Sigma Xi as basic scientists. We had been going to Redlands University to attend chapter meetings, why not have our own chapter at LLU. It took a year of gathering publications, seminars, attendance at scientific meetings and then writing up a proposal. They sent some of best in American science to LLU to discuss with us certain weaknesses in the proposal. They sent back the requirements and later had a pleasant celebration with the Sigma Xi president during the seating of the chapter at LLU. Standards are important for the public trust.

Observers on the side...especially individuals poking at the institution do not know the effort it takes to ramp up a university to compete with other like institutions.
It is hard to believe this, but it is apparent that the LSU Board is split. Since over 40 percent are ex officio church leaders and none of them have had experience in education administration or classroom experience in teaching, etc., no wonder WASC is attempting to reconstruct a board that does not have inherited competing dispositions against certain subjects being taught or how the teaching reaches into areas that are normally taboo to the Adventist mind. I attended an Adventist college...I still think it was a great experience and worthwhile. Then I graduated and went directly to Berkeley for further education and could compare the difference. My goodness, it would take much time to summarize the difference. But quickly. At the Adventist college I was taught to worship knowledge and at Berkeley I had to learn to question knowledge. Compared to my graduate student colleagues who attended non-sectarian colleges and universities it took me some time to learn the critical and rational thinking and questioning "game." These academic structures that require accreditation and standardization from the experience of long years should be carefully respected even if we do not understand how they work entirely. Thanks for your filling out more details about LLU and the review by WASC.

Cheers

tjoe

Don Bowen

1 week ago  Reply

The GC is located in Silver Spring, Maryland not Silver Springs.

Steve Divnick

4 days ago  Reply

Edwin, Nothing critical to add here...just that Yogi would be surprised to learn that he is in a tomb. He is still above ground and waxing eloquently.

Nathan Schilt

4 days ago  Reply

Whence all the condescending hostility? Did anyone notice my admission at the outset that I have no understanding of the accrediting process? Some of you attack me for incompetently preparing a case for courtroom presentation, as if that was my intent. Far from it! Why should I be bound by courtroom rules in offering hypothesis, making reasonable assumptions, and suggesting inferences, any more than scientists should be bound by the rules of rigorous scientific inquiry in making moral arguments?

I asked a question: "Why La Sierra?" and I presupposed, based on what has been written by many knowledgeable contributors to the Adventist blogosphere, that a high degree of faculty governance is mandated by accrediting authorities in all regions of the country. None of the experts commenting here on accreditation have disabused me of that assumption. Doctorf even concedes that predicate in his initial comment. But then he pounces to the reductio ad absurdum, without seeking clarification, that I am astoundingly naive for believing, in essence, that WASC would have no problem if biology professors wanted to include molecular macrame in the curriculum. Yes, it would be only slightly
less absurd for me to think that WASC would have no problem if the 28 Fundamental beliefs were part of the science curriculum than it would be for someone to conclude from my generalization that I actually think that.

Believe me, I appreciate all the attempts to enlighten me about accreditation. But they don't really answer my question - Why aren't other universities in the denomination feeling the heat from their accrediting bodies? The only stab offered at that question is tjoe's interesting observation that the "truthers" arbitrarily chose to pick on LSU because it was in their back yard. This would imply that evolutionary biology is similarly taught and advocated in other SDA university biology departments, but for unknown reasons hasn't appeared on the radar screens of ubiquitous fundamentalist watchdogs. Given the reputedly conservative constituencies of SDA universities in Michigan and Tennessee, I would tend to intuitively question such an argument. Hence, my suspicion that the expressed convictions of science faculty in those academic institutions, and how they teach evolutionary biology in the classroom, give more credibility and respect to critiques of popular evolutionary biology than do the convictions and methods of LSU biology professors.

If I am wrong, then it is unfortunate and cowardly that biology professors, as well as other faculty in sister, SDA universities do not raise their voices in support of their beleaguered colleagues at LSU. The words of Martin Niemoller come to mind: "First they came for the socialists..." If the LSU biology department is arbitrarily being singled out for criticism based on essentially the same curriculum and content that can be found in any other SDA university biology department, should we not be nearly as incensed at other SDA university professors for mutely watching the Inquisition of their LSU brethren as we are at the G.C. for its improper interference in matters over which it has no legal jurisdiction?

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**austudent**

As a student at another SDA university who has friends at LaSierra I have to agree with Nate's argument. I know that at least at both Andrews and Southern the evolutionary biology that is taught is done in a different manner than LaSierra. Yes there are still plenty of students who question traditional SDA views on creation and are skeptical about the "official" line, but faith in SDA beliefs ends up being both challenged and re-affirmed.

The professors, at least from my perspective were able to straddle a balance between being professional in supporting "modern science" while still affirming faith. They admitted they do not have all the answers, yet still stated that they lean towards the traditional SDA view. They admitted that geology and certain scientific finding challenge their beliefs, however these challenges need not make them give up what they believe.

One of my professors had a similar experience to Joe Willey after graduating with his Masters at LLU to do a PhD. at Kansas. He found his SDA beliefs challenged and found himself forced to think a different way. This openness in front of the students to admitting to questioning his beliefs, however, never let to the skepticism which some of my friends had to deal with among their professors at LaSierra. There is a right way and a wrong way to teach evolutionary biology in SDA universities. I believe the experiences of "the other" universities provide a model that LaSierra
Elaine Nelson 4 days ago  Reply

austudent:

If there is a "right way and a wrong way" to teach biology, shouldn't it be made available to all the SDA universities so they would be in sync? As it appears, LSU is the only that has been given so much attention and many suspect it is because the Educate Truth personnel has been lambasting the SDA leaders with their spurious accusations.

Maybe your school could be next: "take 'em down one at a time."

austudent 4 days ago  Reply

Elaine:

Yes the "right way" should be made available to all SDA universities. Why do you think it is that for the most part that SDA universities are not under great attack from the church leadership? Oh sure Wilson and some of the conservatives may say this or that, but for the most part other than LSU our universities are doing decently well (ideologically speaking).

Educate Truth went after the softest target. I highly doubt they will target my school. They know where they can draw the line. Notice how quickly they pulled back from trying to expand their battle to PUC. The church by and large will continue to have the problems on the creation issue, but none will be so troublesome as LSU, mostly because of the balance the institutions have been able to find.

Elaine Nelson 4 days ago  Reply

One time it's the theology dept. that is under attack (SAU and Walla Walla), so it seems that in turn, each school will be the target.

To expect a biology teacher to also teach theology was surely not in their contract anymore than expecting an English teacher to teach biology. This is a perversion of education.

T. Joe & Barbara Willey 4 days ago  Reply

Nathan, your question has gone begging. And since we don't have survey data we are left to anecdotal, which is not very comforting. Let me try to bring out a few possible elements to answer your reasonable question.

I was in the White Mountains Research area for Bristle Cone Pines. My son was given an assignment by a Santa Cruz newspaper to interview and write a story about the findings of environment change on these long-living trees. So we drove up together from Bishop and met this researcher and spent
the entire day walking the hills while she showed the effects of the environment on growth, etc. At the end of the day we ended up in the University of California cafeteria. It was pleasant to relax and talk about aging the Bristle Cone Pines back to about 11,000 years and the techniques used to obtain that data. Anyway, at one point she mentioned that she had been a student at PUC. The conversation suddenly changed drastically, became more friendly, etc. I asked her why she left PUC to attend UCSC and to commit herself into a graduate degree with the research she was conducting at White Mountain.

She explained that she was a traditional even by some accounts conservative Adventist. Both her mother and father were graduates of LLU. They wanted her to go to an Adventist college...But even at an early age she said she wanted to get good training in biology so she could achieve her ambition to do research. She took freshmen biology her first year at PUC. And in the course of the lectures her teacher one day explained the class would skip the discussions and chapters in the book on evolution. They were important but at PUC they were reluctant to get into those subject areas. So as soon as she got back to the dorm she opened her text and began reading the chapter on evolution...and said to herself...that is it. I'm going to drop out and go to a school where they are not afraid to teach biology. So she dropped out of PUC and headed for UCSC. There she discovered that the faculty were free to discuss every aspect of biological science. She was glad she moved away from PUC early to obtain a deeper, broader training in science. UCSC had much first class faculty, who published and participated in the scientific enterprise and resources for graduate education.

Some time later when I was on the campus of PUC one afternoon I stumbled into the biology department chairman and we talked about the issues and problems facing faculty in an Adventist environment in the sensitive areas of philosophy of science and topics that carried evolution theory. So after I gained his confidence I asked him if it was likely that a biology professor at PUC might avoid talking about evolution to any depth in class and actually avoid covering parts of the textbook that covered such topics as biogeography, speciation, etc, This is the way he put his explanation. Our faculty discussed the issues of presenting evolution in class, particularly in the light of what other schools in Adventism are experiencing. We decided as a group we could do a little in teaching certain concepts in evolution, but not devote an entire chapter or any lengthy time discussing the pros and cons. He said, you recall the severe problem we had some years ago when a theologian by the name of Des Ford was teaching here and one Sabbath afternoon he presented a Forum on the Sanctuary theory. It took many years for PUC to get back on its feet and we decided we did not want a Des Ford eruption in biology.

So one of the differences you are looking for is illustrated here. Two Adventist biology programs. One afraid to enter controversy, the other deciding that it was important to be honest, teach the students biology and teach it in a way that adheres to scientific or naturalistic methodology, just like you would get at UCR or Stanford. Creationism is not a scientific area for biology but a theological concept. So LSU biology decided that they owed it to their students to learn biology on the basis of evidence and reason. The strength of the evidence should be justified by data. Don't get me wrong. I believe there are biology faculty in every Adventist college and university that do not obfuscate or divert attention away from the real questions. And if you know the facts at LSU the faculty are just as supportive of the religious heritage as any other Adventist biology program....the recent survey without question demonstrated that result.

And if you have ever been to the biology department at LSU and entered the offices of the faculty
you will see students interacting with their professors appreciate the openness to learn...and so the propaganda appearing on some website attacking LSU has its purpose to mislead people about the real nature of biology. This so-called anti-evolutionary movement appeals to the poorly educated on the matter of biology and science.

One more aspect that fits in here. The other Adventist biologists elected not to participate with the survey developed by the LSU Board because they knew it would only push them also into controversy they did not want to experience. By standing off to the side they let LSU take the heat. Isn't that nearly always a good strategy in a conflict and avoid getting your clothes torn or a black eye?

Cheers

tjoe

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**Elaine Nelson**  4 days ago  [Reply](#)

Why pay for an expensive education when it is not also extensive? A granddaughter is a graduate of UCSC, going on to graduate with a PhD, a daughter and son, elected to do their graduate work at state universities, also. If because of this ruckus, LSU loses its accreditation, it will be one less SDA university now that AUC is folding.

The only reputable sciences are taught at LLU. The medical sciences cannot afford to use the Bible as textbook for diagnoses and treatment of diseases.
Strange, isn't it?

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**Nathan Schilt**  4 days ago  [Reply](#)

Please Elaine! "The ONLY reputable sciences are taught at LLU"? Not sure what you mean, much less what your basis is for that assertion. Where and how in SDA education is the Bible being used as a textbook for the diagnosis and treatment of disease? Besides, if all educational areas but the religion department ought to be faith-free zones, and if the SDA religion is, as you seem to believe, a bundle of benighted pathologies, why in the world would you lament the passing of an SDA university?

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**Elaine Nelson**  3 days ago  [Reply](#)

Does Loma Linda Medical School, and the ancillary health programs use either the Bible or EGW for diagnosing and treating diseases? Why are they out of range of ET for ignoring both the Bible and EGW in their study of medicine? There are whole chapters in Leviticus as well as EGW wrote voluminously on all sorts of conditions, and yet where are they being taught?

The correlation is that at the SDA universities, the story of creation should always include the Bible accounts is to prostitute both the study of science and the teachers hired to teach SCIENCE, not
theology—which should be the province of the religious faculty.

