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**Creation Controversy in Sabbath School:** Blogger Jack Hoehn weighs in with his first installment in a continuing series that adds dimension to the current Adventist quarterly lessons on creation.... (see related blurb immediately below)

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**Minimize the Grimace Events:** Top business operators invest much time and money weeding
out roughness and grimace events in their products. What's stopping the Church from doing the same as it fine-tunes its worship services, asks blogger Lawrence Downing....

**Water in My Eyes:** Are you a beloved child of God, in whom He is well pleased? Contemplate Jesus’ interaction with his cousin the baptizer, and personalize it, with devotional blogger Debonnaire Kovacs....

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**DOZJA Students Meet with Barack Obama:** During the past election campaign, living in Florida clearly increased one's chances of meeting President Obama, as students of Daughter of Zion Junior Academy discovered just days before the election.... (available only to *Adventist Today* subscribers)

*A Weekly Newsletter from* [www.atoday.org](http://www.atoday.org)

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Shocker Headline for Wheeling Adventists: “Jesuit Humiliates Washington Adventist”

Submitted: Jan 10, 2013
By AT News Team

It really shocked at least one Seventh-day Adventist family in Wheeling, West Virginia. They immediately sent an Email to Adventist Today to alert readers to this headline in *The Intelligencer-Wheeling News-Register*, the daily newspaper in the northern panhandle of the mountain state: “Jesuit Humiliates Washington Adventist, 94-67.”

The Jesuit here is not a priest, it turns out, but Wheeling Jesuit University, a Catholic college with an enrollment of about 1,300. And the Washington Adventist is not a General Conference staffer but Washington Adventist University, the higher education institution sponsored by the Columbia Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The competition was not about Bible doctrines or even righteousness. It was basketball, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) basketball. The Cardinals versus The Shock. And just so you are straight on the name, Adventists do not have any cardinals.

The game was played on Tuesday evening, January 8, in Wheeling in the Alma Grace McDonough Center. The Adventist team lost 67 to 94. The Cardinals did so well that they hit “a torrid 54 percent from the floor in the first half,” said sports writer Nick Bedway. The Jesuit team won, although last time they almost did not. That game earlier in the season went into overtime and the Cardinals won by only six points out of nearly 100 scored by each team.

Washington Adventist actually has a 3-3 record on its home court in Takoma Park, Maryland. It has not been able to win in the nine games this season on the road.
The new movie about the stir caused by Edward Fudge’s 1982 publication will be shown in theaters for the first time over the next few weeks, according to a news release from the producers. Fudge was a pastor in a Church of Christ when he wrote *The Fire That Consumes* which advocates a view like that taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Despite the fact that his father was a well-known publisher of Sunday School materials among the Churches of Christ and Christian Churches, Fudge was fired.

LLT Productions has listed 14 cities where the movie will be shown in rented theaters and stated that more are being arranged. The largest cities in the list include Houston, Texas, where Fudge lives, and two cities in Tennessee (Nashville and Chattanooga) near Athens, Alabama, where he was a pastor at the time of the story. Denver and Oklahoma City are also on the list.

After the church fired Fudge because of his views on hell, he moved to Houston and entered law school at the University of Houston. For more than two decades “I have made a living as an attorney,” Fudge says. He is “of counsel” at the Lanier Law Firm in Houston and continues a ministry of Bible study, writing and speaking appointments. He is still an active member of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS).

Mega church pastor Rob Bell revisited the same issues in a book entitled *Love Wins* published in 2011, drawing a response from another young Evangelical leader, Francis Chan, in *Erasing Hell*. The traditional Christian concept that God will miraculously keep sinners alive so that they can be tortured in endless fire continues to be championed by many preachers and writers despite the overwhelming Scripture evidence against it.

Fudge has recently published another book on the topic. *Hell: A Final Word* has “a hopeful, good-natured and sometimes playful tone,” states the Web announcement of the volume’s release. “Fudge’s love for the Bible and his devotion to God is evident on every page.” Fudge’s resume lists 22 other books that he has authored or edited over the years. He was enrolled in doctoral studies in St. Louis at the time he was fired from pastoral ministry.

