Adventists’ quest for news, information, opinion, and insight has grown rapidly in recent months, overtaxing the ability of atoday.org to serve the needs of its online public. Responding to this need, generous donors have provided funding to completely redesign and upgrade the AToday website. The new site will go online May 1.

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The Critical Path to Salvation

*By Preston Foster, AToday Web Columnist*

Over the last several months (and 30 years) Seventh-day Adventists have been debating the role of Ellen White, and, specifically, the traditional Adventist version of the Investigative Judgment vs. the Desmond Ford exegesis of that notion.

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Adventist Education--at the Crossroads?

*By Jan Long*

Recently the President and Board Chair of La Sierra University (LSU) issued a joint letter entitled, *An Open Letter Regarding the Teaching of Creation*. A copy of this letter published in *Adventist Today* raises intriguing questions regarding the future of Adventist higher education.

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Make Room for Refreshing: A Report from 'One Gathering'

*By Lisa Clark Diller, AT Web Columnist*
I am a Christian because I am a follower of Jesus. I was reminded of this recently at a gathering in Atlanta—the One Project, where we indulged in worship of Jesus and celebration of who He is as the center of our Adventist identity, our Christian community, and our walk with God.

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**Cindy Tutsch - Ellen White: Joyless Before the Epiphany of 1888?**

I’m bemused by the allegation that Ellen White’s spiritual life was a journey from legalism to freedom in Christ, from early depression to joy in the Lord, from an emphasis on hell to an emphasis on heaven.

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**Stephen Foster - What is the Essence of Seventh-day Adventism?**

What is it essentially all about? This is not to be confused, necessarily, with its raison d’être as a movement; but what is the one foundational thing you can be certain that all Adventists believe, or believe to be true?

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Trish Tickle - "Pick Me! Pick Me!"

Every once in awhile, especially when I get weary in well doing I need to be reminded why I do certain things. The call of Isaiah never fails to remind me of the spiritual revival God has for each of us throughout our journey.

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Herbert Douglass - The Heart of Power

Can we recognize, in time, the deadly virus of "power"? I read some years ago that power is the "modern idolatry," that it is a "god, and a heady intoxicating one; success is its creed."

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Ervin Taylor - An Earthquake and a Prophecy

I predict that, over a period of six months, the Adventist Review and Adventist World will publish, on at least four occasions, in some form either by itself or in connection with other "signs," statements to the effect that the recent major devastating earthquake in Japan is another sign that the "End is Near."

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Dr. Bert B. Beach served from 1980-2005 in the General Conference as Director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, and lastly as the Secretary of the Council on Inter-Church Relations.

From the interview:

Beach: "Jesus spoke little about political society. However, it must be true that His teachings will have a socio-economic fallout. He presented the Messianic task as spiritual good news, but clearly including a social dimension of good news for the poor, the blind, the oppressed. Today, there are increasing numbers of Adventists that hold or have held political office, up to including head of government or state."

Read more
Adventists’ quest for news, information, opinion, and insight has grown rapidly in recent months, overtaxing the ability of atoday.org to serve the needs of its online public.

Responding to this need, generous donors have provided funding to completely redesign and upgrade the AT Website. The new site will go online May 1.

The new site will be capable of handling far more visitors, much more efficiently, and with far greater ease of operation than its predecessor.

“We expect that those who visit our site will be impressed by the ease of operation and the friendliness of the overall format,” says Edwin A. Schwisow, executive director for development. “Our goal is to make the information on that site available at the fingertips of those who seek it on our site.

“Adventist Today is dedicated to providing the best information and analysis available within, and about, the Adventist culture. We are dedicated to the best in Adventism, and we believe our Web site should, likewise, match the highest standards technical standards in the Adventist world.

“The new Web site will offer more news, more opinion pieces, and other content—the kinds of reading directly responsible for the popularity of the current site,” said Schwisow. “Especially since the 2010 General Conference Session, our site has been oversubscribed with information-seekers. A great deal of change is occurring within Adventism, and Adventist Today is pleased to be able to rise to the challenge of providing analysis, information, and inspiration for these times—and doing so more efficiently.

“We especially thank those of you who have shown patience with us for the past year, and those who have stepped forward to help us raise the standards of our website.”

Schwisow said weekly progress reports on the new site will be released via AT Update, leading up to the unveiling in early May.

Reported by Edwin A. Schwisow
One of the "ah-ha" moments in my early professional career occurred when I was introduced to the idea of the "critical path." The critical path is the set of essential, sequential steps taken to reach a goal. The critical path sheds all optional (even if desirable) steps. It defines only the essential and the related order of the essential.

Over the last several months (and 30 years) Seventh-day Adventists have been debating the role of Ellen White, and, specifically, the traditional Adventist version of the Investigative Judgment vs. the Desmond Ford exegesis of that notion. For some, this has become a point of departure -- or, at least, estrangement, from the denomination. For others, the Investigative Judgment is a fundamental teaching and evidence of the status of the SDA Church as THE remnant church. For many others it is an irritant, as it breeds bad blood and separation in the church.

Some don't care, one wit.

Let's stipulate that we will not come to any consensus here, regarding whether Mrs. White or Dr. Ford was right. Those teams are set and in no mood to listen, much less concede. There are, literally, hundreds of posts on this site offering support for the interpretations of both views.

I seek to determine whether this issue is either vital or important and interesting, but secondary. So I have two questions:

1. Is the acceptance of a particular version of the Investigative Judgment on the critical path to my acceptance of salvation and leading others to Christ?