T. Joe & Barbara Willey

I still believe that proximity to the creators of the discordant educatetruth is a partial answer and the influence it has been able to bring to bear to certain members of the LSU Board. But probably more important is the historical fact that one should look back to the occasion when the students and faculty in biology "stiff armed" one of the founders of educatetruth. Afterwards, educatetruth discovered an opportunity to retaliate by poking on a sensitive spot in Adventist dogma and its convictions concerning the story of creation, etc.

This becomes apparent when you are aware of the broad extent that evolution theory enters biology, nearly every aspect, including physiology. But for instance, the creators of educatetruth are not aware that Andrews University displays a giant Mammoth skeleton that is 8,000 years old...nearly two thousand years beyond the Ellen White confirming 6,000 years for creation. Other examples for found in displays. This disparity between scientific fact and faith was never questioned or revealed by educatetruth...Why? perhaps because they have a narrow interest in bashing LSU and not beyond. Or they are afraid to bite off more than they can chew. Southern Adventist University displays dinosaur bones...these are in the millions ages past. And the president of Walla Walla University tells the alumni they don't have to worry about their children being exposed to evolution when they bring them to this school (a marketing tool). But one of the important texts used in teaching biology was written by Donald Prothero titled..."Evolution: What the Fossils say and Why it Matters." It is a well-written and informative book, one that every biology major should study and prepare to understand.

When you have a broader picture of educating biologists and others in physiology, anatomy, marine ecology, botany, morphology of plants, etc., you know that evolution forms the backbone of modern biological sciences. Why mount a full-scale attack against the word "evolution" knowing full-well just the mere mention of the word causes irrational responses. Educatetruth does not have enough awareness of biology in general and as time goes forward their negative approach to learning will become more and more irrational and unintelligent. So Nathan...

Back to your question. Some of the explanation can be placed in the arms of this controversy created by educatetruth. But not all by any means. Taking the message to poorly informed Board members has the potential to create a reaction that is not in the best interests of educating college students in today's world. Why is LSU feeling the heat from the accreditation process through WASC? It is basically because the makeup of the Board is not relevant to the issues facing the kind of education demanded by the Congress...i.e., The U. S. Department of Education. WASC itself is accredited by the USDoE. If an institution accepts or seeks accreditation it must confirm to the expectation of the USDoE. Then on top of the regionals there are several specific accrediting agencies that represent other professionals, with other concerns for adequate training. It is the Board that is responsible for the current crises, jumping the track, acting like they could do their own thing, including firing people at will...they thought they were getting good advice from outside the university and its faculty...but they were not. So with the anticipated corrections that WASC insists .... educatetruth will also become more irrelevant. WASC has no time for the improper manner that the Board has been acting. And presumably this is not the case in other Adventist's colleges and universities, and hence
why it shows up at LSU. It is time to get back to business.

Bob Pickle

TJ oe, you state:

"Southern Adventist University displays dinosaur bones...these are in the millions ages past."

You sound like you have swallowed the pseudo-scientific lie of evolution. There is no possible way those bones are millions of years old.

For one thing, soft tissue has been found inside of dinosaur bones, and the protein content of some dinosaur bones, given the half-life of protein, is way too high. For another, U/Pb ratios in U halos in Jurassic and Triassic coalified wood were way too high, indicating that the ages assigned to these strata by skeptics are way too old.

Nathan Schilt

You make a number of interesting observations, tjoe, that raise questions in my mind. I know that educatetruth is committed to YLC. But how anchored are they to 6,000 years? I don't think that accurately describes many of them. What do displays of Mammoth skeletons and dinosaur bones tell you about how evolutionary biology is taught at other SDA universities. Are you suggesting that the folks at educatetruth don't believe in Mammoths or dinosaurs as historical realities?

It is my understanding that YLCers acknowledge the importance of offering the very best of evolutionary theory and science in biology classes (after all, you've got to know what the Devil is up to). They are simply arguing that creationist critiques of evolutionary theory, as well as alternative creationist explanations for the science on which evolutionary theories have been built, should be presented to students. Whether you agree with YLCers or not, isn't this a fair representation of their position? And isn't it really more productive to argue with what someone is actually advocating than to create straw man arguments to belittle?

 austudent had what I thought were productive, informed comments to the questions I posed. Do you think that Sean Pittman would have been stiff-armed with a similar presentation at other SDA universities? I find it difficult to believe that there aren't a lot of fundamentalists who would be prepared to pounce on other SDA universities if they were giving creationism short shrift in their biology classes. Do you think Board members at other SDA universities are more open to evolutionary exclusivity than LSU Board members?

You seem to be suggesting that if LSU had more conservative professors, like say Leonard Brand, who has sharp criticisms of evolutionary theory, and great respect for SDA attempts to find scientific evidence for creation, the accreditation of LSU's biology department would be threatened. Do I understand you correctly? When I think of the academic respectability accorded to science ideologues like John Holdren and the late Stephen Schnieder, I find the piety of evolutionary puritans a bit disingenuous. I'm having a hard time with the defense of: "Don't blame the biology department for the failure to give creationism a fair hearing in the biology classrooms;
I guess we can both presume differently. I presume that other SDA university biology departments are in fact presenting creationism in a much more respectable light than is the case at LSU. If other progressives share your presumption to the contrary, they should be outraged that faculty in other SDA universities are watching in silence the injustice that is being inflicted on LSU by their Church.

SecondOpinion

Nate, I would answer your question "Why La Sierra?" with another question "Why Friedensau?" Recently, another AAA accrediting team visited Friedensau, just as they did La Sierra some months ago. The team was, again, chaired by Niels-Erik Andreasen. Rather than accepting the team's report, it was again set aside by top GC administration. Instead, Ted Wilson and Mark Finley made their own personal visit to the institution. Come the autumn AAA meeting, Friedensau may be on a similar hot seat as La Sierra. None of this, of course, should surprise those who know that Friedensau holds left-leaning tendencies, as well. Those over at Educate Truth may have incited the campaign against La Sierra, but it has now been fully adopted by GC administration and has, furthermore, been widened to include any institution that does not meet their liking. Twice now, reports and recommendations overseen by one of our church's most seasoned university administrators and theologians have been set aside in favor of more aggressive attempts at "cleaning house." That's the kind of unilateral, high-minded, heavy-handedness that's going on right now.

Seanpit

I agree with Nate. While there are problems from the YLC position at other SDA universities, LSU's science (and even religion) professors are by far the most blatant in their attack on the church's position on origins. There is simply no defense of YLC at LSU in either the science or religion departments.

None of us from EdTruth are suggesting that mainstream perspectives on origins shouldn't be taught. We've always argued that mainstream evolutionary theories should be presented in the most favorable light possible, but that professors who hold to the SDA perspective should be hired and allowed to counter the mainstream perspective in support of the church's perspective in our own schools.

Those who argue that there is absolutely no evidence to support the Adventist perspective on origins are very much mistaken. There is a great deal of evidence and this evidence grows stronger day by day. Our students in our own schools should not be ignorant of this data. What's the point of having a church-owed and operated school if the church's most basic goals and ideals are constantly attacked by that school? Isn't that equivalent to the church shooting itself in the foot?

Sean Pitman
www.DetectingDesign.com
Nathan Schilt

Sean, do you really think there is a pool of well-qualified SDA scientists that meet your criteria? I have my doubts, but you could be right.

Personally, I'm not real concerned about what theories of origins LSU professors subscribe to and promote, though I acknowledge this is an issue for the Church. I would far rather see professors of deep and abiding love for a crucified, risen, and living Lord, who mentor students to have faith in scripture as a sacred text, whether or not everyone interprets it the same.

When my daughter was a student at Point Loma University, she frequently commented on how faith in the God of scripture permeated many of her science classes. One of her professors who believed in theistic evolution told the biology class that teaching that class was his service to God, and if they did not have deeper faith in God when the class was finished, he would consider his teaching a failure. Knowing that many of his students would come from homes and churches where they had been inculcated with literalistic creationism, he sent his students home with a 25 page paper to have their parents read, in which he laid out his view reconciling theistic evolution with orthodox Christian theology. I did not find it particularly compelling, but nevertheless appreciated his confession that, while he needed to be honest with the present state of science, he still lived more in the realm of faith than of doubt.

Seanpit

Hi Nate,

I don't think the pool for "well-qualified" scientists who support the Adventist perspective is very large - maybe not large enough to fully staff all of our universities. So, that is a problem from the church's perspective.

I also agree with you that honestly and transparency is the most important thing. However, our schools cannot afford to simply hire those who are honest, sincere, and transparent in their ideas and teachings. After all, I know a great many honest and sincere Catholics, Baptists, agnostics and even atheists who are wonderful people but would not be able to effectively represent the Adventist perspective in our schools.

This is not to say that such people aren't good moral upstanding members of society at large or that God won't accept them were they are. It is just to say that honesty and sincerity are not enough to hire someone as an official representative of a particular organization that is trying to effectively promote a certain perspective.

Sincerely,

Sean Pitman
www.DetectingDesign.com
Ervin Taylor

I note that Sean Pitman has expressed the view again "Those who argue that there is absolutely no evidence to support the Adventist perspective on origins are very much mistaken. There is a great deal of evidence and this evidence grows stronger day by day." First of all, let's be clear about the issues. There is no conflict within Adventism about the "Adventist perspective on origins." I am not aware--perhaps Dr. Pitman is--of any Christian or Adventist who would take issue with the religious confession that God is responsible for the ultimate origin of all that is good in the universe. So, the issue of "origins" in that context is not in dispute. The point at issue is how and when God then continued to create all that is.

Dr. Pitman has written extensively that holds the view that life was created on earth less than 10,000 years ago in six literal 24-hour days and that there was a recent world-wide flood. That's what he means by the "Adventist perspective on origins."

Now back to his statement: "Those who argue that there is absolutely no evidence to support the Adventist perspective on origins are very much mistaken." Again, I am not aware of anyone who states that there is "absolutely no evidence" to support his view. Now here again, I assume that he means "absolutely no scientific evidence." There certainly is a small amount of data which can be interpreted to support a recent creation of life. I suppose that there is a small amount of data which can be used to support the view that a virus does not cause AIDS. That is not the point. The point is that the vast majority of scientific evidence from a wide spectrum of scientific disciplines dispute Dr. Pitman's position. If Dr. Pitman wishes to call two or three percent of the evidence "a great deal of evidence," I guess he can do that. But the fact remains, that from a scientific perspective, his position has been as falsified as well as the view that the sun goes around the earth.

Seanpit

I guess one can always be blind to the data. I dare say that for every piece of evidence that Erv Taylor can present for his views on origins (contrary to the Adventist perspective) I can present just as many in its favor. Beyond this, the number of evidences is irrelevant to their weight. A great theory can be destroyed, in theory anyway, by "one ugly fact".

The fact is that Erv has publicly challenged me to public debate on the topic of origins, but has yet to step up to the plate and actually accept his own challenge. While I am willing to meet him or anyone of his choosing in public forum, he certainly won't do it himself and evidently has yet to find anyone else willing to do so.

Until then...

Sean Pitman
www.DetectingDesign.com

George Tichy

That would be an interesting - and may be foolish - debate, isn't it?
A debate about things that cannot be fully proved or verified either way. It's like trying to explain origins of life based on scientific data about objects, versus utilizing faith to explain the inexplicable.

Now, my question is, Why does it have to be debated? If only one side could leave the other side alone and respect personal convictions and beliefs without making war about it. Just respect and tolerance would do it, or not?

Nathan Schilt
1 day ago Reply

Well George, science isn't a matter of personal convictions. You are correct that very few things can be fully proved or verified. And even when we think they have been proven, all we really mean is that they have not yet been falsified. Both creationists and evolutionists frequently suffer from an unwillingness to admit how much of the so-called science on which their theories are based is not subject to falsification or verification by the scientific method.

Seanpit
8 minutes ago Reply

Personal conviction plays a role in science since any time one makes a conclusion as to which scientific theory is most likely "true" one makes a leap of faith beyond that which can be absolutely known. No scientific theory can by fully proved or verified - by definition. And, many scientific theories cannot be absolutely falsified while still being scientifically useful in that they carry a useful degree of predictive value.