Other cities where the movie about Fudge’s confrontation with the Alabama congregation will be shown in a rented theater over the next few weeks include Arroyo Grande, California; Bakersfield, California; Blacksburg, Virginia; Columbia, South Carolina; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Hilton Head, South Carolina; Monterey, California; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Vancouver, Washington. The producers said that in each of these locations they have financial support from local individuals and congregations.

“Some websites have listed,” earlier dates, the news release stated. “This spurious information was not authorized” by the producers and the movie “has not yet been released anywhere either in theaters or on DVD” other than “a handful of private screenings.” LLT Productions has asked for help correcting the false information.
The producer has also asked for contacts from individuals and groups that may want to help arrange for a local showing in their community. Interested people should contact Jim Wood by email at jww@me.com to discuss possibilities.
30-Foot Inflatable Replica from Daniel 2 used to Advertise in Seattle

Submitted: Jan 9, 2013
By AT News Team

The Cedarhome Seventh-day Adventist Church in suburban Snohomish County north of Seattle has set up a 30-foot inflatable “image” from the story of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2. It caught the attention of The Herald daily newspaper in Everett which published a photo of “Nebe, as the members of the congregation call him.”

The giant representation of the man made of multiple metals is being used to advertise a month of lectures by evangelist Jac Colon from the Revelation Now ministry, according to David Johnson, who “arranged for Colon to speak and to have the inflatable figure put up at the church.” Using the theme “Unlocking Revelation … Colon plans to talk about increasing violence, tensions in the Middle East, economic problems and environmental upheaval,” Johnson told the newspaper. “The prophecies of the Bible bring personal peace in the midst of uncertain times.”

With spotlights on the statue it can be seen from a distance in the winter night. “It’s an attention getter, that’s for sure,” Pastor Greg Howell told The Herald. The church is located at 28505 68th Avenue NW and has a current membership of 83. Stanwood is about halfway between Everett and Bellingham along Interstate 5 in Washington state.
“Remnant” Theme Picked Up by “Preppers” and Survivalists

Submitted: Jan 7, 2013
By AT News Team

The reality television cable channel program Preppers has provided wide visibility to the small percentage of Americans who are convinced that society is falling apart or unprecedented disasters will soon bring an end to civilization as we know it today. Christian Century recently reported that Jim Rawles, “an evangelical blogger and novelist who teaches survival skills” has started to use the classic Adventist theme of the “remnant” from the Bible.

Rawles uses the theme differently than do Adventist theologians. He advocates that families protect themselves from the eventual collapse of the nation’s economy by moving to small towns or rural areas in “the American Redoubt,” Montana, Idaho, Wyoming and eastern Washington and Oregon. Much of the material on the blog is technical information about a variety of strategies to simplify lifestyle and improvise technology, some of it parallel to ideas discussed by ecology activists.

There are also comments about what is viewed as the ungodly direction of contemporary American culture and politics. “Even if God has withdrawn his blessing from our nation as a whole,” Rawles has written, “he will continue to provide for and to protect his remnant. … It’s time to distance ourselves from the vile corruptness that we see inside the Washington, D.C., Beltway. It is analogous to the Puritan exodus [from Europe]. They couldn’t fit in and said, ‘We’re going to move to completely virgin territory and start afresh.’ … In effect, we’re becoming pistol-packing Amish.”

There are evidently some links between Adventists and the “Prepper” network. A writer on Rawles’ blog identified as “J.B.” recommends The Seventh Day DVD series produced by an independent Adventist organization and sold in some Adventist Book Centers. Among a list of recommended churches is Bonners Remnant Church, an independent Sabbath-keeping congregation in Troy, Montana, with the same address as Laymen United for Truth, an independent ministry operated by Dennis and Mary Crystal.

