NEWS

**Surprises and Questions: What Will the New Pope Mean for Adventists?**
The ascent to the pontificate of the conservative and controversial Francis I was predicted years ago by a prominent Adventist theologian. Find out who he was, and why he believed an unlikely Jesuit would rise to the fore.

**Adventist Pastor Appointed Chaplain of the State Senate in Idaho:**
A man still in his mid-30s not only pastors one of the larger churches in the Idaho Conference, but has been named chaplain of the state Senate in nearby Boise.

**Amount of Bonds Backed by Government Entities Funding Adventist Colleges and Universities Revealed for the First Time:**
A great deal has been written about the purported dangers of Adventist institutional indebtedness, using government-backed bonds. Are we in jeopardy of losing our ability to teach what by conscience we hold to be Truth?

**Examinations for Secondary School Seniors across India Scheduled Around the Sabbath on March 16:**
When questions for an important national pre-college exam measuring fluency in English were leaked several weeks ago, a new examination was prepared and scheduled for an upcoming Saturday, despite an earlier agreement with the Church in India not to schedule required examinations during Sabbath hours.

**Experiments in Evangelism and Church Planting Continue among Adventists in Europe:**
Whether a true awakening or simply a somnolent muscle-stretch (time will tell), Adventist pastors and administrative leaders across Europe are reaching out in church planting and community services ventures. Pay attention, North America.
OPINION

The Amazing Unbreakable Sabbath (Sabbath School Lesson for March 16):
Blogger Jack Hoehn again presents a case that the biblical Sabbath does not rest on a cornerstone of a literal, seven-day creative week, but on the positive endorsement of God as Creator. "It may be a bigger, longer, greater Creation story than we have thought about before, but that’s why we have so many Sabbaths to learn it better," he says....

What Do These Numbers Tell Us About the Future of the Church?:
Demographic statistics can never tell us exactly what will happen next in an organization, but their story is usually prophetic—though the results may not happen quite as rapidly as predicted. What does demographic prophecy say about the North American Church?...

The Papal Conclave: Do We Have a Dog in this Fight?:
The direction the papacy takes this year may well parallel that of the Adventist Church organization, as the two religions—though doctrinally distinct—minister to similar demographics....

Mustard Seeds:
Blogger Charles Eaton tells of his earnest and continuing effort to seek God's healing for a gravely sick friend, physically and spiritually—even as the illness steals away his friend's ability to think clearly about spiritual things. Why do our blogger's prayerful and sincere attempts to seek healing for his friend fall short? With tears, he seeks our counsel....

David and the Doobie Brothers:
The Bible and the geriatric rockers The Doobie Brothers each say something about what fools believe—and don't believe. Blogger Stephen Foster wonders if the psalmist David is correct in stating that a fool says in his heart there is no God, and what that verse says about card-carrying atheists today....

In the (Cyber) World but not Of It:
Devotional blogger Debonnaire Kovacs examines two kinds of meditation: That which is done in solitude, and that which is done in community—and, oh yes, that which is done in the Cyber World too....

What Really Happened on Mt. Sinai?:
Observant Adventists of the past became somewhat famous, at times, for their minute knowledge of the Old Testament. Now Blogger Andy Hanson offers a quiz to help AT readers score themselves on their recall and comprehension of "who-did-what-when-and-why?" during the Israelites' lengthy Sinai encampment....
SUBSCRIBER'S BONUS FEATURES

A Son of the Great Advent Movement Seeks his Roots in the Great African American Migration:
The search for roots popularized by Alex Haley continues in the black community, and with growing understanding of mitochondrial DNA, has grown massively among Native Americans, Caucasians, Hispanics, and Asians as well. A faculty member at Oakwood University shares his journey.... (available to AT subscribers; see offer for limited-time free subscription on the AT Home Page)

Tax-exempt Bonds and Secularization in Adventist Education:
The indebtedness of Adventist institutions in the form of government-guaranteed bonds is now well on its way to $1 billion. How does this indebtedness threaten our autonomy and the right to teach what our conscience tells us to teach in our own colleges and universities? (available to AT subscribers; see offer for limited-time free subscription on the AT Home Page)

What We Talk about When We Talk about God (Book Review by Jeff Boyd):
A brand new effort by evangelical theological phenom Rob Bell comes highly recommended by the reviewer, who sees in the book an invitation to "slow down, meditate deeply on the Word, and on our experiences, listen intently, and be open to God's ever-unfolding revelation of truth about Godself, about us, and about the universe God has placed us in."...(available to AT subscribers; see offer for limited-time free subscription on the AT Home Page)
Surprises and Questions: What Will the New Pope Mean for Adventists?

Submitted: Mar 13, 2013
By Adventist Today News Team

Cardinal Jorge M. Bergoglio’s election as Pope Francis I did not surprise some Adventists. The noted Seventh-day Adventist theologian Samuele Bacchiocchi, who died in 2008, had mentioned the Jesuit university administrator from Argentina as a possible Pope in 2005.