It is for such reasons that a certain degree of subjectivity cannot be avoided in science.

Sean Pitman

Elaine Nelson
1 day ago Reply

Does Adventism attract the cultic personality or does it create it?

George Tichy
1 day ago Reply

ADventism loves the cultic personality. It not only attracts it, but also strenghtens it and encourages it. This is actually a characteristic of every religion that is NOT "Sola Scriptura" based but is based on "something else" plus "some scripture". Meaning that "something else" comes always first and is considered as sacred as the Bible. It is usually used to "explain" the Bible.

Developing and maintaining a cultic mentality is very important in the process of controlling the crowds because it allows an easy brainwashing process. Usually, as result, money just pours into the coffers very easily as well.

However, not every adventist develops a cultic personality. There is a big number of people who
can think independently and do not become contaminated by the virus. They just care less about the "system", but they like the local church. They are usually called "rebels", "liberals", and often considered as apostates. Sometimes it is suggested that since they don't like the conservative ideas, they should just leave. (Have you heard this before???)

New converts most probably do not notice this, because they are still mesmerized by the "new, fascinating, and complete 'truth'" they just found... But sooner or later, many will figure this out, too.

Elaine Nelson

Why not begin a debate on whether or not God exists?

If some can recall the Scopes trial, it was Darrow who demonstrated he knew the Bible much better than Bryan.

T. Joe & Barbara Willey

Responding to Bob Pickle

I was in the audience when Professor Mary Schwitzer from North Caroline University presented some of her recent findings on dinosaur soft tissue to the faculty at Loma Linda University. She was very cautious as her results were unexpected and in the spirit of a scientific investigations said it was early to speculate about the fossil chemistry, etc...that more time and much further research needed to be done. Research continues in her lab as well as others, and just as expected one discovery often leads to further questions and hypotheses, etc., refining the theories as they go.

I got the impression though that you were willing to stop further research and take a position...that you were ready to firm up your conclusion...and anyone who disagrees practices "pseudo-scientific lies of evolution." I remember decades ago when I first emerged from college how I was taught to look for the gaps and form assumptions that science was nearly always wrong, particularly in certain areas of endeavors. But each time I acquired a new and better position, so I thought, I ended up abandoning my interpretation because eventually it was overwhelmed by evidence. Then one day I understood how science actually works in the real world and now I don't have to go around compromising the evidence and explaining away the advances. It is much more rewarding to accept the scientific enterprise and grow in understanding as knowledge is gained, some results will be wrong, but little advances leads to stronger positions.

But just in case you miss my point, here is the latest finding on Dinosaur peptides and protein survival. Read the Introduction to the paper for yourself. Look and see if you can find any qualified evidence that peptide survival is limited to 6,000 or 10,000 years ...upper limit and readjust your new interpretation. Because next research findings will drill in closer and closer to what is really the situation. Good luck in seeking the next gap in the continuing saga of empirical data acquisition. This is the latest paper in July 2011 on the dinosaur peptide survival.
"While it is widely accepted that proteins have the potential to survive significantly longer periods of time than DNA [1], persistence of original bone proteins in fossils at least 68 million years old is controversial [2], [3], despite multiple lines of evidence supporting this hypothesis [4], [5], [6], [7], [8], [9]. Current temporal limits for survival of original biomaterials [10], [11] are based upon theoretical kinetics and laboratory experiments designed to simulate protein diagenesis through exposure to harsh conditions (e.g. low pH and high temperature [10], [12]) and predict complete degradation of measurable biomolecules in well under a million years if degradation proceeds at simulated rates. Modeled degradation of DNA [13] places temporal limits of ~100,000 years (at a constant 10°C), whereas models of protein degradation (e.g. [1], [14]) extend this to a few million years (at a constant 10°C). However, these predictions have been surpassed (e.g. [15]), supporting the suggestion that current models may not be appropriate, in part because they do not consider the molecules in their native state (i.e., folded, closely-packed, cross-linked or, in the case of bone, stabilized by association with the mineral phase [16]). Recovery of what appear to be cells, blood vessels and tissues from multiple fossils from varying ages and depositional settings [4], and protein sequence data from two dinosaurs [5], [6], [7], [9], also suggests that these models may be incomplete. Examining endogenous biomolecules other than DNA avoids synthetic amplification and reduces contamination issues that significantly impeded early ancient DNA research. Technological improvements in recent years, including soft ionization mass spectrometry, allow increased detection of minute traces of biomolecules that may persist for extended periods of time via crystal encapsulation [17], [18], even in the presence of exogenous contamination that precluded earlier forms of analysis such as amino acid composition analyses and stable isotope analyses [13]."

Cheers

tjoe

David 1 day ago  Reply

An individual can believe whatever he/she wants and expressed to the surroundings. Now when the same individual is working for a religious organization has the ethical and moral responsibility to abide to the basic believes of the organization.

The SDA church believes in the creation. It is natural to expect that all their educational institutions help their students to understand a complicated subject like this.

The SDA members send their children’s to these institutions to be educated in a Christian environment and be enlighten not only in a secular disciplines but also in the basic biblical principles including the creation. These members give their offering and pay tuitions for their children to be educated in what they believe.

If a person decide for other kind of education, there is plenty to look for what she or he may choose even to go the “Charles Darwin Institute in the Galapagos Island” Likewise when an educator, professor, administrator or pastor does not any longer believes in the SDA church teaching, the right and moral thing to do is look for another institution.
George Tichy

So, the conclusion must be that Adventism already knows it all, right? Which then allows to preclude any further seeking of knowledge. And whoever is interested in seeking further knowledge should just leave the system - because this would be "the right and moral thing to do".

I can't believe I read this in the XXI Century. Because, honestly, it really sounds like a "medieval" concept...

David

Your conclusion is out of context… it was never mention or implied that Adventism already knows it all so therefore does not preclude any further seeking of sustainable knowledge. As a father of 4 children that looks for a SDA education why I have to pay money to somebody who is just “regurgitating a suppose knowledge” that is not hard science and goes against the biblical prinicpal I treasure?

George Tichy

As a father of 3 children that are now grown up, all holding a Masters degree, and having kids of their own, I always encouraged them to think by themselves and to make their own decision based on what they learned and processed in their own minds. I always supported access to ALL knowledge available in school and elsewhere. I would not dare to determine what my kids could/could not learn. I refused to pretend being their brain and making decision for them. I support everyone's right to access ALL knowledge without restrain, including the religious realm. I know that in ADventism, suppression of information has been a tactic to control people's thinking and beliefs throughout the ages, but this dog does not hunt in my home.

However, this is just me. Everyone does it their own way. That's their right as well....

David

That is your prerogative that works for you... I want my kids to be in SDA schools to be educated in our principals until they decide for their own. I'll support them to the university of their choice but if they decide to go to an adventist university we expect to be instructed in the basic principals of our church as well in whatever career they may chose.

At lest we agree that everyone does it in their own way. But we have to respect the principals of the organization we belong or we work for it if not is honorable think to do is to look for an alternative. If one day i not any longer believe in what the adventism teach i'll live quietly and look for something that make sense to me. I'll not depend or attack the way we believe.
If a child has attended SDA K-12 and still needs to be taught SDA principles, when does the adult begin thinking for himself? Deep thinking is dangerous in the SDA system, as thinking always results in questions, and question require honest answers, something that cannot always be accomplished and yet agree with Adventism.

My two grandchildren (one with a PhD, the other still in grade school) have both attended only non-SDA schools, this was the decision their respective parents made, based on their own SDA education. If they had been "sold" on it as good for their daughters, they would have repeated this, but they have received far superior education in every way than SDA schools are able to offer. With decreasing enrollment, and some even closing, the future of SDA education may not be available in another generation.

The studies have not shown good results for SDA education in retaining memberships, so why pay so much more with no guarantees?

Is it possible that the idea of sending children only to a (safe...?) SDA school/university is linked to the "cultic personality" that permeates ADventism? The expectation being more to "keep them under the umbrella" then actually providing them the best education available?

Years ago, when two of my children were in High School (Public), I got a teaching position in one of our academies - teaching Bible classes. After evaluating the quality of the education delivered there, I had no doubt about keeping my kids where they were. Inexpensive and much better quality at that time.

The problem is that often parents don't want to, or don't know how to, do their parenting job so they rely on schools to assist their kids in developing certain social, religious, and moral concepts/values. Which usually doesn't work either! And of course not: schools are meant to deliver education, not religious information or to proselytize. Aren't churches already meant to do this job anyway???

Elaine, you strike me as a very well-educated person. Is it in spite of your SDA education, or did that education, and the cultic believers that made it possible, instill in you a sense of meaning and a lifelong quest for learning that even now you cannot fully appreciate or understand?

I went to Union College and then to U.C.L.A for law school. I would say I received a superior education at Union - not because of the curriculum - but because of relationships with professors who thought deeply, had troubling questions, and had even deeper faith. They eagerly shared both their faith and their questions with me outside of classroom hours. In large part because of their influence I have learned far more since I left my formal education than I did during that process.

The cloak of "honesty", worn as a badge of pride and honor is generally a sign of self-delusion.
There are truths that lead us towards God and truths that lead us away from God. The God of scripture seems far less concerned with "honestly" imparting knowledge to us than with evoking an honest and humble response to His presence in our lives and in the world around us. In the meantime, those who believe in pursuing deep thinking for its own sake proudly and contemptuously feast at the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

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**Trevor Hammond**

16 hours ago  

George Tichy wrote: "ADventism loves the cultic personality." ..." This is actually a characteristic of every religion that is NOT "Sola Scriptura" based but is based on "something else" plus "some scripture"....

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The vast majority of Christendom have trampled on the Sabbath wholesale (among other Bible teachings) and would they not also be have ‘cultic personality’ issues as they chop up Sola Scriptura?

T

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**George Tichy**

15 hours ago  

There are not that many protestant denominations that have a parallel set of copyrighted writings that were added to Scripture. They have many authors writing on religious themes, but not imposing themselves as “theological authorities by God's decree."

Thus, Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists and many others don't have that "cultic" mentality developed by worshiping a supposedly inspired author or a new set of holly books. They certainly don't have new books appearing on the bookstores' shelves several years after the writer even passed away. They also don't have to deal with matters like clear visions coming straight from God teaching about the “Shut Door” issue – and many other. Left alone dealing with proven plagiarism!

It’s when people venerate things like these that they develop a “cultic personality,” most times without even noticing it.

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**Elaine Nelson**

15 hours ago  

Nathan,

To answer your questions:

I received the first 12 grades in SDA schools, some college at both Southwestern (when it still a junior college) and at Union.

Years later, I attended community colleges and graduated from the University of San Francisco, a wonderful Jesuit university where I was finally challenged to think, plus, the first time I had ever been required to write a spiritual autobiography (is that mandated in any SDA school, or seminary?).
It was the first time in my life (I was in my 60s then) that I had ever been challenged to really think about my spiritual life until then. The course was required of everyone at this Jesuit school, and any religious belief, or even atheism, made no difference. The individual had to describe his journey at reaching that point. The teacher informed us previously, that very few ever were accepted the first time around. He chose mine for demonstrating what he wanted.

Thus, after many years of being very active in many SDA churches, it dawned on me that I could not claim Adventism as my personal belief, but I adopted a very simple theology: God is love, and if that is not demonstrated in my own or others' lives, it is worthless. As God is often addressed as "Father," as a child and later, he was god, and always demonstrated his unconditional love for his four daughters.

Shortly after, I requested my name be removed from the church rolls. Some 20 years later, I completed a master's degree in liberal studies, something I always had a great curiosity about: history, literature, psychology, philosophy, sociology, etc. Since then I have never stopped studying, reading, and the religious world is so fascinating, perhaps because my thesis was on early Christianity. Seeing how doctrines were formed, decisions made that still are accepted today, even by Adventists, demonstrated to me that all religions are man-made and not a necessity for many. I have found many people through my lifetime that are kind, spiritual, generous, and more, and yet do not profess any religious affiliation, which I, and they, find to be superfluous. I irregularly attend an SDA church and everyone knows I am not a member, but it makes no difference.
Of Writers and Readers

Submitted Jul 21, 2011
By Nathan Brown

In the published conversation that is, Although Of Course You End Up Becoming Yourself, writer David Foster Wallace urged the differences between good writing and so much of the other communications and information that compete for our attentions. He argues that one of the first tasks of a book or other writing is, “to teach a reader how to read.”