“This is all part of the post modern cultural shift in Western society,” observes Monte Sahlin, an Adventist researcher who tracks contemporary trends and their impact on the church. “As institutions have become more massive and complex, there is a counter trend toward the personal, the local, the small, the separate—a human scale,” he told Adventist Today. “Internet technology makes it much easier to function at this level. Many Adventists think of ‘post modern’ as another term for ‘liberal,’ but in fact it is pervasive from the most liberal to the most conservative elements of society and the church.”
Creation Controversy in Sabbath School

Submitted: Jan 5, 2013
By Jack Hoehn

2013 for Seventh-day Adventists starts out with the first quarter Sabbath School lessons written by the head of the Geoscience Institute in Loma Linda, G. James Gibson, and edited (perhaps more than less?) by Clifford Goldstein. For the first 13 weeks of this next year it explores the importance and consequences of Creationism, under the title of “ORIGINS”.

These lessons also promote a single 144 hour chronology of Creationism 6,000 years ago, and continue the mistake that all other differing Creationist chronologies and interpretations are “Darwinism” or “Evolution”.

Beginning in March 2012 I have blogged 13 blogs about an alternative, Bible-believing, Seventh-day-Sabbath-keeping, truly Adventist understanding of Creation called “Old Earth Creationism” that takes seriously both Science and Revelation, and attempts to let the Bible explain why things happened, and to let Science explain how they happened. If you want to refresh these topics, you are invited to go to http://www.atoday.org/article/1095/blogs/hoehn-jack where you can find the following:

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Old Earth Creationists accept that Genesis tells us literally what happened, but not how and not when. They do not agree that YOM (day) means only a 24 hour solar day in the Bible. I was teethed in Adventism that a YOM (day) stood for a year in prophecy! I read that to God a YOM (day) is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a YOM. So I have not had much trouble in accepting that Creation Days can be God’s days, not human days.

Real Adventists can have an alternative view of creation.

I do not claim any deep knowledge of earth sciences (I am a medical doctor who uses applied science); I do not claim any deep expertise in theology (I have an undergraduate degree in
Religion from an Adventist college). I just claim to be a real Seventh-day Adventist who keeps the commandments of God and has the faith of Jesus including deep respect for the ministry of Ellen White, who thinks the chronology of our “Young Earth Creationists” is impossible to support either by the evidence of science or by a healthy Biblical understanding. I fear that if this defective chronology is forcefully imposed on our church it will lead to mass defections of the thoughtful and educated members, especially of our children and grandchildren.

So for the next 3 months these blogs may be reactive and comment on our Sabbath School lessons. I expect to find much to agree with in these lessons, but I will point out where an unnecessary devotion to a short-term Young Earth chronology exists, or a failure to appreciate the possibility of Creationism with a different chronology.

**SS Lesson ORIGINS, Introduction.**
NOTES on Origins Sabbath School Lesson #1. (These comments are for those who have a SS Lesson Quarterly):

“It (Genesis) says nothing about the state of the dead, the Day of Atonement, or even the seventh-day Sabbath. GENESIS ALSO SAYS NOTHING ABOUT THE DATE OF CREATION. IN THE BEGINNING” IS NOT A DATE, NOT A CHRONOLOGY.

“And, in almost all cases, the theological context (of Genesis) demands that it be taken literally.”
“LITERALLY” DOES NOT MEAN WITHOUT INTERPRETATION. YOU CAN TAKE THE TEACHINGS AS TRUE BUT AS NOT COMPREHENSIVE, DETAILED, AND NOT AS RESTRICTIVE—LITERAL DOES NOT MEAN SIMPLE, LITERAL MAY BE AN INTRODUCTION TO COMPLEXITY, IT CAN BE A LITERAL OVERVIEW, A LITERAL OUTLINE, A LITERAL INTRODUCTION, WITHOUT PUTTING LIMITS ON OUR UNDERSTANDING OF CREATION. LITERAL CAN TELL US WHAT GOD LITERALLY DID, LITERAL MAY NOT EXPLAIN AT ALL HOW HE DID IT.