Bergoglio “is a soft-spoken intellectual, and a respected theological and philosophical thinker,” Bacchiocchi wrote at the time. Both were of Italian ancestry and products of Catholic academic institutions, although Adventist Today has not found any evidence that they ever met. “If Bergoglio were to be elected Pope, his simplicity and humility would impress the world. For example, in Argentina people admire the fact that he takes public transportation rather than a chauffer-driven limousine.”

Francis I is the first pope from Latin America and the southern hemisphere, and the first Jesuit to become pope. “The idea of a Jesuit Pope is not readily acceptable,” Bacchiocchi wrote in 2005 “because Jesuits are not supposed to receive ecclesiastical honors [and] have a troublesome history of insubordination to papal authority.” Surprisingly, Bacchiocchi made no reference to the many negative things that Adventist writers and preachers have had to say about Jesuits over the years.

A number of journalists in the secular news media referred to Bergoglio as unexpected today, pointing out that he is 76 and was not mentioned in published lists of possible popes in recent weeks. But Bacchiochi saw him as a possibility in 2005 and Radio Christianidad reported in June 2006 that he was “according to many reports, runner-up in the last conclave.”

Bergoglio is aligned with the very conservative wing of the Catholic faith and has been accused of silence about, if not complicity with disappearances, torture and atrocities during Argentina’s anti-communist “dirty war.” In some ways he embodies the worst fears of some Adventists about the Catholic hierarchy. It is predictable that Email bulletins will soon be circulating that identify this papal election as a sign that end-time prophecy is being fulfilled.

Equally important in this event is the emergence of Latino leadership in a worldwide religion. That is also a “sign of the times” for the Adventist Church. “It may hint at surprises to come at major occasions in the Adventist Church over the next three years,” a retired church administrator told Adventist Today.
Jim Wibberding, pastor of the Cloverdale Seventh-day Adventist Church near Boise was recently selected by the Senate president, based on the recommendation of a search committee, to serve as the Senate Chaplain for the State of Idaho. He will serve during the 2013 legislative session, which began in January.

Pastor Wibberding earned the Doctor of Ministry degree at Andrews University and received the Excellence in DMin Research award. He is currently working on a Doctor of Theology degree in homiletics from the University of South Africa. In addition to authoring several books and articles, he wrote the training curriculum on preaching in the iFollow Discipleship Resource.

The Cloverdale Church has over 700 members and a striking, postmodern facility located near Pacific Press, one of the two publishing houses operated by the General Conference in North America. Pastor Wibberding and his wife Laura are the proud parents of a 5-year-old daughter and newborn twins.
Amount of Bonds Backed by Government Entities Funding Adventist Colleges and Universities Revealed for the First Time

By AT News Team

A feature article written and researched by T. Joe Willey and published by Adventist Today reveals for the first time the extent to which colleges and universities affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America are using bonds guaranteed by government entities. The total amount borrowed under these arrangements is nearly $687 million dollars.

The laws governing these bonds require that the institutions enter into a covenant that the facilities and equipment purchased with the funds not be used for religious purposes. At least seven colleges and universities have entered into these arrangements, include all three of the General Conference universities and the institution generally regarded as the most conservative, Southern Adventist University.

The article presents a detailed analysis of the issues involved, including significant mistakes in the reports circulated by independent ministries that have launched repeated criticisms of La Sierra University. Each of the institutions involved is listed along with the specific amounts of money borrowed in each case using government-backed bonds.

The lengthy article is loaded with information and available to paid subscribers to Adventist Today. If you are not a paid subscriber, you can obtain a free, introductory 30-day subscription in order to access this article, by clicking on http://www.atoday.org/subscription/membership/apply

If you are already a paid subscriber, make sure you are logged in, and use this link to access the article: Tax-exempt Bonds and Secularization in Adventist Education
Tax-exempt Bonds and Secularization in Adventist Education

Submitted: Mar 12, 2013
By T Joe Willey

*If we want to resist the powers that threaten to suppress intellectual and individual freedom, we must be clear what is at stake. Without such freedom there would have been no Shakespeare, no Goethe, no Newton, no Farady, no Pasteur, no Lister. Freedom is the foundation for creativity. [From a speech by Albert Einstein in 1933, Isascson 2007, p. 423.]*

Idiosyncratic web-based conspiracists using emotional laden words to intimidate free expression—all the while generally speaking with hostility to reflections in a university classroom on matters of biological evolution—and on occasion fiercely lobbying church officials to abandon formal accreditation standards—have recently enlarged their criticism against creative tax-exempt bond financing for faith-based institutions. Wishing to extract revenge they claim, “Because of the actions of a few men, La Sierra University is caught in a covenant agreement, which prohibits it from promoting Seventh-day Adventist beliefs.” They continue, “The consequences of breaking the bond agreement are dealing with a potential lawsuit and/or having to pay the bond principle [sic] immediately.” (Pitman 2012a. Refers to a tax-exempt indenture used in part to refinance the construction loan for the Thaine B. Price science complex on campus.)