“You teach the reader that he’s way smarter than he thought he was,” he continued. “I think one of the insidious lessons about TV is the meta-lesson that you’re dumb. This is all that you can do. This is easy, and you’re the sort of person who really just wants to sit in a chair and have it easy. When in fact there are parts of us, in a way, that are a lot more ambitious than that...I think what we need is seriously engaged art, that can teach again that we’re smart.”

In a world of information, it isn’t just television that screams that we’re dumb. The sheer mass of information confounds and confuses us, giving us fact after fact, opinion after opinion with nothing to piece them together or filter out the worthless and the pointless. In our hurried and flustered breathlessness — as a friend recently commented — good, careful, thoughtful, engaging, creative and provocative writing is like taking a deep breath and feeling our thoughts and spirits begin to settle.

That is why we need good writers and thinkers, who will remind us and urge that we are smarter than we have been led to believe we are. We need people who can wrestle with an idea, a belief, an issue and from their labour call us to new ways of seeing, hearing and believing. This doesn’t happen by chance and is a discipline that grows only with practice, so we also need to make space, give responses and allow for less than the best from those of us who are committed to working on the task of writing and learning to write.

Too often, as a church, we have invested our resources in production and distribution, assuming either that we have all the content we need or that, ‘if we build it, content will come.’ So we have many slick — or less-than-slick — products and productions that seem to say little. And we work at creating a ‘brand,’ forgetting that something to say will create far greater credibility than anything we can contrive. We need to invest much more in ideas and the people who bother to try to explore and explain them — and we need to make publication space for writers to work and play with.

But writers also need good readers, people who will accept the challenge to be smarter than they are tempted and told to be. Most writers and would-be writers can accept the insult of not being paid for their work far easier than they can quell their outrage at not being read. Yes, writers need to deserve their readers, whether by effort or results, but they also need readers who will be smart, ambitious, generous and willing to risk a few minutes of their time and thinking.

Such readers should never be taken for granted by a writer but should be relied upon to read, reflect, respond and participate in the almost illusive but necessary task of communication. By his or her
writing, the writer invites the reader into his or her thoughts and experiences and hopes to share something more than just themselves. By their reading, readers demand the best efforts of the writer but will often have to forgive their honest shortcomings.

In his survey of current Adventist writing, published in, *Swimming Against the Current*, Chris Blake is both honest and hopeful. “Many Adventist articles and books today constitute a bland soup,” he suggests. “Readers are held hostage to shrill doomsayers or merchants of safe passage, while writers often appear self-congratulatory and predictable, introducing characters and themes, as Dorothy Parker once wrote, that run ‘the gamut of emotions from A to B.’”

Blake calls for new backbone and new eyes in the task of writing. “Adventist writing is not doomed to a future of the bland leading the bland. In the end, we find realistic hope whenever someone with backbone discerns and points out the truth, says it aloud, mentions the elephant in the room.”

So that’s bolder writers and smarter readers, but what of editors? Perhaps a university study guide puts it best: “Over time, editors tend to acquire a vast, scattered general knowledge and an abiding humility about what they don’t know.”

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**Guidelines for Productive & Courteous Comments:**

- This is the writer's court & play – no upstaging please
- Stay on topic – don’t wander off chasing butterflies
- Be brief – no more than 3 modest paragraphs – if longer, you are too windy
- We ask you to be considerate & courteous – the golden rule, remember
- Absolutely no denigrating of individuals – to err, earns banishment
- Make this a stimulating encounter & come back often

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Elaine Nelson

1 week ago | Reply

Nathan, you nailed it! A writer would much rather be engaged in argument with a reader, or face total dissent, than to be ignored--but only when both the writer and what he intends to say has touched a chord.

So much of the bland articles in the Review, or on the ABC book shelves are not worth the paper they are printed on. They are an insult to most people's intelligence.

Just this morning, after hearing a new book reviewed by Jon Stewart (always a good interviewer), I immediately ordered Michael Sandel's new book "Justice" on how we can apply the old philosophical principles to the many questions we are facing today. The reviews posted by Amazon, and the author's few minutes with Jon, convinced me that it would be more than worth my time and...
money to be challenged by the many questions facing us each day.

We do not need soothing platitudes, but to be challenged about the many positions we take on government, institutional, and even church policy. What is the metric which is used to make critical decisions?

Only by reading and understanding the same problems that have been faced in civilization's history, will we be able to form better judgments today.

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**Ella M Rydzewski**

I recognize that blog writing is set up for debate, but much of what is written deals with trivial details rather than the big picture. There is much concern with what various terms mean in Greek or Hebrew. Quotes from the Bible and White are presented with authority when one can find the exact opposite in the same writings somewhere else. I belief this is due to the differences in time and place, but this is not usually pointed out.

It is also refreshing when a writer actually learns and accepts something new or is open to a new idea. I like humility in writers who admit they don't have all the answers and share their own struggles and doubts with us and yet can share positive spiritual experiences.

In denominational magazines I often find gems hiding in the fluff, but you have to start reading an article to discover it. I find myself avoiding well-known personalities who write; you know what they are going to say before they say it. There is much triteness in church writing, and sometimes it makes me cringe. There is also an avoidance of anything that could make a writer from a different belief system look good or have anything valuable to contribute otherwise someone will assume you share their worldview.

In writing we always run the risk of criticism or we aren't writing well. There isn't space to explain all we believe, and if we leave the door open just a little, some will force their way through and distort our words.

It's not that we don't have smart readers, we have readers stuck in a generation, era, or location and unwilling to think outside the bland.

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**William Noel**

Nathan,

Once again, you've put your finger on a real challenge in the church in a thoughtful way. Well done.

I wish I could share Chris Blake's hope when he said Adventist writing was not "doomed to a future of the bland leading the bland." Publishing is an empire ruled by people whose concepts are so severely disconnected from the market that the necessary changes may be far more than anyone in church administration is willing to accept. So long as that continues then the ultimate collapse of Adventist publishing is unavoidable with the only question being how long it takes to happen.
Elaine Nelson

No one can be a really good writer unless he has read widely of many authors and ideas. In doing that, he allows himself to be exposed to all sorts of ideas; introduces thinking, even questioning his early ideas and if he can still support the Adventist positions in a valid and clear manner to a variety of reader's levels, there may be a place for such writing in SDA publication.
Adventism was born in the Northeastern United States in the mid-19th century. Many parts of traditional Adventist ideology have their origins in the American brand of 19th Century evangelical Protestantism. An influential book on the sociology and history of Adventism, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, considered the role that American culture and politics played in forging the original Adventist sectarian eschatology.

In this formulation, Adventism adopted a largely negative view of what would happen in America ‘in the last days.’ American converts to Adventism were presented with the traditional Adventist vision of America which was considered to be a future potential enemy of the Adventist way of life.

However, it has been observed, especially since World War II, swings in the general mood of American Adventism and the mood of the American populist political culture, have been linked in both overt and subtle ways. In the 1960s, when the American body politic was adopting and implementing what were considered ‘liberal’ political and cultural values, American Adventism, with a phase lag of as much as a half decade, began to move in the same direction. When the American social, cultural and political ethos began to turn increasingly conservative, American Adventism began to turn increasingly conservative as well.

With few exceptions, prior to World War II, Adventism generally exhibited most of the classic characteristics of an institutionalized fundamentalist sectarian group. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, this orientation in North America began to change at major Adventist medical and educational centers and in some urban areas. Educational, economic and sociological factors caused segments of American Adventism to begin a cultural shift that opened it up to the influences of contemporary values and thought. It was within this relatively new context that the overtly progressive and liberal wing of Adventism emerged. At the same time, other well defined segments, the evangelical and historic notably, also became more visible and identifiable. A view of Adventism created in the 1920s and 1930s as being a single monolithic church entity holding to a common set of timeless ‘Truths’ was finally exposed as a myth, revealing widespread disagreements over a long list of traditional beliefs.

With some exceptions, the American Adventist political landscape in the late 1950s and 1960s was relatively congenial to beginning a process of theological and cultural maturation. Although there were temporary setbacks at some local and regional levels, there were moderate and pragmatic administrators at some Union Conferences, at the North American Division, and at the General Conference (GC) who were either sympathetic to, or did not oppose, the process of moving toward cultural and theological maturity.

One notable exception involved the GC presidency of Robert H. Pierson (1911-1989) who held office from 1966 to 1979. After attempting to institute retrogressive policies, he stepped down frustrated that he had little power to counter the forces of change moving his church in progressive directions. Another exception was Robert S. Folkenburg (b. 1941) who served as General Conference President from 1990 to 1999. He sought to institute the monitoring of Adventist academic institutions but these attempts were stillborn when he resigned amid charges of inappropriate financial dealings.
Immediately before and following World War II, the need for accreditation of Adventist colleges developed, following the example of the accreditation of the Adventist medical school at Loma Linda. This had occurred some three decades earlier and the change was providing what many Adventist progressives viewed as increasingly positive results. Over the space of three or four decades, what had been in effect, Adventist Bible colleges, evolved into fully accredited liberal arts colleges. The jewel in the crown of Adventist higher education was, of course, the School of Medicine at Loma Linda University, no longer called by its former sectarian name of College of Medical Evangelists.

During all of this period, there were opposing conservative Adventist lay and clerical elements that were able to exercise some economic leverage and political power to inhibit some positive forward motion. However, the general tide in North American Adventism from the late 1960s into the 1980s was moving Adventism slowly away from its sectarian roots.

The high-water mark of this process is difficult to mark. One notable point was the year of the creation of an organization whose explicit agenda was to oppose progressive Adventism and return it to its sectarian roots. This organization was the Adventist Theological Society (ATS) and the year was 1988. This also dates the beginnings of what we wish to call Tea-Party Adventism, whose rise is associated with the current contentious and polarizing factionalism that characterizes contemporary North American Adventism.

In the next installment of this discussion, the origins and agenda of the ATS will be reviewed based largely on the documentation assembled by the late Dr. Raymond Cottrell, long-serving Adventist editor, author, educator, and founding editor of Adventist Today.

Guidelines for Productive & Courteous Comments:

- This is the writer’s court & play – no upstaging please
- Stay on topic – don’t wander off chasing butterflies
- Be brief – no more than 3 modest paragraphs – if longer, you are too windy
- We ask you to be considerate & courteous – the golden rule, remember
- Absolutely no denigrating of individuals – to err, earns banishment
- Make this a stimulating encounter & come back often

JaNe

If Adventist who hold to Adventist doctrines (such as ATS) are "Tea Party Adventism" (which one can assume you are using as an insult, since you clearly oppose the agenda of ATS) then would not progressive adventism represent the European style socialism we see politically from the left on our landscape? In other words, an elitist view within the church based on "thesis paper" style agendas and views that are, shall we say, not good for the people?
Pat Travis

Erwin,

Why do you choose to use a "political term" for "spiritual issues?"

One needs to address issues on a meaningful basis, I suggest, and there are no direct links per se to Adventism and the "political tea party" are there? In fact many "conservatives" would suggest the "tea party and it's religious associations" are actually the modus operandi to the "sunday laws."

Your going to have to do better my friend rather than obscuring "apples and oranges."

It is true that "theological political progressives" see many issues differently than "Conservative Christians." These should be kept on separate platforms, I suggest...the theological & political.

regards,
pat

regards,
pat

Elaine Nelson

The comparison to "Tea Party" is most apt. The Tea Party is adamantly opposed to compromise, entrenched in their ideology, devotees of Grover Norquist who despies all taxes and has managed to get signatures of most of the Repubs to his "No tax" pledge.

Despite the massive population growth, maintaining finances the same, as the Tea Party demands, is an impossibility, which would destroy the lifelines of millions simply to keep their ideology at all costs.