“Though some voices may urge us to incorporate evolution into our theology, Seventh-day Adventism and Darwinism are inherently contradictory” IT IS NOT DIFFICULT NOW TO PROVE THAT SCIENCE AND DARWINISM ARE INHERENTLY CONTRADICTORY. DARWINISM AS A SUFFICIENT MECHANISM FOR THE ORIGIN AND DIVERSITY OF LIFE IS BEING DAILY PROVED FALSE. THE ADVENTIST STRUGGLE AGAINST DARWINISM, ATHEISM, AND INFIDELITY IS ADMIRABLE. THE ADVENTIST STRUGGLE AGAINST SCIENCE AND THE EVIDENCE
REGARDING THE LITERAL CREATION IS LESS ADMIRABLE.
RIGIDITY IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION HAS DRIVEN MANY BELIEVERS INTO DARWINISM BECAUSE THE LITERALISTS HAVE OFFERED NO OTHER CHOICE.

“Logically one cannot hold both views (creation and evolution)
at the same time.”
LOGICALLY ONE CAN NOT HOLD THAT NATURE TELLS THE TRUTH, AND THEN CONTRADICT THAT TRUTH WITH AN INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE, EVEN IF THAT INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE WRAPS ITSELF IN THE GARMENTS OF LITERALITY AND TRADITION.
JESUS-WORSHIPING CREATIONISTS WHO WISH TO ACCEPT BOTH THE TRUTH OF SCRIPTURE AND THE TRUTH OF NATURE AS GOD’S TWO BOOKS ARE STRUGGLING AGAINST THE ATTEMPTS OF THE EDITOR OF THESE LESSONS TO EXCLUDE THEM FROM ADVENTIST THOUGHT.
Introduction Lesson 2: “Starting with a planet that was unformed and unfilled, God spent the first three days forming the world for occupation and the last three filling it.”

How refreshing to see our official GC-approved Sabbath School Lesson educating Sabbath School members that Genesis 1 may be more than a simple creation history.

I am encouraged that the author and his editor agree that the Genesis 1 story can be viewed not as a simple chronological narrative, but also as an interpretation of Creation. The Genesis creation story may be explaining creation, instead of simply recounting it.

This is the first time I can remember recognizing the possibility that Genesis 1 is organizing creation, rather than simple recounting chronology, in denominational literature. I am pleased that it shows a willingness to make our Creation doctrine bigger and broader, instead of narrow and small.

Sunday January 6: “The text does not tell us exactly when the rocks and water of the earth came into existence, only that the world had not always been suitable for life. The world became fit for living creatures only because God acted to make it so.”

“The simple fact is, we don’t know…”

Right on again, brothers! The text does not tell us exactly when ANY of the created things
happened, except that there were 6 sequential Days/Yom (in Hebrew). 3 Making spaces, 3 Filling those spaces, and then inauguration of religious/worship on the 7th Day/Yom. So since the text does not tell us exactly when creation happened, why should we alter Fundamental Belief 6 on Creation, to say “exactly” when creation of the rocks, water, dark and light cycle, atmosphere, and continents happened? Leave the “when” to extrabiblical sources and discussions from inspired writers outside of the Bible, sure, and from inspired scientists as well.

Monday January 7: “We note in passing that the first day was composed of a period of darkness and a period of light, in the same way we observe days now.”

Yes, a period of darkness and a period of light. But likely not a 12-hour period of darkness and a 12-hour period of light. Astronomers have reasons to deduce that the ancient earth had 3-hour days in the past with a more rapidly rotating earth, only later slowing down to 12-hour days and 12-hour nights at the equinox. So let’s be safe and conservative as a church, and leave the “days” of creation as a period of time, and not specify the time, please.

Genesis 1:11,12 “Let the earth sprout forth with sprouting-growth, plants that seed for the seeds, fruit trees that yield fruit, after their kind, in which is their seed, upon the earth! And it was so. The earth brought forth sprouting-growth…” Everett Fox translation.

We were told in the lesson introduction that “the context demands that it be taken literally.” So we note that God did not say “let trees appear”; God said, “let the earth sprout.” So if on Day 3 earth was covered with sprouts as God commanded, what would there have been 3 x 24-hour-days later when he created Adam and Eve?

