### NEWS

**White Estate Announces Access to All Letters and Manuscripts:** After years of promises, and even threats by individuals claiming to possess the complete corpus of Ellen White's work for posting on the Internet, the Church this week promised to make all of hers, her husband's, and her two sons' correspondence available by 2015, the 100th anniversary of her death. Some things happen very slowly....

**History-making Woman to be Ordained as an Adventist Minister on February 16:** An 87-year-old woman who may never pastor a church is being ordained to the gospel ministry next weekend. Therein lies a historic tale for the ages—and the patience of a saint....

**One Project Gathering in Chicago is Sold-out but Available Online:** Now in its fifth session, this time in Chicago, the convention known as "One Project" to exalt Jesus as the singular focus of our church has again sold out—nearly a week in advance....

**Adventist Church in Australia has Record Growth in Official Census:** Despite glum growth statistics in parts of the First World, census statistics from Australia suggest that the Church is experiencing healthy growth among self-declared Adventists....

### OPINION

**Adult Sabbath School: Relic or Not?:** What is the future of Sabbath School lesson study in the Adventist Church? Blogger Lawrence Downing looks at the question historically and demographically and suggests ways to make Sabbath School more attractive and powerful in the Church. Suggestion number one: It has to be well-prepared....
Shiny Faces: Why does the Bible refer to the shining faces of Moses and Christ as they communed? Is the presence of God radioactive, rooting out the bad, preserving and ennobling the pure and uplifting? Devotional blogger Debbonnaire Kovacs ponders the meaning of irradiated faces....

Who Messed Up The Snake? SS Lesson 6: Why was evil allowed to pervert the nature and behavior of the snake, while Adam and Eve were still sinless in the garden? Blogger Jack Hoehn writes that the Bible allows for a Great Controversy theme that dates back, perhaps even to the time when the Galaxy itself was yet being created....

Adventists on Darwin and Evolution, Part 1: Why do some Protestant faiths in America celebrate the life and writings of that nemesis of Creationism, the accursed Charles Darwin? Blogger Ervin Taylor explains, in this first of two installments on the topic....

SUBSCRIBERS' BONUS FEATURE

The Arts—inSpired by and for God: The Church and the Arts have enjoyed an off-and-on-again romance through the years, perhaps because of the Church's heavy focus on the literal and the doctrinal. An upcoming event in Berkley, California, aims to open up opportunities for artistic Adventists who wish to devote their energies to the kingdom of Christ....(available to AT subscribers)

A Weekly Newsletter from atoday.org
The Ellen G. White Estate has announced that all of the manuscripts and correspondence of the cofounder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church will be available online no later than July 16, 2015. The release will be part of the 100th anniversary of her death and eventually include all the incoming correspondence from others through 1915.

At a meeting on January 4 the White Estate board discussed the issue, “including [her] diary material being typed and digitized [and] publicly available on its Website,” according to a statement released February 3 by James Nix, executive director of the Estate. Online access to the complete White materials has been a point of contention throughout last year with an anonymous group announcing that it had the materials and would release them, followed by a lawsuit filed on behalf of the General Conference accusing a group of stealing the materials, although only one member of the group was identified and he was outside the jurisdiction of the Federal court in Baltimore where the suit was filed.

The Estate “first voted in 1983 to start annotating the letter and manuscript collection for the purpose of … eventual release,” Nix said. “Volunteers were enlisted to begin the process of digitizing … the entire collection, a project that continued into the 1990s. Verification of the accuracy of what was digitized continued until 2005.”

In the 1930s, after White’s son, W. C. White, released some materials on his own, a policy was adopted that set up a cumbersome procedure for the approval of any release of her unpublished materials. This policy was modified over the years, Nix stated, and ended in 1991, in anticipation of releasing all of the materials. For a number of years all 23 of the Estate’s offices around the world—most of them housed on the campuses of Adventist colleges and universities—have had a complete digital copy of the materials which has been made available to any legitimate researcher.

The first two volumes of the complete manuscripts and letters have been fully annotated and are being prepared for publication this year and next by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, the statement says. The first volume will include all materials authored in the years 1845 through 1859, and the second volume will include all materials from 1860 through 1863.