2. What role does either version play in the preaching and teaching of the 3rd Angel's Message?

Let's define terms, generally. I am no theologian, so bear with me.

The traditionalists, buttressed by the writings of Ellen G. White, believe that after His ascension, Christ returned to heaven. Then, in 1844, in fulfillment of the 2300 day prophecy and, consistent with the sanctuary motifs outlined in Hebrews, Christ moved from the Holy Place, into the Most Holy Place, to begin His judgment of humankind. When Christ finishes that process, He will declare, "Let him that is righteous, be righteous still. Let him that is holy be holy, still." Then, probation will close and the books are set -- meaning the determination of our (individual) salvation has been made. Some time, soon following, Christ will return to claim those (living and dead) who have accepted His sacrifice.

The progressives, supportive of the research of Desmond Ford, believe that, at the time of His ascension, Christ returned to the right hand of His Father, and began advocating for us immediately. At the time of Christ's death, the sanctuary functions, on earth and in heaven, were rendered moot. In their view, the year, 1844, and the related 2300 day prophecy have nothing to do with when and how Christ will judge us. Significantly, the progressive interpretation holds that those who have accepted Christ should, now, be confident of their salvation.

I am sure that I have missed many details, some deemed to be critical. Perhaps I have done violence to either or both versions. I am also sure that I have not provided enough context to satisfy either side. That is unavoidable.

Though a detailed explanation of either version of the so-called Investigative Judgment is informative and helpful to us as individuals (in understanding the Kingdom and the nature of God), it is not clear to me how belief in either of these scenarios makes a tangible difference in our acceptance of salvation. In short, I understand how the different scenarios affect how we feel about salvation, but, in my view, they have no effect on what we must do to accept and claim it.

As a favorite fictional character said, "What does all of this have to do with me?"

Without question, it is vital to know that God will judge us. To me, it is obvious that He will judge us before His Second Coming. That aside, the particulars of the two dominant Adventist scenarios are interesting, but both are out of our control and, I think, neutral regarding how we should live. In the rancor over who is right, the "So what?" of the issue itself got lost.

Of course, I could be wrong. That's OK. I wish not only to identify the holes my view of this issue, but also to understand the spiritual risks, if any, either interpretation holds for me, individually, and for others caught in the crossfire of this debate. I am willing to be instructed here, if that instruction includes enlightenment.

Assuming one believes that Jesus died for our sins, offers us salvation by the acceptance of that gift, and understands that rejection of that gift remands you to judgment of your sins, is an understanding (and acceptance) of either version of the Investigative Judgment on the critical path to salvation?
To be sure, there is skin in the game. If the progressives are right, Des Ford would be vindicated. I am sure some will leverage that victory to "take down" Ellen White and all of her writings. From there, some liberals might continue to challenge the Adventist interpretation of the 3rd Angels message, the Sabbath, the Mark of the Beast, and other core beliefs. Part of the exceptionalist branding of the denomination will peel away. From an organizational perspective, it would be, "Houston, we have a problem." The church could land safely, but not without some heroic improvisation.

If the traditionalists are right, progressives and liberals will lose the pivot point of their 30-year debate and, for some, a great deal of credibility. More significantly, the influence of Ellen White in the church will likely be strengthened.

Then again, by the time we find out, for certain, who really is right, it won't matter anymore.

So, I am purposefully unburdened by the details of this debate. I believe Jesus will judge as He sees fit, regardless of how I interpret the judgment process. There is nothing I can do to affect His process. The law and the provisions of grace don’t change for me under either interpretation.

It seems to me that the significance of this debate has more to do with how we feel about the process of salvation than it is about the process itself. Of course, the not-so-hidden issue is the role of EGW in the church and the accuracy of some important interpretations of prophecy. The so-called Investigative Judgment issue, as it is presently debated, is a placeholder for the institutional view vs. the scholarly progressive one. It matters most in denominational politics.

Regarding my salvation, I can’t see where buying into "the right" interpretation of the so-called Investigative Judgment fits on the critical path. I’m sure I’ve missed something important.

So what? Seriously.
ADVENTIST EDUCATION—AT THE CROSSROADS?

Recently the President and Board Chair of La Sierra University (LSU) issued a joint letter entitled, An Open Letter Regarding the Teaching of Creation. A copy of this letter published in Adventist Today raises intriguing questions regarding the future of Adventist higher education. Although the LSU letter was the specific trigger for thinking about this, it is clear that it has broad implication for the entire Adventist educational enterprise.

In the concluding paragraph of this letter, it states that "La Sierra University is committed to being an institution that does not just present the Church’s view of creation, but fully supports it." Although some may be uncomfortable with this statement, in view of the current language of Fundamental Belief #6 (FB) pertaining to creation—a very general statement that affirms God as creator—most will likely read this as a reasonable and non-controversial affirmation. In short, LSU is merely giving assent to a faith statement that is not scientifically testable—but certainly is not a statement that is in opposition to science.

As most readers are no doubt aware, some leading Church officials are proposing to insert language into FB #6—something on the order of the earth, or at least life on our planet, being created in six literal, contiguous, 24-hour days, some 6,000 to 10,000 years ago.[1] What some may view as innocent verbiage would instantly transform the Church into an anti-scientific institution for the simple fact that there is an overwhelming amount of compelling physical evidence that such prospective language is inappropriate.