3-day-old sprouts?
I have no problem with taking the creation story literally. And if I take it literally, then I am forced to conclude that the “days” of creation are indefinite periods of time, not 24-hour days. For sprouts from the earth as God commanded on Creation Day, three to turn into trees with fruit that Adam and Eve could be instructed to eat as their food on Creation Day Six, suggests to me the passage of months for vegetables, and years for fruit trees, to be ready for a literal Adam and a literal Eve to eat literal fruit, that God commanded to sprout from the earth on Creation Day Three.

Yes I know YEC will roll their eyes, and moan, “Jack, that’s not what it means, what it means is that, ’Poof,’ God caused all kinds of plants and trees to magically appear full grown on the 3rd x 24-hour-day of creation. ‘Let the earth sprout’ is just a quaint way of saying it…” Okay, but who is taking Genesis literally now? Yom as indefinite periods of time or stages Creationists, or Young Earth, 24-hour-day Creationists?

(I’ve previously pointed out the same conclusion from a literal reading for Creation Day 6 [here].)

**Thursday January 10: “Most non-biblical creation stories tell of conflict and violence in creation.”**

The author and editor also suggest that “modern men” have also created a popular story of creation through violence. I suspect they mean the Darwinian concept of survival of the fittest popularly known as the bloody struggle through tooth and claw, leading to new species fit for earth by virtue of survival. They could add that geologists and paleontologists also study a world of conflict and controversy from the beginning of creation of life, with multiple mass extinctions shown in similar layers all over the planet.

Finally they could have mentioned that Ellen White agrees that Satan has been Fighting God on this planet before and after the creation. *Great Controversy* page 552 is typical, “…the great rebel still carries on his warfare against God, begun in heaven and (for nearly 6,000 years) continued upon the earth.” So even if this is a 6,000-year struggle since creation, and not a 4.8 billion-year struggle, there is still only one 7- day-week in the history of earth, when there was not a great controversy going on! Even with YEC reckoning that is only 7/2,190,000 days not in “conflict and violence.” Is it any wonder that all the evidence is of a history of conflict and struggle?

So let’s at least agree: Non-biblical creation stories, biology, genetics, paleontology, geology, and Ellen White agree that that majority of the record of life on earth in fact is one of conflict and violence. At most there was a week of peace.

But I’m beginning to think that the Bible Creation Stories too, agree with controversy. That
each Creation Day is an episode of conflict between Light and Darkness, each starts with Darkness, and ends with “Good” or Light. God’s creative actions are in opposition to the disorder–chaos–existing on earth. Each Day can be seen as another stage of correcting the problems that the Great Controversy brought. As the creation story of John 1 puts it, “The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overpowered it.” John 1:5 Weymouth.

It is possible to see that each stage of creation was a progression of the fight of God (Light) with Satan (Darkness). While this is a new way of thinking about Creation as a series of battles instead of a series of perfections, at least it has the benefit of bringing the Bible account in line with all the rest of the evidence. And although the author and editor don’t agree, actually you can have the Bible and the evidence agree. It does not make God the wicked and distasteful “god” they posit, when you understand that Adventism has an explanation for this in our doctrine of the Great Controversy, which they have not yet applied to Creation.

So Great Creation Day/Age 1: God Creates time, sequence, chronology, Light for the Dark, Satan-infected Planet.

Great Creation Day/Age 2: God creates atmosphere, space, order in the sky, protection from bombardment from space, more Light for the Dark, Satan-infected, airless Planet.

Great Creation Day/Age 3: God creates land and plants, place for advanced civilization to form, more Light for the Dark, Satan-infected, landless, lifeless Planet.

Even if things appear to be evolving, developing, even if Creation is by stages, steps, ages, and not instantaneous, God’s character as the Light-bringer, against Satan’s character as the Darkness-bringer is clear.

This discussion is to be continued at a Sabbath School near you. God bless each truth-seeking, God-loving heart.
Minimize the Grimace Events

Submitted: Jan 8, 2013
By Lawrence Downing

Charlie Rose, on the January 6, 2013, 60 Minutes program, interviewed innovator David Kelly, founder of IDEO, one of the most influential product-design firms in America. His creations are part of American life and culture: the computer mouse, Apple Computer and many others. His goal, Kelly told Rose, is to make things easier for people to use by combining human behavior and design.

