Adventist Heritage

TOP STORY

Teens Speak on Abortion in SDA Hospitals

By Melissa Howell, AToday Blogger

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Death, Be Not Proud

By Trudy Morgan-Cole, AT Web Columnist

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Cindy Tutsch - Ellen White and Inspiration

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**Film: The King's Speech**

By Angela McPherson

The crowd stares. The dead air crackles. The "on air" light blinks, adding to the urgency: *Say something. Do something.*

The whole empire is listening.

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**d i d y o u k n o w ?**

**New Blogger Joins a Powerful Lineup**

Please welcome our newest blogger -- Melissa Howell. Melissa is a speaker and author who has traveled the country speaking for youth and young adult audiences. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Theology and an emphasis in Youth Ministries, and a Masters of Divinity from Andrews University, with a second emphasis in Youth and Young Adult Ministry.

Melissa writes this week's Top Story - *"Teens Speak on Abortion in SDA Hospitals."*
Weekly 'Toons

“Death Before Sin”
[click on image]
Teens Speak on Abortion in SDA Hospitals

Posted February 25th, 2011 by Melissa Howell

It felt like all eyes in America turned towards the SDA church last month when the Washington Post so prominently highlighted us in their article "Seventh-day Adventists and Abortion." On the 38th Anniversary of the Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court case, the Post noted that although many religious groups marched in protest of the decision to legalize abortion in America, Adventists were somewhat...missing. Was our absence due to the fact that we perform abortions in our hospitals across the world? The Post questioned "Is this practice inconsistent with their otherwise strong emphasis on health?"

While the Adventist world balked, protested, or cheered over this PR break (or disaster) I myself immediately took the article to a group of over 150 teenagers and young adults, and discovered an emerging reality for Adventism that I wasn't even looking for. Here is a summary of what I found:

1. The largest majority of students were in agreement with our SDA stance of performing abortions in our hospitals only in "extraordinary cases."

"I am proud of our Adventist Hospitals for their work and progress in the medical field today. But I do not think our hospitals should offer abortion as a birth control method. I believe we should stand by our SDA beliefs - abortions are wrong and against our conservative take on life." - Brittany

"To have an abortion performed in our hospitals, I believe it needs to be a very specific case. If the mother will die, if the woman was raped and is not mature enough physically or emotionally to handle the child, or if she is unstable to the point where she could not handle the pregnancy, then it's ok. I don't believe God would want someone to lose their mind over a pregnancy they had no control over. However, if you were just simply irresponsible, it's time to take some accountability - you deserve your fate and should have to keep the child." - Megan

2. Among those who had personally experienced an abortion situation with a parent, close friend or relative (none admitted to having had one themselves), opinions leaned towards the pro-choice stance.

"I was saved from abortion when I was only a fetus in my mother's womb. She decided that she would put me up for adoption rather than abort me, and in the end she decided to keep me. I am eternally grateful for that. I believe abortion is completely wrong, but there still may be a time that abortion becomes a necessity." - BP
"I have many friends who have had abortions, and I know firsthand what they went through because I was there by their side the whole time. But I also know their scenarios called for it. The pregnancies would have ruined their lives and their babies' lives for good. Teenage moms have grim prospects for the future. They are likely to leave school, receive inadequate prenatal care, rely on public assistance, develop health problems, or end up divorced." - A.T.

3. Those students who were adamantly in favor of our hospitals performing all types of abortions tended to base their arguments either on the values of acceptance, grace, or civil rights.

"We need to remember that GOD IS LOVE. Simple. We can't determine what others do or how they will be judged, all we know is GOD IS LOVE. Jesus didn't hang out with people who judged others, he preached against it." - H.S.

"The ability of a woman to have control of her body is critical to civil rights. Take away her reproductive choice and you step on a slippery slope. If the government can force a woman to continue a pregnancy, what about forcing a woman to use contraception or to undergo sterilization? " - Dawn

"We shouldn't make people feel bad for making a choice that we disagree with. Adventists don't have the right to judge people on the choices they make, only God does. " - N.C.

4. Those who stood strongly against our hospitals performing abortions under any circumstances were definitely in the minority, but still spoke with strong voices:

"This is a matter of life or death for a child. Maybe it's not your plan, but it could be God's. God can turn any situation into an opportunity to be a blessing in a person's life, abortion or not." -M.S.

"Abortion is wrong because as soon as the two cells meet, they create unique DNA, and when you destroy that, you have killed life. Rape victims are a touchy subject, but I'd say that even though the life was created for very wrong reasons, we should not disable that life from becoming something great, or being used by God for something great. Why keep God from doing a miracle?" - K.B.