The ATS is attempting to do the same with its Bible interpretation: maintain the status quo in spite of the vast educational and cosmopolitan level of Adventists today who will not be told what to believe simply because the ATS has made those decisions for all SDA members.

Religion, as in politics, has shown a marked adversity to party loyalty on name alone. The Independent are the fastest growing new third group, and in Adventism, the independents are growing at the same pace. No longer will a political party or a loyalty oath be signed by thinking humans.

Connie Severin

Adamantly opposed to compromise, Elaine? It's hard to compromise with someone who within the past 3 years has carried the "I won" mentality and dropped any post-racial or bipartisan notions we
might have had of him during his campaign. I don't think "Tea Party Adventists" is a good way to characterize Adventists returning to fundamentalism at all. With my military husband and our frequent moves, we've experienced numerous microcosms of society in a variety of churches, from the big ones at Loma Linda and Andrews to much more rural ones, where you tend to find the more "traditional" Adventists, usually less educated.

The church we now attend has a mix of everything - Japanese traditionalist clashing somewhat with local laid-back tendencies with a lot of military and ex-military thrown in. Hawaii is as left leaning a state as you could find, and most of the old-timers hold to more traditional values but still vote en bloc for Democrats. The more "liberal" members tend to be military/ex-military yet they are also more likely to be supportive of TEA party objectives. It's really too hard to categorize the church as a body. Liberal and conservative as far as church rules and regulations are concerned usually aren't even close to what I see as far as political beliefs.

Pat Travis
1 week ago Reply

Elaine,

It is NOT the same. If you choose to talk about specific theological differences between Progressives and Conservatives, "do so!"

No need to choose to obscure issues under "political labels" with different parameters...but perhaps that is what you and Erwin choose rather than to focus on specific issues...which you will never be able "to compromise" in a "straight up" discussion.

That said, it is interesting how political and religious thought is being brought to a focus in traditional "liberal conservative" political ways as well as "theological" wys with the "progressive" understanding of documents...both scriptural and constitutional.

I say, "Tie them down to the chains of scripture...and the constitution." :>)

Definitely scripture...because this world and all political systems are in the process of passing away.

regards,
pat

Nathan Schilt
1 week ago Reply

Arguing with slogans and epithets is difficult, not to mention pointless. Intellectualization of bigotry and name calling doesn't change the essential nature of the enterprise, though it certainly inspires the soprano section of the choir to soar in ecstasy. Nothing quite so invigorating as finding yourself in heated agreement with other bien pensants.

How about a blog on the rise of Hippie Adventism, demonstrating the parallels between Adventist
progressive intellectuals and the overindulged, Marxist nihilists who "came of age" in the '60's? I suspect that I could make a very compelling case for such a metaphor, particularly to an intended audience that was already predisposed to agree with me. (I happen to think, by the way, that such a comparison would be very unfair and gratuitously divisive. But if I just wanted to be mean, I could make it sound quite persuasive.)

Erv, might you not also find a compelling, and to many, offensive, parallel to SDA fundamentalists' assault on academic freedom in the shrill hectoring of the self-righteous political Left, its union benefactors, and community organizers who seek to control the lives and earnings of freedom loving, hard working Americans? Ann Coulter recently came out with a book entitled "Demonic". She makes a very persuasive case for the proposition that it is the Left, not conservatives, that exhibits and thrives on mob thought and behavior. I hear that book is really helping to unite the deep and emotional political divisions in this country. Perhaps you want to serve that role in the SDA Church?

See…isn't conscription of language and slogans for polemical purposes a really productive way to communicate and have an intelligent discussion? The Tea Party Adventism "analysis" demonstrates, if nothing else, an admirable grasp and application of Saul Alinsky's "Rules for Radicals".

Doctorf Doctorf1

Nathan,

When talking about extremism on either side I agree with you. However, in my experience the progressive intellectuals as you call them are not screaming or using strong arm or threatening tactics to bring about change in Adventist theology. It seems that the arguments progressives entertain tend to bring out a vitriolic response in conservatives. The parallel that you draw between the assault on academic freedom by SDA conservatives which involves intimidating mob tactics that public employee unions use to get their way, I think is spot on.

Elaine Nelson

Pat,

It is the METHODOLOGY that Erv and I are comparing, not theological. All organizations use methods to influence others, and the manner in which they do so is not unlimited. Just as there are religious "conservatives" and religious "liberals" those are terms that have been used so long that they are usually understood by those who are neither actively engaged in either religion or politics.

I would suggest that the SDA church also has a structure patterned after much older governments, an especially Rome, and the Roman Catholic church which was patterned after Rome. The SDA church is far from a democracy, or even a representative one compared to the U.S. Here in the U.S. we have individual voting rights, but in Adventism, we elect representatives, but by far the majority of delegates are positional appointees, bought and paid for by the denomination.

Comparison to the Tea Party is similar to the comparison between the Dems and Repubs as it immediately identifies certain positions taken by those groups. The Tea Party has drawn a line in the
sand and defies the party that brought them into power.

Stephen Foster 1 week ago Reply

It is with some gratification that I find myself in agreement with Pat Travis on this—to the extent that defining sub-groups of Adventism using political terms and labels is problematic, to put it mildly.

North American Adventism comes in at least two or three "flavors." They historically have practically nothing in common politically; and seem increasingly to have less in common theologically.

Elaine Nelson 1 week ago Reply

Stephen, you have done what you objected to: identified "flavors" of Adventism. Is tea a flavor?

Pat Travis 1 week ago Reply

Elaine,

I don't mind if you choose to use labels...but I suggest the most accurate describing the difference between "historic progressives and conservatives" in both the theological and "political realm" has to do with how they view "historic documents."

Now in the case of the US Constitution I would suggest the "tea party" is the "conservative" and they respect the established historical document without it being a "living document."

Now admittedly this is a "human document" but important one nonetheless in US history.

Now regarding Scripture "Conservative Christians"... not to be confused with traditionnal/conservative SDA's that often view scripture and EGW the same...Conservatives view scripture as the inspired Word of God. "Progressive/theological liberals" have a continuum from simply a human document to "contains in areas" God's Word. It is obvious these two divisions can have no common ground when the rubber meats the road.

My objection to Erwin was that he mixes the political and theological unnecessarily to doubly confound the issues of authority...whose parameters are different both from "inspired of God" to how they are legitimately amended.

Hi Stephen...by the way it was in the 60's that the universal nature of religious accord such as WCC etc.towards the "imminent danger in the SDA playground" begin to change towards seeing "sorry...the religious rt. as the enemy" rather than the "universal accord such as EGW quoting Beecher mentions in GC and the federal council of churches that existed in her day.

regards to both,
Erv: It's possible to trace, at least through my lifetime, the parallels between the ebb and flow of (particularly) Republican Party politics (most of us Adventists are Republicans and have been so for generations) and attitudes in the church. As the Republican Party has professed greater conservatism in recent years, the Adventist Church has followed suit in the theological realm, about five years later (the Reagan Revolution really got moving in 1983, the ATS was formed in 1988, for example).

In real life, it will be interesting to see if Adventism follows the lead of Tea Party Republicans and rebels against the tremendous amount of money it currently takes to sustain the various levels of church administration. Will conservative Adventists build a groundswell for cutbacks? Actually, I think we are seeing this development already, and I expect by next General Conference Session, the movement will be a serious one indeed.

Ron Corson

As someone who agrees with the tea party ideals I am wondering what Erv sees in them that has a similarity to his "tea Party Adventists" So to aid in that here is the official description of the Tea party from their own website:

"The Tea Party movement is a grassroots movement of millions of like-minded Americans from all backgrounds and political parties. Tea Party members share similar core principles supporting the United States Constitution as the Founders intended, such as:

• Limited federal government
• Individual freedoms
• Personal responsibility
• Free markets
• Returning political power to the states and the people

As a movement, The Tea Party is not a political party nor is looking to form a third political party any time soon. The Tea Party movement, is instead, about reforming all political parties and government so that the core principles of our Founding Fathers become, once again, the foundation upon which America stands. http://theteaparty.net

Does the Adventist counterpart want less bureaucratic upper administration from the General Conference?

Does the Adventist counterpart want more individual Adventist freedoms?

Does the Adventist counterpart want greater Adventist individual responsibility?
Does the Adventist counterpart want freedom of ideas (marketplace of ideas) inside the Adventist church?

Does the Adventist counterpart want more congregational control instead of the word coming down from the GC on what the local church should do, believe, tolerate, spend their money on?

What do you think Erv...have you presented an accurate correlation?

If one ignored the bullet points in the above list would the founding principles of the Adventist church be worthy of following, It seems there once was a time when questions were asked, when the official publication presented various theological views and when the church refused to have a creed.

We should not confuse historical/fundamentalist Adventists with the above points because those things are not what the historical Adventists are looking for, As they want greater denominational control and conformity. Now if you were comparing socialists with these kinds of Adventists where the central bureaucracy rules and individuals conform to the official rules of the order...then you might have a case to be made.

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**George Tichy**

Elaine:
That's not fair! You said it all, and all right. Now there is nothing for me to add... So I can just say a big AMEN!!!

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**Stephen Foster**

Elaine,

My aversion to the use of labels evolved in connection to my conversation with Pat (among others) regarding politically active and ambitious American church folk. Labels were impeding or obstructing understanding, in my view.

As to flavors of North American Adventism, I mean of course cultural/racial segments of this Division, particularly in the United States.

Of the roughly one million Adventists in North America, nearly 300,000 are members of the so-called Regional Conferences, and there are an identified number of “minorities” in the other North American Division Conferences. The Adventists in Ontario, Canada and Bermuda are also numbered among the approximately one million SDA in North America. So when Edwin Schwisow states that “most of us Adventists are Republicans and have been so for generations” I just have to smile at the notion of the invisible hundreds of thousands of North American Adventists for whom this does not apply.

Pat, if EGW was explaining eschatology in GC, she obviously could not possibly have been talking about anyone who was a contemporary of hers; whether she was aware of this or not. (Let us not
Elaine Nelson  1 week ago  Reply

Stephen,  

I fail to see where there has been any mention of regional conference or racial minorities. That there is not unanimity in the church is too well known. Maybe it is right that the majority of Adventists are Republicans, I have not seen such data, have you? Or, maybe some are far more vocal, while others go to the voting booth without talking about it.

Again, the reference to political parties was, in my understanding, that there are similarities in the church of which the Tea Party metaphor is a new one, just as it is in Congress. The entrenched position that the Tea Party has taken could be compared to Adventists who are closed to any idea that was not presented them at the time of their birth or conversion, which ever came first.

But there are also many Adventists who are not their grandparents Adventists and have joined the 21st century in their thinking, education, and understanding. We must learn to either accept that there are differences, or else attempt to get everyone to think the same, which, I believe, is what the current G.C. President wishes. Whether he is successful depends on time.

Stephen Foster  1 week ago  Reply

I understand the Tea Party metaphor Elaine. The point is that when you use labels—especially those with political connotations and overtones—there are people who have a political affinity or affiliation with those political labels who get defensive and miss the forest due to having been offended by how particular trees are labeled or identified.

I mentioned the Adventist "flavors" (and later, minorities and Regional Conferences) to point out the fact that we shouldn’t make political assumptions and generalizations about North American Adventists; because in some circles, if someone was to state, as fact, that “most of us Adventists are Republicans and have been so for generations,” they would likely get a large scale quizzical look in response.

Trevor Hammond  1 week ago  Reply

Guys, guys... Here we go again. Voting for the next US Presidential elections is still some time away. ‘Sides, if they’re serving decaf at the Adventist Tea Party then I’m down with it...

As long as the ‘progressive’ Adventist mutants don’t spike the tea with potassium cyanide.

T
Trevor Hammond

oops... Edit to my previous post:
it should be 'mutilators' rather than 'mutants' (apologies)

;

T

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Trevor Hammond

Some within Adventism have made tremendous effort throughout our history to 'remove' parts of our fundamental teachings in order to secure their partisan agenda. Based on their compromised positions that have been largely influenced by secular climates, they have earned the title of progressive ‘mutilators’ in my view. Spurning Traditional Adventism and those aligned to the ‘world-church’ has for them been the order of the day. That is why I have previously asked: “If Dr. Ford was a Black American in the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s, with maybe even three doctorates to his name; would he have got the same idolization for his role in ‘trying’ imperceptibly from within church structures to remove parts of our Fundamental Beliefs and Prophetic History. On the ‘mutilators’ hit list, at number ONE, is Ellen White...