To achieve his purpose, Kelly hires young people from diverse backgrounds and disciplines. Their task: solve problems and build products that work and make life easier. Their method: Assign the problem to these young people and turn them lose. Ideas multiply. Each idea is pasted on a white board. One idea builds on another and in the end, the group reaches a higher level than any one of the group alone.

In this process, says Kelly, the focus is always directed toward developing empathy for the consumer. Understand what people want and what their needs are by watching them, he says. According to Kelly, to really build empathy one must observe people and their responses to specific situations. When you are empathetic you will try to understand what people really value.

As an example, Kelley tells Rose to watch someone work with a computer software program. Pay attention to the operator’s face, he says. When the person grimaces, note where he is in the program and solve that issue. Engineering and human response!

As I listened to the interview with Kelly, I began to think how we in the church might benefit were we to apply Kelly’s philosophy and approach to problems in the local parish. Think with me: suppose the same creative effort IDEO directed to the design and function of the first computer mouse—which the company did for Steve Jobs—were applied to a church worship service. Bring together a group of young, creative people from diverse backgrounds. Put them under the leadership of a visionary mentor like Kelly. Their task: Design a worship experience that minimizes the Grimace Events.

How might such a team work? One group can be assigned to monitor the Grimace Events that occur in a worship service. Another team may be assigned to observe and note when congregants doze off or whisper to the ones next to them. They would record how many people look at their I-phone, play games or text. These occurrences the team might label the Grimace Generators. Fix them! One can multiply tasks, but you get the idea.

Retirement from parish ministry provides opportunity to visit churches, and in the past five years my wife and I have attended numerous worship services. As I reflected further on Rose’s interview with Kelly, I began to recall events I witnessed in a worship services that brought grimaces to my face.
I recall that I winced when a pastor stood before us, a string of Christmas lights wrapped about his waist and chest. After the children’s story that involved a string of Christmas lights, the pastor walked to the pulpit to begin his sermon. He paused, looked at a teenaged girl who had assisted in the children’s story. We heard him say something to her about lights. We could see the look of “What? Are you serious?” on her face and we heard him whisper, “That’s right. Come on up and wrap it around me.” He folded his arms tight to his body. The girl, with hesitation, followed the pastor’s instructions. Round and round she walked, twisting and pulling the string of lights.

We in the congregation shared in this girl’s discomfort. When the pastor was “wrapped and lighted” he turned to the congregation, looked at us for a short time and said, “I’m not sure why I did this. I thought it might be interesting.” He then began his Advent sermon. A Grimace Event. Fix it.

I have cringed when people assigned to offer the main prayer invites the congregation to kneel, speaks two or three cliché sentences, and closes with a mumbled “Amen.” A Grimace Generator, fix it! Ditto when the Scripture is read by a reader who has apparently not looked at the text or does not know how to use the microphone to advantage.

When the pastor and an elder stand at the pulpit during what the bulletin terms “Announcements” or “Church Business” and tell a couple of weak jokes, banter back and forth for 15 minutes and then ask us to join them in worship: A Grimace Event. Fix it.

At the conclusion of his sermon, we in the congregation watched as the pastor put himself face down on the platform with arms stretched out in front of him. He lifted his head, looked at us and invited us to join him on the platform as he prayed. No one moved. By himself, still stretched out like a frog, he began to pray. In his prayer he asked that we might be guided by the Spirit to get in touch with the god within. A preacher-problem. Fix it.

The sermon that began with point A, meandered about exploring points B, D, F, each section unrelated to the other, and, 52 minutes after he began, the pastor asked the congregation if they thought it was time for him to conclude his sermon. A small child whispered, so all could hear, “Mommy, can we go now?” Out of the mouths of babes! That kid’s statement was the one profound utterance of the day.

Fortunately, the above examples of what I witnessed in an Adventist worship service are the exceptions. What is unfortunate is that our worship services too often fail to attract the numbers of people we would like, and the majority of those who do attend are 55 or older. Here is the stuff of challenge for Mr. Kelly and his IDEO group of whiz kids.