5. Amongst all who found abortion to be completely wrong, almost none were willing or even desiring to enforce this belief on anyone else.

"I personally would never choose abortion, no matter what my circumstance was, but if it's a choice that an individual needs to make, then I say let them make that choice." - R.J.

"Abortion is wrong. But I'm glad that our hospitals are saying, "Hey, if you need help, we'll help you." - G.P."
"I really do get a bad feeling in my gut when I think about a little life that God put inside of a woman being terminated. I think abortion is immoral...yet still women should get to choose." - James

"I think abortion is wrong. I would never get an abortion, even in the worst of scenarios. But neither am I angry at or opposed to people who think abortion is okay. I don't have the need to force my beliefs on anyone else. It's not a Christian's job to tell someone else what they need to do. All of us have to follow our own conscience." - Anna

It was the seemingly double-standard of #5 that left me thinking in the end, and musing on the viability of holding a belief firmly and yet not requiring another to hold it. What sort of moral fabric is emerging here among this generation, I wondered? I have seen this trend surfacing on quite a few other issues as well -- homosexuality, gay marriage, the death penalty, the war in Iraq, President Obama and all things political, euthanasia, suicide, and more -- they find something to be wrong, yet are still very accepting and comfortable with others who don't. Does that sound like Adventism to you?

Maybe we are seeing a reaction to our legalism of the past in a true attempt at living out the ideals of grace and acceptance. Or perhaps it's the emergence of the postmodern, relativistic mindset of the day. Either way, it seems a generation is coming on the scene which does hold firm beliefs, yet doesn't seem to have the need to enforce them. Is Adventism ready for this? Does this spell ruin or rebirth for our church, our beliefs, our evangelism? Is this a lukewarm, compromising-type of "conforming to the world" that we should worry about, or is it a welcome and much needed breath of fresh air that we should celebrate?

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Death, Be Not Proud

Posted February 17th, 2011 by Trudy Morgan-Cole

I've been thinking about death more than usual lately. It's not so much that I have a heightened sense of my own mortality, as of other people's.

Over the last year, the small, close-knit adult-education center where I teach has suffered three tragic losses -- two staff members who both died of sudden heart attacks, and a student, a young man of twenty, who drowned on a camping trip. Three times in a year we've gathered to mourn as a community; to echo shocked variations on "I can't believe it!", to attend wakes and funerals, to share stories and tears and laughter.

Each time, I've been struck by how many members of our community -- including young people who profess nothing but contempt for God and religion -- cling to the hope of some kind of conscious existence after death. Loving tributes on sympathy cards and Facebook pages are addressed directly to the deceased: messages range from "I don't know how I'll go on without you," to "Hope the coffee is better up there, buddy!" The vague sense that the person who has died lives on, able to watch over those left behind, waiting for an eventual reunion, provides comfort for people who seem to have no other use for religion.

Like most lifelong Adventists, I can't stop the phrase "The dead know not anything," from popping into my mind at such times. Since I believe it's insensitive to give grieving people a quick Bible study on the state of the dead, I spend a lot of time biting my tongue at funeral homes. I smile and nod at folk-religion ideas which I disagree with, but which obviously bring the bereaved a great deal of comfort.

After enduring the successive shocks of these three sudden deaths, I had the opportunity to spend time with a close friend who is in the later stages of cancer. Talking about death with someone who knows he's going to die is a sobering experience, though having the chance to say goodbye is a blessing.

My friend has had to fight his way back to some degree of trust in God after losing faith in the Adventist church and its picture of God. Now, talking about the hope of an afterlife, he admits he has no idea what, if anything, waits beyond the grave. "But I kind of hope the Adventist idea, that death is just a sleep, isn't true," he tells me. He likes the thought of going immediately into the presence of God, whatever that might mean.

As with my bereaved friends at work, I listen and nod, and think over my ideas about death and the afterlife. The Adventist doctrine about the state of the dead has always made perfect sense to me. (My husband, who was not raised SDA as I was but joined the church as an adult, describes it as his "favorite Adventist doctrine.") The dualistic idea of an immortal soul seems completely
at odds with a Biblical view of human nature; it also opens the door for the absolutely evil concept of a God who condemns sinners to an eternal conscious hell.

But the older I get, the less I know. Our Adventist doctrine on the state of the dead still makes perfect sense to me intellectually, but death and grief don't always hit us on an intellectual level.