If this FB rewrite takes place, not only will every Church member be confronted with whether they will support a program that belittles the human capacity to draw conclusions from sense data and sound reason, but it will directly impact LSU’s affirmation referenced above, as well as all other Adventist institution of higher learning. This impact will be due to the irrefutable differences it would create—the choices being to affirm an anti-scientific statement and thereby lose academic credibility, or whether to remain committed to the scientific enterprise.

Since I come from an administrative background and was also on the faculty of Loma Linda University for a number of years, I am sensitive to the need for a degree of respect to the parent organization to which a university is attached, but there is also the need for academic honesty if a university is intent upon remaining credible.

In short, in the best of times it can be a difficult dance that administrators of higher education are required to play—and I submit that this dance will reach the breaking point should the Church move forward with its nefarious FB rewrite plan. The reality is this, LSU and all other Adventist universities will have a difficult time upholding and supporting any Church belief that proceeds down an anti-scientific path?

How does the educational wing of the Church reconcile anti-science with science? The fork in the road for the entire educational enterprise will be one of choosing to remain credible academic institutions by distancing from the parent Church, or to downgrade the entire educational enterprise to the status of bible colleges that specialize in apologetics.

That we are heading into this storm is quite amazing, considering the fact that Adventists have historically placed a high value on truth. For that reason, it may be useful to go back and review how it is that we acquire knowledge about anything—the fundamental tools that humans employ in this endeavor—for any resolution of this shaping conflict will be found in the engagement of these tools.

On the face of it, this may seem like a worthy endeavor for a Church that places a high value on truth. Yet, as we burrow into the subject we soon learn that there is very little that we can categorize as knowledge. In the absolute sense of the word, the only real knowledge any of us have, would be the self-evident truths about which reasonable people cannot otherwise object—such as all triangles have three sides, or a whole is greater than the sum of its component parts.

Obviously, this does not represent a very practical definition of knowledge, and consequently what we sometimes refer to as knowledge, is really less than knowledge in the true sense of the word. Generally such use of the term falls into the category of an educated opinion based on theory and/or observation based on evidence. But most importantly, this reality reminds us of the difficult task we face, presenting a fundamental tale of caution regarding that which we should be willing to assert.

In addition to the empirical and theoretical, Adventists and other theists would include revelation as a source of knowledge—though as evident from the multitude of theology floating around, even this comes with a host of cautions. So this, then, is essentially the world we live in, a world that is very short on certainties and knowledge in the absolute sense of the word.

To the extent that Adventist are to remain committed to truth there is no choice but to frame our notions about creation in a way that balances revelation with that which we can derive through sense data and just basic commonsense reason. These different tools we have for aligning our thinking with the reality, as well as the process sometimes can create unresolved tensions, but there would certainly be no wisdom in ignoring solid data that suggests a contrary conclusion.

It seems that Adventism and Adventist education are approaching a crossroad, because how these issues are resolved will determine whether the Church and its affiliated institutions will maintain ongoing credibility in the world, and whether the Church and its education enterprise will remain united or go their separate ways. The shrill voices of some within the Church that seek fundamentalist purity give reason for pessimism, yet it is possible to hope that reason will yet bubble to the surface averting this shaping disaster. Perhaps the place to start would be to keep the current language of FB #6. Hope springs eternal.

[1] While the Church officially makes a distinction between "young earth creationism" and "young life creationism" (favoring the latter), there would seem to be a major problem in logic. After all, a literal reading of Genesis suggests that the Earth, Sun, Moon, stars, and all life were all created in six days. Since an FB #6 rewrite includes the prospect of a literal reading of Genesis with language that creation week consisted of six literal, contiguous, 24-hour days, it is puzzling as to what standard of objective criteria is being emulved in order to sinule out "life" and aannrently exclude it from a very old universe.
criteria is being employed in order to single out life and apparently exclude it from a very old universe.
I am a Christian because I am a follower of Jesus. For me, the story of Jesus came first, and became the reason I invested in the rest of the Scriptures, the practices of my church community, and further theological development. Jesus first—it was the first thing I was taught by my parents, the first thing we say about in Sabbath School, and it remains the heart of my identity.

I was reminded of this recently at a gathering in Atlanta—the One Project, where we indulged in worship of Jesus and celebration of who He is as the center of our Adventist identity, our Christian community, and our walk with God. It would seem that such an idea is so simple as to be almost silly—of course Jesus is the center of our church. And perhaps because I’m an academic, I may be more susceptible to being distracted by so-called bigger ideas: things that I’m worried about in the church, theological concepts I want my students to understand, evangelistic strategies, apologies to those in my life who are skeptical. Owning up to Jesus as the One, Jesus Period, Jesus Full Stop, can seem scandalous and quirky to outsiders, while dangerously flat and undeveloped to my fellow believers.

But worshipping Jesus with other followers, praising Him, putting into words the ways in which my church belonging follows from being His disciple, praying in His name, and talking about how my service to or for the world is shaped by following Jesus—this was profoundly important for me. I needed these reminders, these practices, this sharing. I need revival and I need it to focus on Jesus, rather than drifting into interesting and sometimes-useful, but less Christ-centered arguments and exhortations. At the One gathering, I discovered spiritual re-formation with my brothers and sisters in Christ.