Annotation is a major concern of the Estate, the statement reveals. Considerable work has been put into notes that describe “the background and contexts of the individuals, theological concepts and historical situations mentioned in Ellen White’s letters and manuscripts.” The board has on more than one occasion had to readjust its estimate of how much work was involved, including a 2001 decision to fund a full time staff member for this project. There is clearly a concern that many Adventists will read these materials very literally and without proper context misunderstandings will arise.

Nix points out that because of the increase in competent historical work by Adventists, this has
become less of a concern over time. He notes that a number of biographies of key personalities written by scholars have been published in recent years, as well as online access to almost all of the original periodicals published by the church through the General Conference Archives website; the Adventist Digital Library will soon be available through the Center for Adventist Research at Andrews University, and the *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* will be published in the next 12 to 24 months.

The Estate has about 8,300 documents totaling some 50,000 pages, dating from 1845 when the teenage White began her ministry until her death in 1915. White was the most influential of the three individuals who led in the organization of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. The other two were her husband, James, and Joseph Bates, who was a generation older than the young couple. She outlived both men by many decades.

Plans for observing the 100th anniversary of her death in 2015, as announced by the Estate, include at least three key events and the release of many hours of audio and video taped oral history interviews with persons who knew White, including her daughter-in-law and several grandchildren. The plan also includes specific dates in 2015 when the correspondence of her husband and her two sons will be released online.

The events marking the anniversary will include a commemoration on the last Friday evening of the 2015 General Conference Session and a special weekend in July 2015 at Pacific Union College and nearby Elmshaven, her last home. A scholarly symposium on Ellen White will be held at Andrews University, October 15-18, 2015.
History-making Woman to be Ordained as an Adventist Minister on February 16

Submitted: Feb 7, 2013
By AT News Team

Dr. Josephine Benton will be ordained to the gospel ministry on Sabbath, February 16, at Sligo Seventh-day Adventist church in Takoma Park, Maryland. She has been a pioneer in ending gender discrimination in pastoral ministry in the Adventist denomination since the 1960s. She is 87 years of age and has been approved for ordination by the Potomac Conference and the Columbia Union Conference.

A professor of speech in the 1960s and early 1970s at what is now Washington Adventist University, Benton taught young would-be pastors how to preach. Her father was a well-known evangelist and she told Taashi Rowe, news editor for The Visitor (official publication of the Columbia Union Conference) that as a child she “would sit and listen to my dad’s sermons and I always knew that if I had been born a boy, I would be a preacher.”

Benton took some courses in pastoral ministry at Wesley Theological Seminary, then located in Takoma Park and in 1973 was appointed by the General Conference (GC) officers as a member of the first major study committee on the role of women in the church. The group produced 29 Bible research papers known as the Mohaven Papers because the committee met at Camp Mohaven, the youth camp facility of the Ohio Conference. It also recommended a process for including women among the ordained ministers in the Adventist Church by 1975.

Some of the recommendations from the study committee were eventually voted by the GC executive committee and confirmed by vote of the delegates at the 1990 session in Indianapolis. Among the most important were the policies that approved the ordination of women as local elders and extended many of the functions of ordained ministers to women ordained as local elders and employed as pastors.

Benton was the first woman in the 20th century to be ordained as a local elder in the Adventist denomination and employed as a pastor. She served as an associate pastor at Sligo Church and also as pastor of a church plant in Washington, DC. From 1979 to 1982 she was senior pastor of the Rockville (Maryland) Church. After retiring from denominational employment, she served for 19 years as chaplain for the Williamsport Retirement Village in Williamsport, Maryland.

Although it’s taken a while for women pastors to be recognized through ordination, Benton told Rowe that she has seen it coming for a long time and believes it will come to the entire world church. At a special constituency meeting in July last year delegates to the Columbia Union Conference voted four to one to end gender discrimination relative to ordination. Under the new policy adopted by the constituency delegates, the union conference executive committee then approved 16 women for ordination and many of these have had an ordination service in recent months.

In November, the Columbia Union Conference executive committee named Benton as a Notable Person of Honor. “We’ve been talking about equality in ministry in the Columbia Union for 40
years,” said Pastor Rob Vandeman, executive secretary of the union conference, as he made the presentation with Benton present. “Shame on us that when Josephine Benton was an associate pastor at Sligo Church or the senior pastor at Rockville Church, that we as a church family did not have the courage to ordain her. We don’t know how to apologize as a church for the time it has taken us to recognize the contribution that [she] and other women have made to the ministry.”
By the first day of 2013, all 700 seats available at next week’s One Project gathering in Chicago were reserved. Adventists from across North America and overseas will be coming to the Westin Lombard Hotel in Yorktown Center about a mile from O’Hare Airport for the February 10-12 event.