T

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Pat Travis

Trevor,

Your thought is itself "racist" I suggest but playing your game...if there was a black SDA that pressed Des Ford's agenda I would as an "ole racist southerner" been first to get on board.

Lorenzo Grant was highly thought of at Southern but He did not have Des' total message. Got anyone in mind in the "A-A community" that did?

What you say we get back on point and not "race card" foolishness.

regards,

pat

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Elaine Nelson

How about Samuel Pippim who was almost revered by many SDAs? Look at the present positions held in the G.C. and union conferences. The SDA church is no longer a "lily white church."

In the church I frequently attend we have had a black minister who gave the sermon, and there are many races represented in both the membership and local leaders. Where do you worship, Trevor? Is
it multicultural?

Pat Travis

PS Trevor,

Lorenzo and other Southern college profs. complained of the way Des was treated at Glacier view.

Those agreeing with Des on hardly any level...must less questioning how Des was judged...were not long at Southern in those days judged by "white traditionalist/conservative SDA's."

pat

Pat Travis

One more PS Trevor...

Des was a true Evangelical Conservative...to be differentiated with SDA "trad./conservatives."

Nathan Schilt

Ed Schwisow's parallel between the ascendency of a conservative movement in the SDA Church and a similar movement in national politics accurately describes an ideological reality. But I do not believe that the inferences he draws are warranted when looking at dynamic power struggles within religious institutions and society, which is the thrust of Erv's blog.

Those who hold power resist change, whether they are on the Left or on the Right. Thus, progressives, who hold the power at LSU, conservatively resist the change that the "truthers" are trying to force upon them. In the larger Church, the "truthers" hold power, and they conservatively resist the change that progressives try to force upon the denomination.

The same banners of "accountability" and "transparency" are wildly waved by both fundamentalists confronting LSU and progressives confronting clerical power structures in the Church. Yet when their own power centers are challenged, the druids of academic and religious institutions circle the wagons, claiming a superior source of authority and morality, exempting them from the standards of accountability and transparency which they would impose on others.

Using labels like conservative, liberal, fundamentalist, or progressive can be quite useful to illuminate ideological differences. They are intellectually unhelpful and misleading when used to describe the dynamics of power struggles within a group or institution. The rhetoric and methods of progressives trying to maintain the purity of intellectual orthodoxy at LSU end up sounding and looking very much like the rhetoric and methods used by fundamentalists to maintain hegemony over Adventist orthodoxy in the larger denomination.
Ron Corson very effectively demolishes the attempt to analogize the Tea Party movement, of which I too am a proud member, to Adventist fundamentalism. The former seeks to confront the prevailing political power structure. The latter, like our current U.S. President, seeks to strengthen the prevailing political power structure by quelling dissent, demonizing opponents, and disempowering political opposition. I respectfully say, "A fie on both of them!"

Trevor Hammond
4 days ago

My point is that spiritual advancement and light from the scriptures was NOT the basis for what the anti-Traditionalist camp was primarily pursuing. Political, cultural and socio-economic changes which included educational opportunities and advancements were key factors which even today continues this parody of compromise. AToday for example - from what I have gathered is primarily NOT here to lead souls to Christ but is a self appointed political watch-dog bent on denigrating the Traditional Historical basis of True Adventism. On the pretence of encouraging robust intellectual discussion and open-minded thinking and debate they have positioned themselves well in encouraging their political 'allies' to 'diss' and attack Traditional Fundamental Beliefs as well as the Official Adventist Organisation, its duly elected Leadership, and Traditionalists in the First and non-First world. In keeping in line with current 'educated scientific norms' they falsely claim that 'third world Adventism' is actually 'third class Adventism' due to the low maturity levels of those who are lesser 'evolved' - especially those of a certain skin shade. These make assumptions that lower class third world 'converts' are gullible, can't think for themselves and are immature in the way of academics, politics, and 'western' culture where sin and worldliness are accepted norms within a so-called Christian Society. So yeah, Secularism is the benchmark of such compromise and let me tell you it ain't Adventism - race card and all!

T

Elaine Nelson
4 days ago

I have never read that ATOday's mission was to promulgate or convert to Adventism. That is the mission of the Review and most other SDA publications. Atoday is independent and allows many views to be represented. Try and find that in any official SDA publications.

If one is bothered by reading comments which he finds offensive, the solution: don't read or comment here. So far, no one has been ejected so long as common civility and courtesy is used. It's a fair fight and only those who enjoy vigorous discussions will continue to read and comment. Those who are easily offended needn't read AToday.

The negative comments should be addressed to individuals, not to AToday, especially since it has published a variety of opinions.

Nathan Schilt
4 days ago

Adventist Today : The Rise of Tea Party Adventism
AMEN Elaine! Trevor, where have you read any of the bloggers on AToday imply that Third World Adventists can't think for themselves or are less evolved? What calumny! You made one - and only one - statement with which I wholeheartedly concur: AToday's primary purpose is not to lead souls to Christ. If AToday appears overly weighted towards liberal perspectives, that is probably because most fundamentalists aren't interested in robust, open exchange of critical thinking about the Church, its past, and its future. You are perfectly free to defend fundamental beliefs and attack liberal ideas? What Church-sponsored publication or website can you think of where such freedom exists?

Edwin A. Schwisow

Nate and Friends: I would suggest that the common denominator between some manifestations of conservatism and the Tea Party is the word "populism." It's a very general term, granted, but I get the impression that our friend Erv is no friend of populism, whenever and wherever he detects it.

Nathan Schilt

Couldn't disagree more, Ed. Whatever Adventist fundamentalism might be, it is not populist. It is highly doctrinaire and, unlike populism, it does not attempt to appeal to popular sentiment within the Church in an ideologically inconsistent manner. Just because the majority within a political group supports something doesn't mean it is populist. Populist is usually a term of denigration used by elitists, and generally serves only to remind the listener that the the person using the term is the intellectual and moral superior of those he seeks to define by the term.

Precisely what is it that makes the Tea Party movement, described above so well by Ron Corson, populist, as compared to say public employee unions and taxpayer funded government handout recipients? Use of the label "populist" begs the question, adding obfuscation to an already very murky argument.

Trevor Hammond

1] Firstly, I’ve just used AToday only as an example of an organisation which in my opinion provides a fertile ground for the wolf pack predator type anti-traditionalists who are candidly spurred on in pursuing their persistent attacks on the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Yeah sure, the free open discussion platform is what the website stands for and offers – so be it. I only expressed my take on it. No need to get all defensive and lecture me on ‘freedom of expression and opinion’ and wag the ‘holy cow’ in my face. If that’s what ‘self proclaimed mature’ (maturist) Christianity seeks to offer to the world then go ahead... after all it’s your ‘cow’. In my last post I was commenting on anti-traditionalists in general which I assumed I was entitled to do so and only suggested that maybe AT was been used as a propaganda tool in this regard.

2] This is what the ‘Jesus Editor’ is quoted as saying on one of the Blogs on AToday: “the most important contribution Adventist Today can make is to help people find a relationship with Jesus . . .” So – while not all within AToday subscribe to making Jesus a secondary part of their objective, the mood of such a site reflects the opposite which in my opinion and is in direct conflict to what Adventists within the SDA Church as an Organization stand for and practice, even at worst - at least
3] The pompous self-styled progressive Christianity is NOT (in my opinion) motivated by a Spiritual Growth through the power of the Holy Spirit and within the context of a relationship with Jesus Christ (the Traditional way Christians mature) but rather by a ‘shortcut’ through education, cultural moods and political persuasions. This they impose on the Church...

T

I do not wish to use the quotation I previously used on another blog which hides deep within the ‘closet’ of evolution theory and clearly expresses the false science basis of racism found within evolutionary theory regarding so-called lesser evolved persons, mostly directed at the African people who form a large part of the much demonized Third World contingent.

The mood of many anti-traditionalists commenting here DOES exude this - in my opinion; and I feel strongly against such racism which I have fought for most part of my life even at the expense of other lucrative pursuits.

Traditional Adventism does NOT support such a crass position and while I admit that many within the Church may be grossly lacking in the ‘love thy neighbor department’ it is not based on the ‘scientific’ lesser evolved posit.

My rejection of evolution is based on by belief in the Holy Bible as the word of God and that HE IS THE OMNIPOTENT CREATOR of all things through HIS SON JESUS CHRIST and it is within this context I reject such racist evolution theory innuendos.

If AToday is such a platform or allows (and it is your preogative which I do not dispute)this ‘school’ of thought to flourish freely and expects this to be mature conversation regarding the belittling of other race groups then one such as myself won’t be 'gagged by the media' so to speak. Banned, barred or denigrated but NOT silent while this may continue on a ‘supposedly’ Adventist platform.

The measure of Salvation and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is NOT based on Buying Power and a perceived superior culture. It is based rather on the John 3:16 model which I wholeheartedly subscribe to which groups all humanity as one people group and offers Jesus Christ as the WAY, the TRUTH and the LIFE. Peace...

T

>>You said this..." “If Dr. Ford was a Black American in the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s, with maybe even...
three doctorates to his name; would he have got the same idolization for his role in ‘trying’ imperceptibly from within church structures to remove parts of our Fundamental Beliefs and Prophetic History."

Who is emphasizing race? Your the first one I’ve noted as doing so on the strands I have participated in.

Kevin Riley
I don't see that the comment that with a rise in education goes a shift to the left in religion is in any way based on race, whether of an evolutionary kind or just the old-fashioned xenophobic kind. It has even been noted within our church in the South Pacific and parts of Africa. As I have more than one race in my family tree, I have seen racism close up. This is not it. No one is saying that Africans or Asians or anyone else cannot think, merely that, no matter what race someone belongs to, the trend is to either move to the left or leave altogether as education increases. I don't believe it has to be so, but the evidence certainly points to that conclusion at the moment. As people become more educated they are more likely to question what they are taught, which is likely to lead to some different conclusions along the way. That is a good process. Having read some Pacific theology and Asian theology, I look forward to more people being educated to the point where they can take part and share their perspective. The only African theology I have read is from South Africans - black and white - and none were SDA, but I have no doubt there are good theologians in Africa who are worth listening to.

BTW Ford was not 'idolised' because he was white, or because he attacked the church, but because he taught the gospel in a way that appealed to many people as being Bible-based. Much of what he taught on righteousness by faith - which was his main focus - is now taught in virtually every SDA seminary in the world. It was his beliefs on prophecy and Ellen White that raised questions. He is still a member of the SDA church, as are many who agree with him. They did not see it as an attack on the church. And despite what has been said here and elsewhere, the church has not yet dealt with some of the questions he raised.

Elaine Nelson
Trevor, have you read "Who we are" in describing the mission of AToday?

Kevin wro53:
"no matter what race someone belongs to, the trend is to either move to the left or leave altogether as education increases."

This is not a racial statement, but a factual one that does not point fingers, but only identifies what is observed. One is free to analyze.

Where one is not free to raise questions, no one is thinking.
George Tichy

Kevin, 
Regarding FORD, you are right, "the church has not yet dealt with some of the questions he raised." And guess what? The Church won't! Sure during the crisis many people left the church, but it didn't really affect anything.

If the church just keeps convincing new converts that this is the remnant church, that this is the only church that got direct revelation from God (EGW), leaving alone any "Ford's issues" and discouraging studying them, then people will jump into the boat based only on what was disclosed to them. Ignorance is the best tool to control the crowds!

And I bet that under this administration there will be a great deal of "zeal to protect the 'truth' no matter what." I would be very curious to know what percentage of members have ever heard about the Ford Controversy. Left alone how many have read any of his books.

Gailon Arthur Joy

Just where do I sign up to become a Tea Party Fundamentalist? Where is that website? Consider me a very PROUD MEMBER and I will wear that badge with absolute resolution to eliminate the apostates of Seventh-day Adventists, of which the editor is clearly a member.