On an October night in 1942, my twelve-year-old aunt Vi, raised in a devout Seventh-day Adventist home, woke at four in the morning to see her grandfather sitting in a chair near her bed. This made no sense, as her grandfather was on the passenger ferry S.S. Caribou, then crossing the cold waters between Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. Her father dismissed it as a dream. A day or so later, the family learned that the Caribou had been sunk by a German torpedo -- at about the same time Vi had reported seeing Grandfather in her room.

That story has been told in my family for nearly sixty years, usually with a shake of the head and a comment about how some things defy explanation. It was a bizarre anomaly in a clan where everyone believed that the dead knew not anything. In defiance of the folklore beliefs of those around them, my family would all have asserted that spirits of the dead could not possibly make farewell visits to their loved ones as they slipped away from this bodily life.

Now, in the midst of studying the epistle to the Philippians, I stumble over Paul's assurance that he would rather depart this life and "be with Christ," and wonder what he meant by that. How could he -- or, for that matter, Jesus, telling the story of the rich man and Lazarus -- be so carelessly misleading about such a central point of doctrine?

I still love the Adventist doctrine of the state of the dead, of body and spirit as one inseparable unit. I believe John Donne was right when he wrote that "One short sleep past, we wake eternally, and Death shall be no more: Death, thou shalt die." I am comforted by the thought of falling asleep in death, and waking to that trumpet, to the resurrection of the body.

My friend with cancer admits that when he imagines an afterlife immediately beyond death, it's in a resurrected body, not as a disembodied spirit -- and he also admits that his speculations on an afterlife probably owe as much to science fiction as to any kind of theology. Intellectually, none of this makes any sense. The pieces don't fit.

I'm left with no answers, only questions, and this is always a problem in the midst of a religious community that values certainty above almost every other virtue. It's not that I want to cast doubt on this most sensible of doctrines, but I wonder about the confidence with which we Adventists speak of the ultimate mysteries. John Donne ordered Death not to be proud -- but should we, speaking in our limited human knowledge, also be a little less proud when we talk about death? Is there a kind of arrogance in saying that we understand and can explain everything about death, the afterlife, the resurrection? Is there room in our theology -- or, I should ask, in my theology -- for some mystery? Room to say "We don't fully understand these things"?

I've been taught that the idea of consciousness after death is Satan's first lie, a deadly and pernicious heresy. And perhaps it is. But does the afterlife mythology of folk-religion necessarily reflect demonic deception, or could it reflect a different way of looking at
resurrection -- a way of looking that isn't bound by the constraints of earthly time, but that moves to the rhythms of eternity? Is it possible that in God's eternity, concepts like "now," "not yet," and "later" may have far less meaning than in our world of clocks and calendars?

Yes, I still believe that the dead know not anything. Because of that belief, when a student expresses the hope that his beloved teacher is enjoying better coffee "up there," I ought to react with shock at the suggestion that my former co-worker is now in heaven -- not to mention that he's drinking coffee in Paradise!

But sometimes, perversely, all I can do is smile.

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Ellen White and Inspiration

Posted February 16th, 2011 by Cindy Tutsch

I've heard it before, and I'm regretfully sure I'll hear it again. Here's how it goes: Ellen White at last understood righteousness by faith in Jesus when a couple of young Californians introduced the concept at the 1888 General Conference session. But she still wasn't quite certain about the centrality of Jesus until W. W. Prescott preached a sermon, motivating Ellen White to begin work on The Desire of Ages. Often this theory of the source of Ellen White's inspiration goes hand in hand with the concept that she was a gloomy, morose, depressed, melancholy Christian until -- Oh! Day of Days! -- she heard the messages of righteousness by faith from Jones and Waggoner.

What does the Bible teach about how God communicates messages to His people? In Numbers 12:6, God spoke directly to doubters Aaron and Miriam, saying "Hear my words! When there are prophets among you, I the Lord make myself known to them in visions; I speak to them in dreams." The chain of communication in Revelation 1:1 is God--Jesus--angel--prophet--people.

Peter states it clearly: "No prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." 2 Peter 1:21 NRSV  Nothing in these verses suggests that the inspiration for a prophet's messages comes from his or her family, friends, or cultural milieu.