“Celebrating the supremacy of Jesus in the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” the One Project has become an international network of pastors, youth workers and others who want to focus on “just Jesus,” a renewal of basic Christian faith. Its first gathering was in Atlanta two years ago in February 2011. Since then there have been One Project events in Finland, Seattle, Sydney and Denmark.

Nine preachers are scheduled over two days, three of them women. Emily Flottman, an associate pastor at the Walla Walla University Church, will speak Monday morning and Brandy Kirstien, a nurse and mother from Collegedale, Tennessee, who has served as a Bible worker as well as a chaplain at an Adventist secondary school, will speak Tuesday morning. Lisa Clark Diller, a historian who teaches at Southern Adventist University, will co-lead the closing communion service late Tuesday afternoon.

Perhaps the most provocative among the sermon titles is “Tebow and Sandusky Went to the Temple to Pray.” It focuses on Luke 18:9-14 and is scheduled for Tuesday at 2:40 p.m. (Central Time) by Karl Haffner, senior pastor of the Kettering Church in Dayton, Ohio.

Other speakers include Randy Roberts, senior pastor of the Loma Linda University Church; Stephan Sigg, youth director for the Inter-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; Alex Bryan, senior pastor at the Walla Walla University Church in Washington state; Timothy Nixon, pastor of New Life Fellowship on the campus of Andrews University in Michigan; Sam Leonor, chaplain for La Sierra University in Riverside, California; and Tim Gillespie, young adult pastor at Loma Linda University Church.

New this time are small conversation groups that will meet after dinner on three evenings, each focused on one of 14 topics—authenticity, Christian faith in the urban context, cross-cultural ministry, following Jesus, intergenerational churches, worship, mentoring, prayer, preaching, relevance, Scripture, the Body of Christ, vision and young adult faith. Participants must pre-register and the groups are limited in size.

Also new this time is the possibility of listening in even if you are not among the 700 participating in Chicago. The Hope Channel web site will be live streaming the event. In order to access this connection, you will need to go to the One Project web site in advance – http://the1project.org/hopetv.html -- and register with the One Project. Once you are in the member area, click on the Hope Channel icon and a special pass code will be Emailed to you. This code will be necessary to get into the live streaming on February 11 and 12 at
“Our church has something unique to offer, and that is Jesus,” says Japhet De Oliveira, a One Project coordinator and chaplain at Andrews University. “We hope [participants in the event] use every moment to build community … that we stand, arms linked, together stretched across the globe with that first-love passion for Jesus in our lives. … That we work together to that end in our spheres of influence.”

One Project gatherings are planned for April 5-6 in Mjondalen, Norway; July 20-21 in Newcastle, Australia; and at Newbold College in England for November 1-3. It is a spiritual renewal movement emerging right where the Adventist movement is often seen as in decline; North America, Europe and Australia.
From 2006 to 2011 the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia grew by 14 percent in data recently released by the national government. That gives it the second most rapid growth rate among all denominations in the country. Only the Oriental Christian Church grew more rapidly in this period.

Two thirds of the increase in Adventist membership came from immigrants, Rob Steed told Adventist Today. He is president of the interdenominational Christian Research Association and an Adventist minister who has worked for a number of years on the staff of the national headquarters of the denomination in Australia.

The number of people who told government census workers that they are Adventists was 11 percent more than the official membership total of the Australian Union Conference. This is an additional indicator that the Adventist faith is growing in the country.

“Contrary to the media reports Christianity is growing,” Steed says. “There was an increase of 3.7 percent of Australians identifying themselves as Christians.” At the same time there was a “massive shift away from denominationalism to independent churches … a 40 percent increase in Christians [who do] not identify with any particular denomination.”

This is in many ways similar to what is happening in the United States. The Adventist Church in the U.S. is the fastest-growing denomination in the most recent interfaith statistical report from the National Council of Churches. The non-denominational sector of Christianity in the U.S. is far out-pacing all of the denominations in growth.
Adult Sabbath School: Relic or Not?