It is not likely we will ever see IDEO’s analysis of an Adventist parish. The odds are we will never read the resultant recommendations that might arise from such a study. It is fascinating to think what might be should a congregation invite IDEO to examine what takes place in an Adventist worship service. It is equally unlikely a congregation will put together a group of young people to direct their creative energy toward the development of a worship service that minimizes Adventist Grimace Events. (And I emphasize “young!” Take a look at the 60 Minutes
segment—no gray hairs in that group, save for Kelly's. This is not the turf for us oldsters! We can fund it, but not do it. Sorry, church administrators, you're out of the loop.)

Who knows, there may be the brave, the eccentric, the foolhardy congregation that would take on the challenge and welcome a careful look at how they do church. What a delight that would be, and what a fright it will be to those who think we have it just right the way it is.
As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Well, you know me. I like to imagine.

What if we'd been there? Close your eyes, get comfortable, and try to use all your senses to make the scene real. Can you feel the push and crowd of bodies? Taste the breeze? Smell the river? Hear the throng? Can you see John (and do you imagine him as the scruffy, hairy semi-savage all the movies portray him as, or differently?)

Listen to him saying to you, "Another One is coming--someone greater, someone incredible." You notice that John is quoting from Old Testament prophecies that portray the Messiah as king and judge, a common and completely understandable misconception of the times. You can only say after the fact which parts of the prophecies relate to Now and which to Later. The first Advent wasn't of the king and judge, or at least not in that capacity. It was the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. But John doesn't seem to have known that yet.

But we're in first century Palestine, so just listen, and ignore my editorializing. (I'm sure I would have done the same then. I think lots of AT readers would have loved the rabbinical debates in the synagogues!)

This particular passage does not describe the baptism of Jesus, but you can imagine it from other passages if you like. See Jesus coming, listen and watch while John argues. "Are you kidding me? I should be baptized by you!"

See him give in.

See Jesus going under, rising up--honestly, the fabulous art on the cover of Messiah, by Jerry D. Thomas, is what comes to my mind, the past few years. See Jesus gazing joyfully upward, water streaming from his face, and watch the Dove descend. Shiver with awe as the voice of God thunders, "You are my beloved one! I am so pleased with you!"

How do you feel?
Now try something harder. Imagine you are the one being baptized. You may relive your own real baptism, or you may put yourself in the Jordan and try to imagine what it might have been like to be baptized by "the baptizer."

And then---

Hear the voice of God thundering, "You--yes, you!-- are my beloved one! I am so pleased with you!

_How do you feel now?_

Wow.
Adventist Native Leader Introduces President Obama

Submitted: Jan 9, 2013  
By Debbonnaire Kovacs

Chairman Brian Cladoosby of the Swinomish Tribal Community (and head elder of the Lummi Seventh-day Adventist church) was recently chosen to introduce President Obama at the Fourth Annual White House Tribal Nations Conference. This conference, initiated by Obama during his first term, is an important landmark in Federal relations with Native Nations and tribes. According to Cladoosby, Obama had made a commitment before he was elected that he would meet with tribal leaders. He invited leaders of all 566 tribes to come to Washington, D. C. to meet with him. Cladoosby also says he was told that the meetings during these past four years are the only time the president has had so many of his cabinet members under one roof. “And it was to meet with tribal leaders, making sure his cabinet members in the highest level of government are there to hear our concerns,” the chairman said.

Possibly this sense of being listened to and heard is one of the most important outcomes of the conferences and one of the most powerful influences in native communities. But Cladoosby has said before that there is more—that this administration “has done more for Indian Country than all the presidents in my years of leadership.” So AT asked him for specifics.

Three items sprang immediately to his mind. “Obama has appointed Native Americans in more key positions than we’ve ever seen,” said Cladoosby. “He’s settled decades-old lawsuits that have been out there for years. And he passed the Indian Healthcare Improvement Act—passed it forever, so that we don’t have to keep bringing it up every few years and trying to get it passed again.”