"American Adventist political landscape in the late 1950s and 1960s was relatively congenial to beginning a process of theological and cultural maturation." Ervin's statement is simply another way to define "Creaping Compromise" and apostacy.

We need to call it what it is and ask Ervin to do the ethical thing: Admit he are not a Seventh-day Adventist and resign his membership as he clearly does not endorse the SDA Fundamental Beliefs.

We will be substantially better off as a culture preparing for the final events of worlds history without this apostacy and if we must shrink to "not more than one in twenty", so be it.

Gailon Arthur Joy
AURreporter and a Tea Party Adventist

George Tichy

After reading Gailon's nonsensic emotional outburst above, I am asking myself whether there is still any chance for some logical reasoning with some people.

Closing the door to any dialogue and any rational exchange of ideas is unacceptable in our days. Things are not black&white. Even the doctrinal set has evolved in the church. First it was 27..., now it's 28.... What's next? There is movement! (Not necessarily progress...)

The problem with the "Tea-bag mentality" is that those people are ready to even destroy the country just because of some pretense, hiperitical zeal and austerity.
It seems that the same may happen in the church. And sure, the church will split if this keeps going on. Who wants to interact with a bunch of intolerant radicals that have no humane sensitivity. They have just PRIDE and ARROGANCE. And it seems that it's coming from the top! It looks like now some people think that God's throne is literally at the GC!!!!!
And worse, they treat the guy up there as God. That's just insane!!!

Mr. Joy: Tsh! Tsh! Being classified by you as an ‘apostate’ is a tad unfair and a touch off the Christian base. If only you knew me you might understand a little of my beliefs, my passions, my convictions and left or right leanings. You are privy to none of this, so I’m to assume you categorize ‘apostates’ as those allowing good and free discussion on our belief system.

Why are we (church), or you, so hasty to dismiss people from our midst because they lack an identical and parallel belief system? Even if Erv may not believe the same things I do, I will defend his ability to express these thoughts without rancor, to all who will listen. You receive the same courtesy and we welcome you to all ongoing discussions. The rigid cookie-cutter Adventism of last century is no longer. I encourage you to welcome and embrace those who may not fit the ‘right’ shape, but none-the-less, are chosen. CH.

It is the black and white thinking that loses all sense of proportion. The recent murderous rampage in Norway is a perfect example of black and white thinking which is the same mentality of the Islamic jihadists.

To live in a world devoid of doubt and ambiguity is seductive and deeply satisfying (something sensed in comments of those whose thinking knows no shades of gray, let alone colors); but it's crazy and inevitably leads to crazy results as Joy above represents who is eager to "eliminate the apostates."

What is your chosen method of elimination? Concentration camps? Dismembering? Nailing the individual's names and their sins to the church door? Who will remain? Surely, if you wish to pursue such a course you must have a plan for doing so. Share them with us so at least we will be prepared.

Look - in Dr. Ford's Heyday, racial discrimination was an accepted norm and he catapulted to success after a public debate defending an Adventist position which gave him much 'popularity'. His skin colour most likely may have been a key factor in his idolization and success based on 'whatever' position he may have taken. He had (and still has) his followers eating out of the palm of his hand.
Australia, even today in all its glory, has issues regarding discrimination against the Aboriginal people and the neglect of them by the 'powers that be'. So yeah, sticking one's head in the black and white sand won't just make it go away matey!

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Regarding the racism associated with evolution theory in terms of the 'lesser evolved' on this planet. This is a fact. Evolution theory teaches this horrid type of racism which they teach at 'accredited' schools of higher learning. Maybe that's the very reason why fundamentalists (like the crazy dude in Norway) may very well be influenced by such false science which denigrates others and enhances the black and white view of the planet although it is hushed and not made altogether conspicuous. Also, I did not start the race card agenda but only picked up the negative aura of such, especially some anti-traditionalists who made derogatory remarks about the Third World. This may be the result of bitterness - or just maybe, a case of sour grapes - only because Traditionalists are a large majority stakeholder in our World-Church, much of which comes from the denigrated Third World membership which (I say again), are perceived by many First World anti-traditionalist Adventists as gullible, uncultured, immature and unable to think.

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One last question: "If the Gospel according to Ford is the present percolated truth of the hour which was insidiously decimated at strategic institutions within Adventism, then where are the preachers of such truth? Hmm... no one's knocked on my door to enlighten me! Doesn't the Bible say GO INTO ALL THE WORLD? Huh! Why piggy back on the Adventist Tea Party crowd to preach the Gospel according to Ford?

T

George Tichy

1 day ago

Trevor:
Please answer honestly:
Are you familiar with Ford's Theology, first hand?
Did YOU ever read his book "1844 and the Investigative Judgement"?

Please answer the questions.

George Tichy

1 day ago

Elaine:
If you are thinking of surrendering to the enemy, consider putting yourself into the Catholics' hands. It's safer than in the conservative Adventist' hands. Catholics can destroy your body. But these "tea-bag adventists" can destroy your soul!

By the way, are you pronouncing the word ADventist correctly yet? You know it's a sin to say ADvenTist..., right? Is there any AdvenTlst as well? Just wondering...kkkkk
Elaine Nelson

FYI, I was born a SDA PK, chose to become a former member some 25 years ago. The SDAs have the most intensive arguments of any denomination. I would much rather be in Catholic hands than some Adventists with their vitriolic speech.

The SDA "Tea baggers" remind one of the Vietnam slogan: "We had to destroy the village to save it."

Ron Corson

So are you happy with your choice of language Erv? Look how it has degenerated, now using the derogatory sexual act term "tea baggers", it is just a few steps away when labels are used as weapons isn't it. when truth gets lost in propaganda which seems to be amazingly popular in the media today, see my latest blog article for some examples. [http://cafesda.blogspot.com/2011/07/media-plays-us-for-fools-and-fools.html](http://cafesda.blogspot.com/2011/07/media-plays-us-for-fools-and-fools.html)

Ervin Taylor

In reviewing the comments on the theme of this blog to date, I'm impressed by some of the arguments, puzzled by some, and very surprised that a few missed the point so completely.

I regret that I can not respond to all comments, but will attempt to address quickly what I view as the high (or low) points.

I assumed that every reader would realize that any analogy does not completely work in all the particulars of the comparison. Using a political label to describe a point of view within a faith community makes use of the similarities. There are obviously elements of the analogy which does not work as well as some others. Shall we stipulate that?

First of all, as usual, Elaine’s comments reveal that she gets the point and makes a number of cogent remarks. As she notes, the foremost element of the analogy is the black-and-white, no-shades-of-gray-thinking which characterizes and informs the dominant ethos of the Tea Party (TP) and Adventist Theological Society (ATS) adherents.

Mr. Hammond seems to want to extend the analogy to rather extreme lengths, such as bringing in racial (and sexual?) elements into the mix. Sorry. As Mr. Riley notes, that’s absolutely not part of the analogy and just doesn’t work on many levels. The relevant issue is educational level not race.

As for Mr. Joy, I do wish he would not always conform so closely to the stereotype he projects. I hope he does not have a problem finding a local chapter of the TP to join.

One comment correctly notes that using political terms in a negative context risks running up against those who have a political affinity or affiliation with those political labels. Since it is well-established that the majority of North American Adventists vote Republican, that point is well put since the overwhelming majority of TP adherents are Republicans or Libertarians. I agree. That is a problem.
In many cases, my good friend, Nathan Schilt, usually makes reasonable and constructive comments and expresses himself logically and rationally. But in this case, I regret to have to say that a combination of his rhetorical skills and ideological commitments obscure greatly both his reasonable and rational comments.

A good example of this was his objection to a comment of Ed Schwisow in using the use of “populist” to refer to Adventist fundamentalism. Nate’s response was “use of the label “populist” begs the question [ET comment: I disagree, but that is for another time], adding obfuscation to an already very murky argument.” What a magnificent use of words—even if the substance of the argument is questionable.

I was not sure of the source of Nate’s affective objections until he posted the comment that he is a “proud member” of the TP movement. At that point, I now better understand his positive comment about Ann Coulter. I may be mistaken, but I believe that Nate is also a fan of Ann Rand. This is, in no way, a negative comment about my distinguished colleague at Adventist Today. We just agree to disagree on the virtues and constructive nature of certain political ideologies.

Let me quickly add that I wish to utter a loud “amen” to a response that Nate made to a comment of Mr. Hammond: “If AToday appears overly weighted toward liberal perspectives, that is probably because most fundamentalists aren’t interested in roust, open exchange of critical thinking about the church, its past, and its future.” Well stated!

I think I also better understand Ron Corson’s objections in that he says he agrees with TP ideals and then lists the elements of their specifically conservative political agenda from their web site. That TP web site says that they are a “grassroots movement.” If one believes that, I have the proverbial bridge I’d like to sell him. But that is another topic. Again, I guess Mr. Corson and I will agree to disagree as to the positive influence of the TP agenda on the American body politic.

Let me restate my point: The similarities exhibited in the American conservative political movement known as the “Tea Party” and in the conservative theological organization known as the Adventist Theological Society (ATS) are no accident.

The ATS operates essentially as a political action committee within the Adventist Church using theological language as a political weapon to advance a retrogressive conservative ideological agenda and gain for those who support that agenda greater political power inside the Adventist Church. That is an elementary and obvious inference which has been noted by many observers.

If there are those who dispute that, it just provides another illustration of the well-known principle that the same set of observations can be interpreted in a number of ways depending on one’s prior world view—in this case, their prior political world view.

Elaine Nelson

I can think of no better description of the Tea Party than the editorial in the recent “The Week:
"There is no gray--only black and white, Us and Them. To live in a world devoid of doubt and ambiguity is seductive, and deeply satisfying, but it's crazy and inevitably leads to crazy results."

These results can be seen daily in the terrorists and jihadists of all regions.

They don't have to be violent, but the tactics destroy mutual respect and foster no community.

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Trevor Hammond

I have resisted defending my comments or those perceived to be (sexual?) that has been made by Doctor Taylor in referencing an accusation levelled at me for using words with sexual connotations. I don’t appreciate it but will let it pass under the bridge. If have inadvertently used words that may be misconstrued then the powers that be may delete or edit that post if warranted.

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However, my sometimes rough etiquette and p’s and q’s hardly can be used as ammo against the noble visions of the Adventist Theological Society. They are so much nobler than many ‘other’ organisations who vehemently oppose their mission and vision.

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Here they are:

The Society’s vision embraces a variety of values and goals:

• Promoting sound biblical scholarship among Seventh-day Adventist scholars, theologians, teachers, pastors, and Bible students;
• Exploring Scripture in order to better understand it;
• Creating a spiritual and intellectual atmosphere for fellowship and dialogue within the Church and offering support and collegiality to students of God’s Word;
• Upholding the fundamental beliefs and piety of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in education, in church life, and in the completion of its mission;
• Sponsoring Bible symposia and conventions in various parts of the world, providing opportunities for reading, discussion, and dissemination of scholarly thought;
• Interacting with Bible scholars and theologians beyond the Seventh-day Adventist community of faith;
• Publishing theological literature;
• Being a positive, relevant theological voice in the church and society at large.

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The same can't be said of many 'other' organisations today...

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Fall 2010 Survey Results

Submitted Jul 29, 2011
By Edwin Schwisow

While most publications carefully conduct surveys behind closed doors, *Adventist Today* does so openly, at least once a year, by mail. The following news feature articulates the findings, as analysed by a professional pollster (who donated his services) to help AT extract the most accurate information possible from its Fall 2010 Survey. The findings in these surveys are often far "more precious than gold." Read on, and discover what *Adventist Today* readers value most in their magazine.

Read the survey results

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**Guidelines for Productive & Courteous Comments:**

- This is the writer’s court & play – no upstaging please
- Stay on topic – don’t wander off chasing butterflies
- Be brief – no more than 3 modest paragraphs – if longer, you are too windy
- We ask you to be considerate & courteous – the golden rule, remember
- Absolutely no denigrating of individuals – to err, earns banishment
- Make this a stimulating encounter & come back often

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There are no comments.