Submitted: Feb 3, 2013
By Lawrence Downing

I’m old enough to have experienced “genuine” American Adventist adult Sabbath School “programs.” For those who are not of a certain age, here is how the typical adult Sabbath School unfolded: Song service, Scripture reading and opening prayer followed by the Superintendent’s Remarks, usually a “spiritual” lesson often accompanied by a “sweet” religious poem, frequently of the syrupy variety. The Secretary’s Report was a recapitulation of what happened during Sabbath School the previous Sabbath; “Sister Halter offered the opening prayer. … Brother Freeman gave the Review.” And so on, including an account of how many people reported they had studied their lesson seven times, how much offering was collected and other pertinent information, as defined by the presenter. (The “Review,” for the uninitiated, was a review of the Sabbath School lesson from the previous Sabbath, a double dose for those who were in attendance the week before; new light for the absent ones.) Somewhere in the line-up came the Mission Story. In the hands of a more creative person, told in dramatic fashion, the jungles of Africa and the rivers of South America came to life. More often than not one of the older members stumbled through the two or three pages of the Mission Quarterly as the long-suffering congregation counted the spots on the ceiling. (It came as somewhat a shock to learn in later years that many of the thrilling stories were more thrill than fact. I became acquainted with several of the mission story authors and learned that some of the stories they wrote were somewhat embellished. One person admitted that some of the accounts she wrote were pure fiction, but her motives were pure.)

When the preliminaries were completed, the adult lesson study began. The classes met in sections of the sanctuary. The teaching style was didactic: the teacher stood in front of the group and read each question in the Lesson Quarterly for each of the seven days of the week, and then gave the answer from the listed Bible text or E. G. White quotation. It mattered little whether the text or statement had any bearing on the question. It was “here a little and there a little,” with a result that usually ended in little. (My biased opinion.) That was then. Now is another day.

Today, the Adult Sabbath School program continues in many churches to meet at 9:30 AM. There will be few holdovers from the olden days. The contemporary adult Sabbath School, if there is one, will probably have a brief song service, a welcome and prayer followed by a themed program presented by the superintendent or someone invited to address a specific topic. At 10 o’clock, the Adult Sabbath School classes will often meet in separate rooms, rather than be bunched together in the sanctuary. A significant number of churches have abolished the Sabbath School program altogether. People go directly to classes as they arrive rather than meet in the sanctuary. One may debate whether this change is better or less than ideal. It is reality, and, for many congregations, an improvement over the struggle to continue the adult Sabbath School as it was practiced in past decades.

For those churches that continue the struggle to maintain an adult Sabbath School, here’s my challenge to leadership: Take a hard look at your Sabbath School program. Count the number of people sitting in the pews at 9:30. If attendance is 15 percent or less of those who attend the
worship service, there is trouble in River City! It is time to take a long, hard look at what may be a relic of a past age. (We do well to remind ourselves that “ought’s” don’t count!)

For the churches that wish to continue the traditional adult Sabbath School program, I believe it is important that competent leaders give as much attention to what is presented on Sabbath morning as for any major event. Strive for superior performance, and superior performance is defined as 15 to 20 percent above average. (How to measure average is the kicker. At this point I don’t have a satisfying answer. Any ideas?)

It is, I think, important for Sabbath School facilitators to develop a leadership team that will define, articulate and implement a plan that works a minimum of six months ahead. A plan for a year is better. It is also important, I believe, to initiate an educational process to equip future leaders to be competent Sabbath School presenters and organizers. An accountability system will help the leaders to evaluate the skills and qualifications important to Sabbath School leadership. Set the bar high and hold people to it. And, whatever the program and whoever leads the Sabbath School, if a significant number of people do not buy into the end product, the lack of buy-in may be the clue that the traditional Sabbath School is no longer viable. Face reality. Zip the Adult Sabbath School program and put energy into making the lesson study time a positive experience.
Moses’ face shone when he came out from talking with God. The story reads as if it were literally true, since they had him wear a veil, and that may well be so. Privately, I wonder if the “physical” (for lack of a better word) presence of God isn’t radioactive. Having created the atom, God would know how to protect fragile humans from that, and it would explain (somewhat) the idea that God’s presence is either deadly and lifegiving, depending on one’s state at the moment.

On the other hand, the metaphysical shining that comes from someone who spends time in close communion with The Holy also sometimes makes people uncomfortable. Maybe it was the love in Moses’ eyes they couldn’t bear. He did tend to get a bit crusty, didn’t he? Maybe they were more comfortable with that. . . But when he was with God he forgot how irritating they often were and remembered that they were God’s children and in some sense, his, too.