In a perfect world, I would think that I wouldn’t need to do participate in a conference or attend an event for this to happen. More One Project gatherings are being planned and this takes money and effort and time. Why bother doing this? As I seek to share with others the blessing I received, I’ve also been reflecting on the role of organizations and groups in spiritual revival. Being part of something larger, being pushed by the diversity of people in a group to see God as bigger than I might otherwise, feeling the joy that comes from holding the hands of fellow Christians as we worship together—I think this is a very human experience. We encounter something like this when we attend sporting events and concerts, or run marathons with 30,000 people. Certainly, Scripture indicates that our belonging to God is something that happens alongside other people and there are few spiritual disciplines/behaviors in the Bible that don’t include others.

Still, it seems counter-intuitive to organize spiritual growth or to have groups that we join that indicate where we’re trying to go with our time with God. Isn’t this what we are supposed to be doing in church each week? Why do something extra? Why come apart to emphasize the most basic of our beliefs and identity? Shouldn’t we be moving onward and upward, getting beyond the “Jesus Loves Me This I Know?” So as I mull over why the One gathering and the others like it are needful, helpful organizations, I thought I’d try to put into words what I took away from this Christ-focused meeting.

One crucial thing I was reminded of is that we need to bond with others and we can often do that most effectively when we’ve come away from our daily schedules and immersed ourselves in worship together. We’re often more vulnerable, more willing to share, and looking for like-minded disciples, people who’ve asked our same questions and are open to exploring possible ways of giving glory to God and seeking after Him. Many of us are really involved in our local churches and need a break from the routine and responsibilities to remember why it is we’re doing all this sometimes frustrating, family-style, un-sexy work. We need to recharge in a neutral zone, bringing our weekly spiritual and work routines into perspective and re-assessing what it is we’re investing in for our spiritual communities and our personal devotional life. If we’re jaded in any way, this is a time for refreshment.

Another set of themes to come out of this communing were the need for worship combined with our need to find effective service to the world. We are much more clearly focused on Jesus and finding unity with the Body of Christ when we make worship a priority and invest time and thought in pushing ourselves to greater commitment in worshipping Jesus as Lord—and then connect that priority to what it is we are trying to do in the world as service. Thoughtful gatherings allow for investment in worship in ways that might be challenging on a daily and weekly basis.

Another element of such gatherings, which is especially helpful for those of use who are laypeople, is that we get to hear thoughtful and engaged church pastors and theologians put into words what it is that we believe, how that is connected to the primacy of Jesus Christ, and why it makes a difference. I think sometimes our leadership does so much reading and talking about ideas that become commonplace for them, that they forget that the average person in the pew isn’t participating in these conversations. We need words put to what we are experiencing, we need language to talk about why it matters that Jesus is first and last. We come to places like this with people whom God has gifted with exhortation, teaching and prophecy, and we come away with the language to talk about what the Spirit has laid on our hearts.

Most of all, what I learned from the One Project gathering is that we need more love in our communal worship, more love in our shared identity as believers and more chances to be inspired by love together. It seemed to me that those who came were looking for chances to be vulnerable by naming the love they had for Jesus, the love they shared with their fellow Christians, and the love they felt for those in their community who God had placed on their hearts. Life gets difficult and crummy and mundane
sometimes, and we need space and encouragement to indulge in expressing and enacting the love we have for each other through communion, mutual prayer, and sharing.

There's nothing trite about this. It's at the heart of who we are and it is worth taking time out to remind each other in new and fresh ways what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Let's have more, and let's make the effort it takes to get back to the basics.
ELLEN WHITE: JOYLESS BEFORE THE EPIPHANY OF 1888?

I’m bemused by the allegation that Ellen White’s spiritual life was a journey from legalism to freedom in Christ, from early depression to joy in the Lord, from an emphasis on hell to an emphasis on heaven. According to this interpretation, all of Ellen White’s “positive understanding” regarding assurance of salvation seems to have come to her heightened senses during the 1888 General Conference and thereafter.

Sometimes I wonder if persons who present this view are imposing their own autobiographical journey onto the spiritual path of Ellen White. It’s difficult sometimes to be objective in our research when we’re hoping to find evidence to support our own favorite theories.

Let's take a look at Ellen White’s own testimony regarding her comprehension of new life in Jesus at the age of fifteen:

“The promises of God looked to me like so many precious pearls that were to be received by only asking for them. As I prayed, the burden and agony of soul that I had so long felt left me, and the blessing of God came upon me. . . . Everything was shut out from me but Jesus and glory. . . . Everything looked glorious and new, as if smiling and praising God. . . . It was Christ and the hope of His soon coming that had made me free.” (Early Writings, pages 12-13)

Again in Life Sketches, Ellen White describes the joy she experienced after a Methodist minister, Elder Stockman, talked to her about the deep love of Jesus and His desire that His children be drawn to Himself in simple faith and trust. Pastor Stockman helped young Ellen understand that God does not rejoice in the destruction of sinners and that the accident that so altered her life was not an indication that God had abandoned her.

"Faith now took possession of my heart. I felt an inexpressible love for God, and had the witness of His Spirit that my sins were pardoned. My views of the Father were changed. I now looked upon Him as a kind and tender parent, rather than a stern tyrant compelling men to a blind obedience. My heart went out toward Him in a deep and fervent love. Obedience to His will seemed a joy; it was a pleasure to be in His service. No shadow clouded the light that revealed to me the perfect will of God. I felt the assurance of an indwelling Saviour, and realized the truth of what Christ had said: ‘He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.’ John 8:12. . . .