Let's take a look at Ellen White's own views on the source of her inspiration. While we're at it, we might as well let her speak as to which of her published writings are inspired, and which are not, since many Adventists take the smorgasbord approach to her writings:

"In these letters which I write, in the testimonies I bear, I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision---the precious rays of light shining from the throne." Testimonies, Vol. 5, page 67

"I have given you the light God has given to me. In no case have I given my own judgment or opinion. I have enough to write of what has been shown me, without falling back on my own opinions." Selected Messages, Vol. 3, page 70

The theory that Ellen White's inspiration was either self-generated or influenced by her peers or culture fits nicely for those who want to paint a Jesus after their own likeness. EGW's own comments remind us that this mindset isn't new:

"Many times in my experience I have been called upon to meet the attitude of a certain class, who acknowledged that the testimonies were from God, but took the position that this matter and
that matter were Sister White's opinion and judgment. This suits those who do not love reproof and correction, and who, if their ideas are crossed, have occasion to explain the difference between the human and the divine.

"If the preconceived opinions or particular ideas of some are crossed in being reproved by testimonies, they have a burden at once to make plain their position to discriminate between the testimonies, defining what is Sister White's human judgment, and what is the word of the Lord. Everything that sustains their cherished ideas is divine, and the testimonies to correct their errors are human -- Sister White's opinion. They make of none effect the counsel of God by their tradition." Selected Messages, Vol. 3, page 68

"When I send you a testimony of warning and reproof, many of you declare it to be merely the opinion of Sister White. You have thereby insulted the Spirit of God." Testimonies, Vol. 5, page 64

God is the source of her counsel, her messages, to the church. Thus, it is God, not Ellen White, who is being rejected when we deign to have the ability to discern what is inspired and what is not:

"The testimonies I have borne you have in truth been presented to me by the Lord. . It is not I whom you are betraying. It is not I against whom you are so embittered. It is the Lord, who has given me a message to bear to you." Selected Messages, Vol. 3, page 84

Ellen White herself identifies the source of her inspiration as God. So, to use the C. S. Lewis analogy about Christ's claims to Divinity, either she is who she claimed to be -- a messenger of the Lord -- or she is an imposter, a wannabe, a fake. Most critical Adventists will not say that she is totally fake. Instead, they will nuance something about her being pastoral and devotional. In other words, Steps to Christ and The Desire of Ages are great, but throw out The Great Controversy, Counsels on Diet and Foods, and Messages to Young People.

It doesn't appear to me that we have that throw-out-what-we-don't like option. Either she is inspired by God, as she says she is, or she is not. Why do we play these games with ourselves? Are we perilously close to the condition of the vineyard leasers described in Mark 12:1-11?

Though Ellen White was certainly fallible, what some allege to be mistakes in her writings driven by her humanity or the culture in which she lived may actually be relevant counsel more correctly attributable to Divine influence. Ellen White's inspiration can be described as plenary, or thought, rather than verbal. Thus, she sought out words that best describe the messages communicated to her by God. As with most of us, her writing skills improved with maturity, practice, and extensive reading. This does not mean, however, that what she wrote in 1900 is truth, and what she wrote in 1850 isn't! Neither does it mean that she suddenly "got Jesus " in 1888. Let's consider what she wrote in 1883:

"We look to self, as though we had power to save ourselves; but Jesus died for us because we are helpless to do this. In Him is our hope, our justification, our righteousness. We should not despond and fear that we have no Saviour or that He has no thought of mercy toward us. At this
very time He is carrying on His work in our behalf, inviting us to come to Him in our helplessness and be saved. We dishonor Him by our unbelief. It is astonishing how we treat our very best Friend, how little confidence we repose in Him who is able to save to the uttermost and who has given us every evidence of His great love." _Faith and Works_, p 36

Does that sound like someone who didn't understand the centrality of Jesus before she "heard the voice" in 1888??

We're out of space, so next time I'll present the case that Ellen White knew her Jesus early on and experienced joy and freedom from guilt in her young Christian experience.

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The King’s Speech

Posted February 21st, 2011 by Angela McPherson

The crowd stares. The dead air crackles. The "on air" light blinks, adding to the urgency: Say something. Do something. The whole empire is listening.

The King's Speech opens in a stadium at the 1925 British Empire Exhibition. Albert (played by Colin Firth), second-in-line to England's throne and the current Duke of York, stands in front of a microphone in a stare-down with the technological advance that will expose his deepest insecurities: the radio. The pressure of addressing his kingdom on-air exacerbates the flaw he's formerly been able to hide: his stammer.

If hearing the reverberation as Albert attempts to assemble his words is not enough to incite sympathy, the looks on the faces of his listening subjects do the rest: pity. Shame. Embarrassment. Disappointment. Surprise. Anger.

The look on Albert's face: defeat.