Not only Jesus’ face, but even his clothing shone on the mountain when he was transfigured (literally, changed looks). Then again, his face, the face of God, was already veiled in human flesh because we couldn’t bear it. Do humans cling to the picture of an angry, vengeful god because that’s more understandable (given what we know of our inward selves) and because the shocking, far-reaching Love is almost unbearably bright?

When we, as a race, turned away, we became unable to bear that Light. We created a veil, dozens of veils, hundreds of veils, and hid inside them. Jesus put on our veils and came inside to find us. We weren’t truly free until his veil of flesh was ripped apart.

By us.

That, too, is unbearably to look at. But if we do, if we hold our wavering, tear-soaked gaze on that Love, our faces get shiny. Some people don’t like it. All people need it.

Is your face shiny?
Who Messed Up The Snake? SS Lesson 6

Submitted: Feb 6, 2013
By Jack Hoehn

These comments are on the current Sabbath School lessons on Origins Lesson 6 and attempt to open the conversation to a broader Adventist understanding of Creation. Should Adventists have any trouble accepting an Intelligent Destroyer as well as an Intelligent Designer?

Memory Text: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15, NIV).

It’s good to have a Sabbath School Lesson, for it lets us re-read familiar texts and think about them again. I have always understood Genesis 3:15 to say to the Snake, “Jesus will crush your head.” I’ve seen Mel Gibson’s riveting Passion of the Christ movie, watching the slithering viper approach Jesus bare feet in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the deadly exchange of a strike and blow to the snake’s head.

But the Enmity promised is not between the woman’s offspring and the Snake. It is between the woman’s offspring, and the Snake’s offspring.

Woman will have children. Snake will have children. What are Satan’s offspring? Women create children. What does Satan create? Does this verse remind us that Satan is a procreator like Woman? Does it show Satan will be involved in reproduction of creatures in his image? Can we begin to explain the pain, disease, and monstrosities of creation as Satan’s offspring?

It is not only Christians who recognize a satanic influence in the history of life on earth. Howard Bloom published a book called, “The Lucifer Principle” subtitled “A Scientific Expedition into the Forces of History” from a completely secular viewpoint suggesting that all creation and all history has a principle interwoven into every page best characterized as satanic, (although he considers Lucifer a metaphor not a person).

Sunday February 3: The Serpent Was More Cunning
Who created the snake? Were snakes created deceitful by the Creator? Doesn’t this story show
us a Biblical example of satanic power over God’s creation before the fall of man? Genesis 2 shows that the Devil could make a beautiful, wise, created flying reptile do something it had never done before. Satan made the flying serpent not only talk and but also talk lies.

How could an unfallen animal like the serpent, before Eve sinned, be manipulated by Satan, if animals were first subjected to satanic power only after the fall of man? How many other animals and plants were mutated, transformed, amalgamated into something more pleasing to Satan’s plans during the creation events before the fall? According to the abundant records preserved in the geologic sediments of earth, there was indeed a controversy going on during pre-human history. Jesus said Satan was active on earth not from the fall of man, but from “the beginning.” John 8:44 says not only lying, but murdering (death of creatures) was happening on earth, from “the beginning,” thanks to Satan and his minions.

This suggests that the Great Controversy was going on between Christ and Satan, during the creation of this earth. That each Creation Day, starts in darkness, and then by God’s power ends in light. Each day is a recurrent conflict of darkness (Satan) with light (Christ).

The geologic record of creation shows not only an Intelligent Designer, but also evidence of an Intelligent Destroyer. The devil and his substantial crew of angelic beings could work with God’s tools but pervert them to selfish, harsh, cruel ways and means. Genesis’ creation record can be understood as a record of God’s interventions into chaos, of Light shining into the darkness at each successive stage of creation. Geology then can be not only a record of the Great Controversy after the fall of man, but it could also be a record of the Great Controversy before the fall of man but after the fall of Satan.

Present day examples of this Great Controversy can be found in most of creation.