Though I was very young, the plan of salvation was so clear to my mind, and my personal experience had been so marked, that . . . I knew it was my duty to continue my efforts for the salvation of precious souls, and to pray and confess Christ at every opportunity. . . . Those older in experience than myself endeavored to hold me back and cool the ardor of my faith; but with the smiles of Jesus brightening my life, and the love of God in my heart, I went on my way with a joyful spirit.” (Life Sketches, pages 39, 42)

What about joy in Christ’s righteousness? Did Ellen White “get it” before the wonderful messages of Jones and Waggoner at the 1888 General Conference, messages which she heartily affirmed? Let’s check out just a couple of her pre-1888 statements: “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 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, pg 36, written in 1888)

Some have suggested that Ellen White was legalistic, over-emphasizing obedience and sanctification pre-1888. Though it is true that at no time in her experience did Ellen White suggest that the perpetual transgressor will be saved in God’s kingdom, neither did she ever say that Christians are sanctified by keeping the law! Note the following statement, made in 1881, “Unworthy, unworthy of the least of Thy favors, O my God, is my cry. My only hope is in a crucified and risen Saviour. I claim the merits of the blood of Christ. Jesus will save to the uttermost all who put their trust in Him.” (Emphasis supplied)

Does that statement sound like someone who relied on their own works for salvation?

So, was Ellen White sad and melancholy at the beginning of her Christian experience, and joyous in Jesus at the end? If that was the case, how does her 1903 statement fit that trajectory?

"At times I do feel depressed, but I struggle against the feeling. I know that God wants His joy to be in us, that our joy may be full.” (General Conference Bulletin, GCB, April 1, 1903)

I think it would be more accurate to show Ellen White as a real person, a person who loved Jesus and found joy in His salvation at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of her Christian life. Like every Christian, there were times throughout her spiritual journey when Satan hedged her in with a darkness that made it necessary to trust Christ and His promises by choice, and not by feeling.
Her last spoken words, from a heart that loved Jesus above all else, were "I know in Whom I have believed."
WHAT IS THE ESSENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM?

In the church that I attend, the choirs are all exceptionally good. In fact, one of the choirs is so well regarded that it has often traveled to various parts of the country to sing for worship services and for special concert engagements. The pastor there is becoming increasingly well known for being especially used by God when preaching; so much so, that of (seating capacity) necessity, two fully attended divine worship services are now conducted each Sabbath; and Wednesday evening prayer service is often a full house event as well. Nearly every Sabbath the young (34 year old) pastor conducts a call and response in his greeting, in which he says that "It's not about the pastor, it not about the choir, (tell your neighbor that) it's not about me, and it's not about you. It's about Jesus...it's all about Jesus!"

Well certainly that is what Christianity is purportedly about. But what about Adventism; what is the essence of Seventh-day Adventism? What is it essentially all about? This is not to be confused, necessarily, with its raison d'être as a movement; but what is the one foundational thing you can be certain that all Adventists believe, or believe to be true?

The answer may be found in the question, "What's in a name?" Adventism is about the return of Jesus.

The point is that if Adventists don't believe or agree on anything else, they (we) certainly all must agree that Jesus is returning as it has been Biblically recorded that He said He would; and that we are not to be ignorant concerning the various signs, many that He Himself identified, of the imminence of His return.

This literal "Adventism" is, of course, not unique to Seventh-day Adventists; but it is nevertheless universal among Seventh-day Adventists...or so we thought.

As it turns out, this may— or may not—be the case. Personally, I had always assumed it to be a self-evident reality that Adventists believe that Jesus will return. That in fact, this is really the very definition of Adventism. Well...as the saying goes, live and learn.

What may be in question, I suppose, is how important it is that we (all) commonly believe anything—or that this "anything" be something we all accept by faith to be unquestionably true. In other words, as a religious denomination, or if you prefer, a faith tradition, is there an identifying and unifying belief? Also, are we institutionally strengthened by the big tent philosophy that we have occasionally seen evident in the political arena, or would we be strengthened by encouraging uniformity of doctrinal teaching relating to at least the most basic of nominal beliefs inherent in our name?

When conflict of any kind is impending or apparent it is undoubtedly always appropriate to determine what, if anything can be agreed upon by the parties; and whether anything indeed can be built on that common ground. To this end, others have written blogs, and specifically my personal commentary following certain blogs relating to historic Adventist beliefs, have asked of those who have, shall we say, "issues" with what they have labeled as traditional Adventism and its beliefs (including the identification of earthquakes in divers places as a sign of the imminent return of Christ) do they believe that Jesus will return as He is reported to have claimed that He would (to take us to be with Him). I have, in fact, been reprimanded by a particular frequent participant as having been rude in repeatedly asking this question—in commentary on a blog about eschatological prophecy—when I have been afforded this blog space in which to ask this question.

So, let me now again ask the question to any and all who read this blog or who participate on this site, especially those who remain Seventh-day Adventists, do you believe that Jesus will return as is reported to be the case in John 14: 1-3? This question isn’t rhetorical.

My position, of course, is that the specific John 14: 1-3 promise is the essence of "Adventism" generally, and of Seventh-day Adventism particularly; that this is what Adventism is essentially about. I further personally believe that those who claim to be Seventh-day Adventists but do not believe that Jesus will return as He is reported to have claimed that He will, are not Adventists at all, but are in fact enemies of Adventism and perhaps do not have the intellectual fortitude to admit it; if in fact they realize it at all.

Now, if my take on the essence of Adventism is erroneous (or worse), tell me how so, and what you think it is. In other words, what is it all about? So, I have now asked two questions to those who may have problems with historical Adventism—in the never-ending search for common ground.
"PICK ME! PICK ME!"