The King's Speech is the true story of how Albert, who would become King George VI, went about overcoming this defeat. And he did not do it alone.

Albert's first assistance comes from his wife, Elizabeth (played by Helena Bonham Carter), who goes on a mission to find a speech therapist—finally settling on an unorthodox candidate: Lionel Logue (played by Geoffrey Rush), an Australian actor with a speech therapy practice.

Logue's interaction with the royals is quite unorthodox, as he insists on a first-name basis with his clients--Logue calls Albert "Bertie," and Bertie calls him Logue. His methods, too, are a bit off-the-wall in 1930s England: Logue makes Bertie sing his words, scat different vocables, and read Shakespeare while listening to loud music. He even goes so far as to discourage smoking:

Logue: "I believe sucking smoke into your lungs will kill you."

Bertie: "My physicians say it relaxes the throat."

Logue: "They're idiots."

Bertie: "They've all been knighted,"
Logue: "Makes it official then."

Bertie isn't sold on the methods or the man at first--they have an 'on again, off again,' partnership. But as events in Bertie's life (and the kingdom at large) continue to unfold, the pressure mounts for Bertie to speak. And to speak well.

England is gearing up for World War II. Bertie's father, King George V, makes use of radio as a tool to access and lead his empire. As George V harshly notes, being a monarch is no longer a matter of 'looking regal on a horse,' but a matter of mastering technology—without silences and stammers.

After the death of George V, the throne is to pass to Edward VIII, Bertie's brother—but Edward (played by Guy Pierce) is hopelessly in love with the thrice-married Wallis Simpson. The abdication crisis of 1936 ensues, and the crown comes Bertie's way. Bertie is to be King George VI.

King George VI must lead. King George VI must speak. But he can't seem to do it without the assistance of his unlikely therapist.

So the vocal lessons continue in rapid succession. Colin Firth is excellent in displaying Bertie's tension and determination during scenes of lesson triumphs and flub-ups—he tromps through the emotional spectrum of optimism and frustration with fervor. This fervor soon becomes quite necessary: as war looms on the horizon, one very important speech remains to be spoken.

The King's Speech is more than a period piece for curious viewers who wish to see the story of Queen Elizabeth II's parents (though this is a definite pull). The King's Speech is about fear. About pressure. About feeling inadequate to the task at hand.

The King's Speech is also about finding one's voice. About silencing fear by moving through it—one step (or stammer) at a time. About being humble enough to ask for help, and gracious enough to give it.

The dynamics between Bertie and Logue are endearingly enjoyable, and gently grab at comedy, with quips from Logue such as: "Do you know any jokes?" with Bertie's retort of, "Timing isn't my strong suit." Their interaction throughout the film builds to an intimacy and poignancy which allows for Logue to act as a formidable mentor and father figure. There is something to be gained by watching two men, set apart by society as unequal, sit in one another's presence not only as equals, but friends.

The King's Speech is rated R. The R rating comes as a result of a single scene in which Bertie lets out a string of profanities (most prominently the F-word) after Logue notices that he doesn't stammer when he swears. This scene depicts a very human moment of frustration and catharsis. Aside from this scene, nearly nothing is inappropriate in regard to the film and, should it have been omitted, The King's Speech could have easily garnished a rating of PG.
The Greek philosopher Epictetus said, "If you want to improve, be content to be thought foolish and stupid." The crux of the film is exactly this: the price of improvement is, sometimes, the willingness to foolishly and stupidly sing your words till you don't stutter anymore. In King George VI's case, improvement was cheap enough.

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Comments

Re: The King's Speech
On February 25th, 2011 Trudy Morgan-Cole says:

Good review -- this was by far my favourite movie of the past year. Hope it wins Best Picture and Firth wins Best Actor.

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Angela McPherson writes book and film reviews for Adventist Today. She loves God, humanity, pop-culture, and quality music. She is a Senior Mass Communications major at Southern Adventist University, and longs to write a great and mighty literary work about how much God likes us-really likes us. She preaches at every available opportunity, and adores multisyllabic words, avocado eggrolls, and talking incessantly about Jesus Christ.
Death Before Sin

Posted February 27th, 2011 by Heinrich

One of the Saints

Posted February 21st, 2011 by Guido
Cain's Little Secret

Posted February 12th, 2011 by Heinrich
Editor's note: Cartoon based on our feature article found on page 6 of the Winter 2011 print issue. Read the article.

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**The Lion and the Lamb**

Posted February 3rd, 2011 by AT Online Editor
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