There are mosquitoes who suck plant juices/ there are mosquitoes who suck blood.  
There are stingless bees who make honey/ there are bees that sting.  
There are things about a Lion that make it an analogy for Christ the Lion of the Tribe of Judah/ there are things about a Lion that makes it an analogy for Satan who seeks whom he can devour.  
There are faithful dogs who are man’s best friend/ there are hyenas who are no one’s friend.  
There are rodents like beavers who are pond makers and river tamers/ there are rodents like Norway Rats who carry bubonic plague.  
There are fruits which are sweet and nourishing/ there are fruits which are toxic and hallucinatory.  
There are roses/ there are thorns.  
There are bacteria that serve our bodies as essential organisms keeping us alive and healthy/ there are bacteria that would invade and kill us given any chance.  
There is pure grape juice (Navarrowine.com and DraperValleyVineyard.com have great varietal juices-- the Pinot Noir from Navarro and Early Muscat from Draper Valley are exceptional)/ and then there is “Two Buck Chuck” and many other dangerous fermented beverages.

Young Earth Creationists think all this happened after the fall of Adam just 6,000 years ago and have only 2,000 years for a very clever and energetic Satan to corrupt all of God’s creation in time for the fossils to be formed in the flood.
While I respect angelic capability, I would not put Satan on par with the Creator. The satanic influence on creation is to modify and adjust God’s creation, within the limits of intelligently designed life. Satan can breed a hyena from a fruit-eating civet and evolve a wolf and then humans can evolve dogs from an ur-dog created by God, but only if he has a God-created mammal to start with.

So rather than seeing Satan mutate much of creation into evil in a very short period of time, this possibility of an Intelligent Destroyer makes more sense to me to see him working and learning how to mutate and deform God’s progressive creation, over the long time line science gives for creation events. If Satan was a liar and murderer from “the beginning” not just after Adam’s fall, I can understand the Great Controversy in creation recorded in the fossils before the creation of man.

This is an interpretation. But a theology of Satan helps me understand the existence of evil in the creation both before and after the fall of man. I cannot accept that God created HIV. I can understand that Satan mutated DNA into a dreadful virus. Just as soon as God began his creative work in the world, Satan began his corrupting work. Creation was God’s continuing attempt to redeem a Satan-blighted planet. Or put the other way around geology record’s Satan’s attempts to corrupt God’s good creation.

If this is true, then we will not be surprised to see evidence of pain, suffering, and death existing in the world before Adam and Eve, since Satan was active from the beginning.

“Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from The Beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.” John 8:43, 44
On the weekend of February 8-10, 2013, more than 500 congregations associated with a number of Christian traditions will celebrate “2013 Evolution Weekend” as a means of emphasizing the compatibility of Christianity and biological evolution. This is the 8th year that such a weekend had been organized. We all know the name of the 19th-century English naturalist, Charles Darwin, and the book, *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection*, which provided the most detailed exposition of biological evolution as one of the most influential scientific concepts in the history of science.

The Christian congregations participating in 2013 Evolution Weekend include those affiliated with the various denominations or branches of the Anglican, Baptist, Church of the Brethren, Congregational, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Presbyterian, Quaker, Swedenborgian, Unitarian Universalist, and United Church of Christ traditions. Many Jewish and a few Islamic congregations will also be participating, although surveys have determined that Orthodox Jewish and about half of all members of Islam in the United States reject biological evolution and its implications.

Although no individual Catholic parishes are listed as participating, a recent announcement by the Vatican noted that the present Pope and a number of his predecessors have declared unambiguously that Darwin’s evolutionary theory is compatible with Catholic Christian faith. Back in 2009, the Roman Catholic Pontifical Academy and Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome held a conference to mark the 150th anniversary of the publication of Darwin’s major work. A recent poll by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that Catholics joined mainline Protestants, most Orthodox Christians, non-Orthodox Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and the “unaffiliated” in overwhelmingly accepting evolution as the best scientific explanation for the development of living forms—including humans—on earth.

We can be reasonably certain that no Seventh-day Adventist congregation from anywhere in the United States—or, for that matter, anywhere in the world—will participate in the 2013 Evolution Weekend. We know that institutional Adventism joins with other conservative evangelical and fundamentalist churches and denominations—such as the Watchtower Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses) and Mormons—in rejecting the key scientific idea contained in Darwin’s work, which represents the view that all life forms on earth evolved from common ancestors over hundreds of millions of years, primarily by the process of natural selection.

Focusing our attention just on Adventism, we might ask the question: “What is it about the Adventist theological tradition that has caused this small branch of Protestant Christianity to reject the ideas embodied in Darwin’s great scientific work?”