Posted March 29th, 2011 by Trish Tickle

Every once in awhile, especially when I get weary in well doing I need to be reminded why I do certain things. The call of Isaiah never fails to remind me of the spiritual revival God has for each of us throughout our journey.

Isaiah is a multi-generational, lifelong follower of God. He has heard about God from his first breath and as an adult begins to work for God. Prior to his “call” in Chapter 6, he is already delivering messages on God’s behalf. But at a time of national crisis and insecurity, God opens Isaiah’s eyes to greater things.

Isaiah sees a vision of coming into the presence of God. He looks all around to figure out where he is, noting God on the throne of heaven. How awe-inspiring. But added to the picture, he sees beautiful, perfect beings paying the highest homage to God.

Suddenly Isaiah catches the true picture of himself in relation to God and these perfect beings. He sees his sinfulness, his inadequacy, his utter worthlessness in relation to the perfection, power and might displayed before him. He groans, “Woe is me, for I am undone! I am in the very presence of the God of the universe and I am so absolutely unworthy.” There are no words to express this profound spiritual insight.

In the midst of Isaiah’s hopelessness, one of the beings brings a coal from the altar, touches his lips and pronounces him forgiven, atoned, guiltless. Nothing Isaiah did prompts this action; it is an act of pure grace. Instantly, he feels the load of guilt and hopelessness removed; he understands the plan of salvation and restoration God has been trying to communicate to Israel for centuries. He knows, in a way he has never known, the depth of true repentance and the power of God’s grace.

While Isaiah is still savoring this new-found grace, God says, “I have a job I need done. Who will do it?” Isaiah could have given Moses’ initial response to God’s call, “get someone else, I’m not qualified.” Instead, without hesitation, Isaiah raises his hand, “Send me!”

God advises that this assignment will be difficult. People will not want to hear, will not want to be helped. Isaiah wonders aloud how long the assignment will last but gets a very unsatisfying answer, “until the plan is done.” However, God doesn’t leave him hopeless. He tells Isaiah that despite the appearance of total loss, there will be a “holy seed” left.

At times when I want to quit because I’m tired or things are working out the way I expect, if I stop and see myself in Isaiah’s place, I again catch the true vision of myself. This is so humbling that I find myself crying out just as he did. Without fail, when the hopelessness threatens, I see Jesus dying for my sins and offering me forgiveness and restoration. Then when I hear the Holy Spirit whispering about something God is calling me to do, despite the difficulties I’m like the eager young student volunteering, I’m waving my hand, jumping up and down, saying “Pick me! Pick me!”

Trish Tickle's blog  Login or register to post comments  

If background colors opinions, then Trish Tickle’s experience as life-long Adventist, corporate marketing professional, small church leader and resident of rural Appalachia paints lots of different hues. Trish has a degree in communications from Southwestern Adventist College. She works with unemployment issues for the state of Ohio and consults with the Governor’s Office on Faith and Community-Based Initiatives. She also serves as Public Information Officer with Adventist Community Services - Ohio. Trish grapples with how we “do” God’s Word in our community.
Seventh-day Adventism is classified by historians and sociologists as an apocalyptic Protestant Christian tradition. Apocalyptic means focused on "End Things," i.e., as in the "End Is Near," the "Last Generation," and similar expressions. Is it not correct to state that Daniel and Revelation are traditional Adventism's favorite Biblical books?

We used to be called an apocalyptic Christian sect. In a strict sense and generally speaking, we still are. However, we also have, over more than a hundred years, matured and institutionalized, so that more formally, we often are referred to as an apocalyptic institutionalized sect which continues to incorporate a fundamentalist ethos. The recent election of a highly sectarian, openly fundamentalist General Conference president has just highlighted this characterization. His initiative to distribute copies of Ellen White's *Great Controversy* simply confirms his orientation.

Traditional Adventism continues to be, at its heart, apocalyptic in focus and orientation. This is where my prophecy comes in.

In the spirit of traditional Adventism, I would like to prophesize. I predict that, over a period of six months, the *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World* will publish, on at least four occasions, in some form either by itself or in connection with other "signs," statements to the effect that the recent major devastating earthquake in Japan is another sign that the "End is Near."

It will not make any difference that Japan is the most earthquake prone country in the world and that it sits on geologic plates where earthquakes are frequently generated. No, this particular earthquake, and the tsunami that it generated, will be viewed as a "Sign of the End!"

There, it is on the record. It is clear and unambiguous. Let's see if the author of this prophecy is a true or false prophet.

It is my hope that this prophecy will be disconfirmed and that its author will be declared a false prophet. On the other hand, I will not be surprised if the prophecy is confirmed.
Welcome to Viewpoints: Adventist Perspectives on Peace, Justice and Righteousness. An interview series presented by Adventist Today in partnership with Adventist Activism. This week we feature Dr. Bert B. Beach.

Dr. Bert B. Beach [pictured below] was born in Switzerland of missionary parents. His wife, Eliane, is from Belgium. He served for twenty years in the Northern Europe-West Africa Division office, first as Director of Education and Public Affairs, and for the last seven years, as Division Secretary. He served from 1980-2005 in the General Conference as Director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, and lastly as the Secretary of the Council on Inter-Church Relations.

Jeff Boyd: You received the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit from the country of Poland for your "important role in developing the international dialogue for peace, tolerance, religious liberty, and human rights." Can you tell me more about what led to this award -- your actions globally and in Poland?