Posting as

Enter comment here...

Subscribe to comments
Adventist Today Readers Offer Frank Assessment in Scientific Survey

Results of a comprehensive survey of Adventist Today subscribers show strong support for continuing an editorial policy that emphasizes intellectual, probing material, along with coverage of Adventist history and culture.

The survey was written by AT staff, led by Edwin A. Schwisow, Adventist Today development director, and was analyzed and tabulated by H. LeVerne Bissell, a retired professor who for many years taught survey techniques at the university level.

The survey posed 10 central questions, the first of which addressed what current readers of Adventist Today most enjoy in the journal.

“Our board and staff have goals and objectives, but for this ministry to grow and succeed, those proposals need to dovetail very closely with the expectations of our readers,” said Schwisow. “This question is central to our direction as a magazine.”

The results are based on responses of 300 Adventist Today readers to a survey by mail returned this past winter.

The first question asked readers to indicate the type of content they prefer—of five options offered, they were asked to rate them on a five-point scale. Results were tabulated as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Content</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1B. A broader scope of material, with emphasis on intellectual/controversial</td>
<td>2.086</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>material, but with additional articles that define historical discoveries about</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the church, its demographics, projections for its future, and changes and trends.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1A. Intellectual/debative/controversial material related to Adventism, its</td>
<td>2.092</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beliefs, its organization, its use of money and resources, its sociology, and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>its definition and stewardship of “Truth.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1C. A still-broader scope of material, with inclusion of the intellectual and</td>
<td>2.190</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>controversial, but with compelling thought angles that for various reasons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>many church publications do not readily carry.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1D. An editorial formula of positive articles about Adventism, with some</td>
<td>3.714</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>material of a deeper, more probing nature.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1E. An editorial formula similar to that of other church publications, so long</td>
<td>4.481</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as Adventist Today retains the credibility of its independence.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In his analysis, Bissell noted that “based on survey results, respondents showed a distinct preference for content that is intellectual and controversial rather than on content that is similar to that of other church publications.”

Publication Format and Frequency

Question 2 asked readers to share their views on how large the publication should be and how frequently it should be published.

Figure 1 shows the responses:
More respondents preferred to continue with quarterly issues of AT with an expanded number of pages in each issue than preferred any other option. Fewer respondents would like to return to the six-per-year sequence,” noted Bissell. The survey showed minimal support for a Web-only publication—about 3 percent.

Funding Options for AT

Question 3 asked respondents to mark the best, or primary ways, AT could “make up the difference” between its subscription income and the actual cost of its ministry. Responses to the five options were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Option</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3A. Circulate informative letters and surveys, dealing with AT’s future goals and needs.</td>
<td>2.189</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3B. Encourage readers and members of the AT sustaining advisory to make regular donations through invoiced or direct deposits.</td>
<td>2.226</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3D. Augment income by distributing additional materials, such as cutting-edge books.</td>
<td>2.295</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3C. Discontinue the sale of regular subscriptions and seek support solely through tax-deductible memberships starting at $50 per year.</td>
<td>2.979</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3E. Other</td>
<td>3.333</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents clearly preferred continuation of the primary fund-raising practices now in place at Adventist Today.

AT Coverage of the Creation vs. Evolution Discussion in the Church

Question 4 asked readers to indicate on a six-point Likert-type continuum (ranging from “0” for “Carry Nothing” to “5” for “Follow the Story Closely”) regarding the level of coverage they expect from Adventist Today on the Creation-and-Evolution debate. About 68 percent of the responses fell within the “4” and “5” ranges, with a mean response of 3.958. This indicates that respondents lean quite strongly toward close coverage of this discussion.

In a follow-up question, readers were asked about their level of interest in the creation and evolution debate (contrasted with Question 4, which asked what level of expectation they had that AT carry reports on the subject).

Readers indicated their level of interest on a six-point Likert-type scale, similar to the one above, with “0” indicating “Not at All,” and “5” indicating “Very Much.” About 57 percent of respondents marked a “4” or “5.” The mean response of 3.648 was a bit lower than the mean for Question 4 above, but still shows a moderately strong interest in this topic. Readers apparently think the magazine should carry material about this debate, though on a personal level, the debate is of a less-consuming nature.

Interest in Materials from Authors Such as Desmond Ford

This question asked readers if they read and enjoy evangelical-oriented materials from authors such as Dr. Ford, as they compare these with other salient writers in AT. Once again, a Likert-type scale was used, as in Question 5.

Nearly 62 percent of respondents marked either “4” or “5.” The mean response was 3.725, slightly higher than the mean for Question 5. Once again, this indicates a moderately strong enjoyment of the writings of such authors.

AT WEB Site Access During the 2010 General Conference Session

Question 7 asked readers how many times they had accessed the Web site during the General Conference Session, held in the summer of 2010. Nearly half (143) the respondents had accessed the WEB several times, or at least once or twice. Only 25 respondents accessed the Web daily. Many respondents (130) did not access the Web at all.

Eight respondents commented on Question 7. Four did not have access to a computer or did not have training in Internet. One had trouble with his/her e-mail site and received nothing from AT about GC. One had expected e-mail updates/summaries from AT, but apparently did not receive them.

Readers Who Own or Plan to Acquire AT-distributed Books

Most respondents (243 of 300) either own or plan to acquire AT-distributed books. Only 45 did not own or plan to acquire such books, and 12 respondents did not answer the question. Adventist Today currently carries seven different titles.
How Many Individuals Read Each AT Copy?

The survey shows that on average, two individuals read each respondent’s copy of AT (mean of 2.088). However, some respondents shared their copies with three or four others, and a small number shared their copies with as many as 10. One respondent left this comment: “Just myself – here in [this] conference, that is risky business for employees, so must read it in the closet.”

Interest Level for 12 Possible AT Articles

The final question asked readers to rank 12 articles that might appear in an issue of AT, ranking them from “1” through “12,” with “1” being of most compelling interest. The 12 articles are shown in the following table, and for purposes of identification, are numbered in the order in which they appeared in the survey as 10A through 10L.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Rank Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10D. Article by an Adventist statistician and researcher who identifies five primary reasons Adventist youth leave the church, temporarily and permanently—and ways the church can realistically respond to each problem area.</td>
<td>4.918</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10A. Give-and-take between a highly educated literal creationist and an outspoken Adventist theistic evolutionist.</td>
<td>4.983</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10J. Article on the future of women in church leadership, written by a high-profile writer known for her knowledge, coherency and outspokenness on the issue.</td>
<td>5.063</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10K. An article advocating a radical, but workable transition to higher retention of tithe funds for use in local congregations in North America.</td>
<td>5.353</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10B. Letters to the Editor.</td>
<td>5.484</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10L. An article studying the differences and similarities between Adventist conservatives and progressives and asking the question, “Can Conservatives and Progressives Coexist?”</td>
<td>5.732</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10C. Article that examines emergence of strongly Historic Adventism in some sections of the nation, and the effect of the recent election of Ted Wilson on its viability and growth.</td>
<td>5.755</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10G. Letters to the Editor.</td>
<td>6.300</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10E. Article identifying evangelicalism as a strong movement within Adventism and the elements of evangelicalism being assimilated into traditional Adventism from this movement, including changes in liturgy and methods of study.</td>
<td>6.554</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10H. Article by a retired Adventist minister in good standing who has served as senior pastor of a Sunday-keeping church for nearly two decades.</td>
<td>6.965</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10I. A cluster of shorter articles by articulate, thoughtful Adventist college seniors as they anticipate graduation and the adjustments they know they will face in months and years ahead in the larger Adventist community.</td>
<td>7.943</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10F. Article identifying growth projections of Hispanic Adventism in North America and the financial and demographic effect when Hispanic churches (as projected) outnumber Anglo congregations.</td>
<td>8.806</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of responses to Question 2 option C suggested topics of special interest that might be included in future issues of AT. A discussion of these suggestions is included here. Some of these were very brief, such as “soteriology; origins,” “Biblical Research, Honesty in the church (money wise),” “Tithe vis a vis ‘storehouse’ concept,” “Reaching Islam,” “Prophecy,” “Salvation (who is saved?)” “Current Adventist events,” “Being a gay SDA,” “Evolution from [an] SDA perspective,” “General Conference—Atlanta,” “Creationism, censorship.” Some of the suggestions were longer and fairly specific. One respondent wrote, “Gluttony... it’s pervasive in the SDA church & it’s just as bad as any sexual sin but everybody fears condemning. Better yet...do special issues on all seven deadly sins...lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, pride.”


“Suggestions varied widely,” noted Bissell. “There doesn’t seem to be any clear theme among them.”

Final Comments

Nineteen respondents offered general comments, expressing their appreciation for AT as follows:
a) “We always enjoy the magazine.”
b) I always enjoy the magazines. Every 2 months is better. I do not spend much time on the internet. Mostly e-mail.”

- 3 -
c) “We love your magazine.”
d) “Hi! I’m so grateful for both AT & Spectrum. The church I attend is a small, rural church in the most conservative conference in the US—Michigan! The two magazines keep me alert, interested & with a healthy mental attitude. Otherwise I would dry up on the vine! Thanks.”
e) “If you back down from your current AT venue, who else will hold the church administration accountable? Our people need the exposure you give. Keep up the good work.”
f) “Keep up the good work! AT is my favorite SDA publication. You ‘guys’ have ‘guts.’ Appreciate you very much.”

A few respondents offered suggestions, “Too intellectual at times. Bring articles down to average or a little higher;” “Less money spent on Web, more on magazine;” “I am not sure what you have published last. I expected a special GC report & a magazine but nothing received since 6/10;” “I would like to see Adventist Today spearhead a grass roots movement to abolish the Union Conference level of the church. If you want some ideas on what the money saved could be used for throughout the US denomination, please let me know.”

One respondent underlined on his/her survey form, “This is the time for the Free Press to stand tall!” A couple of comments expressed respondents’ concern about the Adventist Church: One wrote, “As you read my notes, please know that I love our church & the message I accepted 50+ years ago. I came from ‘way out in the world’ when I married a wonderful SDA young woman. My life changed when I accepted Christ as my Savior. I feel strongly that the pastor in the pulpit is not given the true support that is necessary in order for him to minister to his flock. Conference employees do not fill the role.”

Another commented, “In my 80th year, I find the SDA Church has little relevance to my life. I’m still a seeker and do a lot of study & lead a study group. I find too much of Adventist doctrine is non-supportable. Good luck to AT.”

Summary of Conclusions

Bissell summarized key findings from the survey, as follows:

1. Respondents preferred AT content that is intellectual and controversial.

2. They preferred that AT continue with quarterly issues, with expanded number of pages.

3. In order to “make up the difference” between subscription income and actual cost of publication, they preferred:
   a) circulating informative letters and surveys detailing AT’s future goals and needs,
   b) encouraging regular donations from subscribers and AT sustaining advisory members, and
   c) augmenting income by distributing additional materials.

4. They expect AT to follow the creation/evolution discussion in the church closely.

5. Respondents themselves are fairly interested in the general topic of the interrelationship of creation and evolution.

6. They read and enjoy materials by evangelical writers such as Desmond Ford.

7. More than half the respondents had accessed the Web at least once or twice during the 2010 General Conference session.

8. More than 80 percent of respondents owned or planned to acquire AT-distributed books.

9. On average, about two individuals read each respondent’s copy of AT.

10. In descending order of preference, respondents rated the following five topics at the top, from a list of 12:
    a) why youth leave the church, and what to do about them;
    b) the issues that arise between theistic evolutionists and creationists;
    c) exposure of major financial wrongdoing involving donated funds;
    d) transitioning to a higher retention of tithe funds by the local church; and
    e) Letters to the editor.

    “I thank those who took the time to return the questionnaire,” says Schwisow. “The findings are frequently cited in our discussions about the future of the magazine. We take these findings very seriously, indeed.”

If you are interested in a more comprehensive report of this survey, phone me at 503-826-8600. We are particularly open to sharing this report with you if you are interested in learning more about AT and its needs. —bg