Specific examples of lawsuits are the Cobell Settlement, a multi-billion dollar settlement of a class action suit accusing the government of mismanaging Indian trust lands and funds; and the Keepseagle Settlement, a $760,000,000 settlement of damages resulting from discrimination in Native farmers’ and ranchers’ access to the low-interest loans and farm assistance their white neighbors could get. This settlement also makes changes that will make these kinds of farm assistance more readily available to Natives.

The Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA) was the main legal authority for the provision of health care to American Indians and Alaska Natives until 2000, when authorization of appropriations for the IHCIA expired. Various versions of the bill have been considered by congress, but the IHCIA was made permanent when President Obama signed the bill on March 23, as part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, and now it has no expiration date.

When asked if he knew why he had been chosen to introduce the president, Cladoosby said, “I have no idea what process they went through to choose little old Swinomish and little old Brian Cladoosby, but I give God the credit. He said he'll put you before kings and princes.” The chairman expressed his gratitude to a White House official and was told, “You are adored by many.” This was by no means the first time government officials had met the chairman.
In March, 2012, *Adventist Today* reported on Chairman Cladoosby’s selection for the honor of receiving the coveted Native Leader of the Year award. In part, that award came because of work Cladoosby has done in improving relations between the Native American communities and the Federal government. Besides being the many-times-reelected leader of the Swinomish Tribal Community, Cladoosby is President of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest American Indians, a 57-tribe confederacy from nine states. He was also appointed to a national committee which coordinates relations between the Federal government and tribal governments.

Two years ago, twelve leaders were chosen to have a meeting with Obama in the White House. “I was one of those twelve, and of the twelve, was chosen to co-chair the meeting with Obama,” says Cladoosby. He then turned to one of his favorite activities—joking. “There were a lot of comments about the twelve disciples, the twelve apostles, the dirty dozen. . .”

Maybe in part, that fun-loving nature is what makes Washington officials “adore” this leader. You can see him in action if you watch the youtube clip of his introduction of the president. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hm3UXkonnO4] Maybe it’s his undoubted leadership skills, his humility, his willingness to get busy and get things done, and his obvious concern and compassion for his friends and neighbors in what he calls “Indian Country.” Chairman Cladoosby would say, though, that it’s the Creator, and that all he accomplishes is done by the power of that One who has made of one blood all the nations of the earth.
DOZJA Students Meet with Barack Obama

Submitted: Jan 9, 2013
By Debbonnaire Kovacs

Note: This exciting story, submitted by Debbonnaire Kovacs, was written by Karen Jones and appeared in the December edition of Southern Tidings. It is reprinted by permission. There were small pictures with it, but we couldn't download them. They may be seen at http://www.southernunion.com/site/1/docs/Tidings/2012/Dec12.pdf Scroll to p. 31.

On October 23, 2012, the students of Daughter of Zion Junior Academy (DOZJA), Delray Beach, Fla., met with President Barack Obama while he was campaigning for the 2012 presidential race. The event was held at the Delray Beach Civic Center and Tennis Stadium Complex, which is one block away from DOZJA.

Shortly before the event, the school staff received word that the President’s motorcade was scheduled to pass by Daughter of Zion Church, which is adjacent to the school. The staff gathered the students and stood anxiously along the edge of the church’s property awaiting the President’s motorcade. As the President’s car passed, the student’s voices were lifted with the gathering crowd as they chanted, “Obama! Obama!, Obama! ...” Obama waved at the students. The students were gleeful with affirmation that they saw the President of the United States. With that, the preschool through 3rd grade returned to the school, while grades 4 through 8 sought to secure a spot near the Tennis Stadium to listen to the President’s speech.

During the event, a presidential aide came to the school and informed the staff that Obama requested to meet with the students after the event. Staff members ran through the hall screaming and shouting. Radio communication began to buzz, “The President wants to meet us!” Soon DOZJA’s parade of green, blue, and maroon uniforms began snaking their way to the Delray Beach City Hall Civic Center. The students were honored to meet, greet, touch, take pictures of, and simply embrace the President. “The look on every one of our students’ faces was priceless,” said one faculty member. “The President truly demonstrated a love for children and a genuine interest in DOZJA.” The students received a personal, motivational speech, autographed placards, and other memorabilia.

—By Karen Jones