Bert B. Beach: When one gets old, honors do tend to arrive. As one famous theologian once told me, "it is a patent of longevity"! The "knighthood" granted me by the President of Poland was the result of some forty trips to Poland, starting in the early sixties. They began at the height of the cold war; communism was riding high in Eastern Europe. We had no organized Church in the USSR. The headquarters building of our Church in Czechoslovakia had been confiscated, churches closed and the training school taken away. Our Church in Poland had been divided after the war, and the factions were coalescing. Our Church was seen by other churches as a sect and of little significance. Over the years the picture began to change. We got visionary leadership in our Polish Union. I was happy to cooperate with these leaders, bringing supportive ideas, fresh air and free thinking from the West. They also influenced my considerations.

I met over time with most, if not all, the leaders of non-Adventist churches and the Bible Society, providing encouragement and helpful suggestions. This helped give them a favorable understanding of our Church, and this grew to respect and produced positive, peaceful inter-church relations. I also attended several Peace Conferences in Prague and Moscow. I had many contacts and conversations with government officials and political leaders. Gradually, they began to see the SDA Church as a meaningful player in public affairs. They realized that Seventh-day Adventists are solid citizens and willing to participate in helping improve society and in post-war nation building.

JJ: You have written about Christians and politics. What encouragement and caution do you have for Adventists who pursue involvement in political processes either by holding office or by advocating policy changes? Do you have different thoughts for lay people and pastors?

BBB: The Christian and politics is a complicated story, with a long history, much of it scandalous and even oppressive. Interestingly enough, Jesus spoke little about political society. He presented no socio-political platform and rejected any zealot-like kingship. He made it clear that His kingdom was not of this world. However, it must be true that His teachings will have a socio-economic fallout. He presented the Messianic task as spiritual good news, but clearly including a social dimension of good news for the poor, the blind, the oppressed.

Today, there are increasing numbers of Adventists that hold or have held political office, up to including head of government or state. This is especially understandable in countries where a relatively sizeable percentage of the population is made up of Adventists. The task of Christians in political leadership is not easy. Joseph, Daniel and Ezra didn’t have smooth sailing. The dangers and temptations of political life are legion. Politics is often the art of compromise. Self-promotion is the order of the political day. Nevertheless, there are great opportunities. Ellen G White affirms that there is nothing wrong in young people aspiring to make laws and taking part in legislative halls. If a person feels called to go into politics and elective government service, we should not automatically stand in the way. I encourage young people to aim high, but we need to warn them of some of the dangers that lie ahead.

On the other hand, pastors and teachers in our schools should be guarded and carefully avoid getting involved in party politics. This can be very church divisive. Furthermore, there is the danger of politics becoming a hard and demanding taskmaster, absorbing all a person’s time and trouble.
JB: Many of us struggle to know how to balance evangelism and service or social action, since both are seemingly important for the church’s mission in the world. How do you see these two elements fitting together in holistic ministry?

BBB: I believe that evangelism and service are both important aspects of God’s mission in this world. We need to proclaim both God’s salvific love, which is the core of evangelism, and God’s will, which involves both belief and serving action. We must value, as your question implies, both evangelism and service.

Some see service, or social action, as simply a part of evangelism or as a means of “pre-evangelism”. Such an approach to evangelism can be misunderstood and even seen as cunning or even deceitful. I would tend to see evangelism and service as two separate, or, in the words of John Stott, “parallel” tracks of God’s mission. Though they support each other, they are separate aspects of the mission God has entrusted to His disciples and Church. While, indeed, evangelism must ever be the overarching responsibility, the immediate priority may differ. This is well illustrated in the New Testament story of the wounded and robbed man on the Jericho road. What was his first need? Was it a Bible study? Hardly, it was to receive medical care. Then, later, during another visit, the priority could change.

JB: Much of your ministry has been in the area of promoting religious freedom, such as supporting the Declaration on Religious Liberty, which was voted by the United Nations in 1981. What drew you to this particular concern and what actions do you believe are the most effective at promoting religious liberty in society (or societies more globally)?

BBB: The first half (grosso modo) of my over half a century of denominational ministry was spent in Adventist education. That was my first love. Then I moved into church administration, and gradually more and more into religious liberty, public affairs, and finally into interchurch relations. My first real interest in religious liberty was aroused in Paris, France, in 1951. I was working on my doctorate, while assigned to the evangelistic team of Dr. Jean Nausbaum. At that time he was the most famous Adventist religious liberty expert and advocate, while also carrying on an active medical practice and holding a yearly evangelistic campaign. He introduced me to Eleanor Roosevelt and other diplomats at the United Nations General Assembly meeting that year in Paris. She was the President of the UN Human Rights Commission and involved in getting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights voted in 1948, with Article 18 forcefully upholding religious liberty, in which Mrs. Roosevelt was very interested.

Later we worked to get the UN to vote the so-called Religious Liberty Declaration. We were able to get included a statement upholding the right of every person to “observe days of rest in accordance with the precepts of his religion”. All this took several years and many contacts with various delegations and ambassadors. My colleague Dr. G. Rossi was especially helpful.