We can begin by reminding ourselves that when Darwin published *Origin of Species*, Adventism had, at most, 800 adherents scattered in “little flocks” in the northeastern United States. The organized Adventist Church did not as yet exist. As Darwin’s ideas or, more often,
interpretations of his ideas, spread into the popular consciousness through various means in the communities where early Adventists lived, the reaction of individual Adventists adherents to Darwin’s ideas were almost certainly similar to those of all other working and middle class Christians in these communities. Unless an individual possessed some formal education beyond the elementary school, the ordinary Christian layperson almost instinctively contrasted Darwin’s view with what was being taught in the pulpits on weekends, about God’s creation of the world in six days about 6,000 years ago. The first chapter of the Book of Genesis in the King James Bible editions of that day even contain in their margins the date of Creation as 4004 BC.

Thus the views of early Adventists on this topic were essentially the same as all other Protestant Christians of similar background. What has happened through succeeding decades to completely alter this? Why have other Christian bodies—some quite conservative in some matters—modified their earlier views about evolution? Why is the Adventist Church not celebrating the “2013 Evolution Weekend” to show the compatibility of Christianity and biological evolution? What has changed?

Part 2 of this blog will suggest some answers to these questions.
A new kind of conference is coming to Berkeley, California, this April 26-28. Billed as “the first ever Adventist inSpire weekend,” it promises to be an event filled with passion, excitement, and most of all, creativity. There will be presentations and speeches, as in most conferences. But there will also be music, art, discussion, and poetry. Attendees have a chance to enter creative works of their own for prizes and to “participate in our search for new music and graphics on one of 5 key themes.” Best of show in music or digital design will win an Apple iPad.

InSpire’s plan is to truly breathe in [the literal meaning of inspire] the spirit of creativity that the Bible speaks of as being directly given by God (Exodus 31:1-11). They don’t want a conference that’s all about talking and thinking. The event schedule bears this out, as it lists poetry readings, musical presentations, and a songwriter’s exchange. Dick Duerkson will be the worship speaker.

Another creative note is that the Friday evening and Sabbath sessions are free to all attendees. Full registration will get the participant meals and a DVD of the weekend (shipped later) besides access to all presentation. Registered attendees may also submit one creative work without paying the $20 entry fee, though if one wishes to send the allowable two more entries, they will each be charged.

“InSpire: Sharing Christ through the Arts,” is bigger than this one event, however. There is really no better way to describe the project than to quote their own description, from their website at www.visitinspire.org:

inSpire is one of several projects being sponsored by Church Support Services, a research and development entity for creative ministry in the Pacific Union Conference. inSpire is a web community where Seventh-day Adventist members gifted in, and passionate about the creative arts, can share their ideas and creations in a collaborative way. Songwriting, drawing, painting, photography, sculpture, poetry and more can be used in powerful ways to convey God's message of hope and healing to our churches and surrounding cultural environments.

This website represents an intentional effort to stimulate dialog and creative engagement in mission among Adventist songwriters, poets and artists. As a church we need to celebrate the old and capture the new.

It is time to risk and explore new ministry frontiers--for God's sake! We cannot use 19th century methods to reach 21st century people. Even in her day, Ellen White said: “Whatever may have been your former practice, it is not necessary to repeat it again and again in the same way. God would have new and untried methods followed. Break in upon the people – surprise them.” -- Manuscript 121, 1897 (Evangelism, p.125). We need fresh new music, art, photography, poetry to convey God's healing message of hope and coming deliverance.

"This project is possible because of a willingness on the part of many artists and musicians to
share their stories, without which we would have nothing to say. Special thanks to Roy Ice, Ron Pickell and Dennis Hunt for their feedback and help with behind-the scenes planning. Their creativity and enthusiasm is contagious." --Rich DuBose

It is worth noting that the site then goes on to protect all content sent to the site by the church’s various artists by posting a detailed list of what cannot be copied without permission from its creators, from text on the site to music and videos found there.

Adventist Today salutes this intentional engagement with the arts and those whom God has given the ability to create them. If you’re in the area at the time of the conference, please send us a report! Whether or not you go to the conference, do visit the inSpire website and check out some of its many offerings. Perhaps soon every conference will have something like it. But different. Because that’s what creativity is all about.

Here is the link to the conference itself: http://www.visitinspire.org/article/91/featured/inspire-2013-gathering