Religious liberty promotion often requires long, persistent, and patient efforts to legalize religious freedom. This involves having ongoing contacts with political and diplomatic figures, suggesting language drafts and pointing out violations of freedom. Thus, it is important to know people, and to be known by them. Knowing another language is a plus and knowing several other languages is a “plus plus”. It is necessary to grasp past history, understand cultural and other influences, and know where people come from and in what direction your interlocutors are moving or want to go. It helps to be seen as having a wide, non-sectarian vision, and working for human dignity and non-discrimination, and the rights of all people, not just your church members or the citizens of your country.

In public affairs it is difficult to work in isolation and achieve success; you easily become suspect. I have always been encouraged and lifted up, by knowing that we are both on God’s side and that of persecuted or downtrodden human beings. For me it was a great day to be in New York on November 25, 1981 and listen and see the Religious Liberty Declaration voted by the UN General Assembly, after decades of discussion, delaying tactics and outright opposition. When you are on God’s side, you are on the winning side.

JJ: During your extended tenure of service, have you seen any notable changes in ecumenical organizations such as the WCC or in the way the Adventist Church relates to ecumenism?

BBB: There have been many changes. You can go today to World Council of Churches meetings without risking being in a smoke filled room! For decades the WCC and many ecumenists advocated and called for organic union of churches. Little progress, or as I would put it, little movement has taken place in that direction. Now, advocacy has moved in the direction of communion rather than union. So far, several churches refuse to have Eucharist or communion with other denominations. Another trend is the push for recognition. Each church or denomination can keep its own identity, organization and traditions, but is encouraged to recognize other churches. This takes place by accepting each other’s Communion Service, baptism and ministry, thus achieving what is called “altar” and “pulpit” fellowships between separate churches. Ministers can then serve across church boundaries.

Perhaps the most recent development has been the creation of “Christian Churches Together”. This is still more a meeting than an organization, which aims at “providing a space” for all Christian churches to be able to meet together on a world-wide basis every few years, without belonging to an organization like the World Council of Churches. A key purpose is to involve Evangelicals and Pentecostals, who have been reluctant to participate in the WCC. For the past five years or so there is a somewhat parallel annual meeting in the U S, based on five family groups (Historical Protestant Churches, Roman Catholics, Evangelicals, Orthodox, Ethnic Churches). The SDA Church obviously doesn’t fit into such an arbitrary arrangement.

On the other hand, Seventh-day Adventists practice “open communion” and have recognized for some 85 years “all agencies that lift up Christ” as part of the divine plan for the evangelization of the world. This doesn’t mean we see ourselves as just another church. My Church is a prophetic movement called by God to prepare the way for the soon coming and returning Savior. This Church of the Remnant is to proclaim God’s love and teach Biblical truths in a time of the end setting, several of which Christianity at large has either rejected, opposed, overlooked or neglected.
Jeff Boyd has undergraduate degrees in Religion and Psychology from Union College and an MBA from Andrews University. He is currently pursuing an MA in Peace Studies with a concentration in International Development at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Jeff and his wife, Charissa, recently moved to Detroit, MI. He writes book reviews for *Adventist Today*, and interviews for Viewpoints: Adventist Perspectives on Peace, Justice and Righteousness, in collaboration with *Adventist Activism*.

I think our approach has over the years become less legalistic, less isolationist, less self-centered, and more open, more open, more humble, more Christ centered, and more global mission oriented, or in other words, more Christian.

**JB:** Because of your presence at the Vatican — for example observing Vatican II and giving the Pope a medallion — you have received a fair amount of criticism. How have you handled this critique? And since it seems that we are becoming more confrontational both online and in person, do you have any advice for how others can deal positively with criticism?

**BBB:** Yes, in past years I received some criticism, but much of it I would not call “fair”, but rather ignorant, misinformed, and at times even rather silly. Much of this criticism, especially when I felt that it was dishonest, I simply ignored. In fact, I don’t even like to talk about it, because it gives enemies of the Church undeserved publicity or false status. To accuse me, for example, of kissing the Pope’s ring, is both untrue and ridiculous. Only Roman Catholics (and perhaps some Orthodox) can be expected to do this, recognizing the Pope as the bishop of Rome, as they recognize other bishops by kissing their rings.

True, it seems society is becoming more controversial, even venomous, particularly online. I was told, some years ago, that someone had opened a website attacking me. I never looked at it, knowing that it would feature lots of dishonest nonsense. On the other hand, we need to be ready to respond to those who inquire honestly and with polite sincerity. To get into a debate with querulous people leads nowhere. No matter what you say, they will always find a way to continue spinning and spewing their hateful distortions.

**JB:** What thoughts do you have for the future of the church regarding inter-religious (inter-faith?) relations?

**BBB:** It is, I believe, difficult to be evangelistically successful, with a fortress mentality. In the fortress we may feel safe, though probably not too comfortable, and likely be out of touch or contact. We need to be always active and involved. Separation doesn’t reach out. Dialog is helpful, in at least two ways: First, we contact others, get to understand them better, and, hopefully, they appreciate where we come from, who we are, and where we aim to go. Secondly, we get to better understand and explain our own beliefs. From long experience, I can say, without fear of contradiction, that as result of interfacing with other churches or religions, I have learned more about my Church, and my faith in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, her beliefs and organization, has been greatly strengthened and expanded.

I am now retired. Others will carry on and bring our Church and message to still greater heights, and finish the work. New methods will be discovered and more powerful tools will become available and be used. I believe in the inevitable triumph of this Advent Movement. As I get older, the beautiful hills of the Promised Land of the New Earth look better and better.
DEATH BEFORE SIN

Posted February 27th, 2011 by Heinrich

Death Before Sin? Almost...

ADAM, NO.