Beneath the surface, observers who are familiar with Adventist higher education are aware that La Sierra University is committed to carrying out God’s purpose as a Christian institution. At the same time, with money from the bond the administration is attempting to improve the facilities of the campus, air-condition the dormitories and make the campus a safer place to study. This school has been a leading champion in the campaign to teach scientific biology and create scientific thinkers. As it turns out these misleading remarks from the critics about the bond are thoroughly detached from reality. The psychic distemper expressed by the naysayers gives the impression that La Sierra University (LSU) must have somehow inadvertently repealed the plan of salvation.

Nonetheless on this matter of “prohibited uses covenant” it is obvious that the conspiracists cannot have it both ways. The two perspectives they advocate are inherently irreconcilable; or else just plainly malleable, showing an eagerness to bend any fact to fit an impending purpose. On the one hand they posit that “scientific creationism” should be taught in biology as any other science subject. But on the other, in the face of bond covenant restrictions, they claim that creationism is inherently a religious belief and, as such, cannot be discussed in the LSU Price Science Complex.

Excessively conservative voices are fairly common in Adventism. In the past, the acceptance of government aid has been often viewed as hastening the end times or twisting the tail of the dragon that controls what can and cannot be taught in church-sponsored schools. In this traditional world, it is not a matter of inconvenience. Often there are other underlying concerns, even implying a sincere lack of faith. “I wonder if it has occurred to our membership that God
has covenanted with us to take care of our financial needs … When the church falls short and has to go to the government, it means that God has failed and that the government has picked up the slack. This, I believe, is a terrible indictment against the members.” (Stevens 1992)

In 1991 Gary M. Ross, Congressional Liaison for the General Conference, noted a “declining fervor for separationism in regard to the role of government in religious education.” He believed that this shift was related to increasing costs of education, and the fading memory of the potential problems that might grow out of church-state entanglement.

It is not my ambition to act out bad feelings between religious liberty and government aid or to reprise the gloomy battle between religion and science. I intend to set a more modest course. The tax-exempt bond — is, what it is. I wish merely to clarify and document the situation that has recently arisen in the economics of capital investment using tax-exempt bonds in Adventist senior colleges. Increasingly over the past few years these institutions have shifted to tax-exempt bonds to pay for larger scale construction and improvements on campus. Besides having to pay back the long-term bond debt, there are, of course, inherent risks in this type of conduit financing.

**What is a Tax-Exempt Bond?**

Nonprofit educational institutions cannot issue tax-exempt bonds directly on their own. Typically a local municipal or development authority established by the state legislature will issue private tax-exempt bonds — bonds where the interest payments to the investor are generally not subject to federal, state or local income tax. It is important to note that none of the funds come from the (State or City) government itself. The money which the school or college borrows is a loan from wealthy investors attracted to purchasing the bond because the principle is secured by a larger institution and the earned interest is tax-exempt.

Tax-exempt bond financing is a government “benefit” to the institution as well. But the nature of tax exemption is a loss to U. S. and State Treasury. In a sense it is a government “gift” to the institution or organization somewhat analogous to being exempt from paying property taxes. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that borrowing through tax-exempt debt cost the federal government in forgone tax revenues about $5.5 billion (in 2010).

By accessing the tax exempt bond marketplace church-related institutions can raise capital quickly and conveniently. It allows them to preserve their own cash or endowments which can then be used for other purposes. Generally an investment banking firm underwrites the bond and puts together a team of experts to create and market the tax exempt indenture. Fees are paid to the bond legal counsel and investment firm, credit enhancements and sometimes also to the issuer (often a municipality or a development agency). Neither the issuer nor the investment banker is responsible for the repayment of the loan — only the nonprofit borrower (in cases discussed here).

Clearly, there is the possibility that this type of tax-exempt arrangement could lead to state-church entanglements. It can be said that the government is indirectly subsidizing this low-cost loan by forgoing tax revenues while indirectly benefitting the borrower (in this case a religious
Does this violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment? We will answer that question without going to five attorneys and getting eight different opinions. (I reviewed the major court decisions on tax-exempt bonds in religious organizations but will use the legal academic literature that summarizes the evolution of these decisions.)

Legal matters of tax-exempt debt issuance are somewhat complex. There are certain fact patterns and restrictions that come to bear on the process. Institutions must follow Internal Revenue Service (IRS) guidelines and the intended use must be consistent with 501(c)(3) prohibitive or exempt purposes. The easiest way to think of these bonds is in the form of a financial indenture issued for activities that satisfy some broadly defined “public” or societal purpose or good. For one thing buildings constructed from tax-exempt bonds must be open for use for the community as well. Among other things, special care has to be taken by Adventist institutions to isolate the bond proceeds from intermingling with funds for chapel construction, worship facilities and churches. In almost all cases dedicated religious facilities and classrooms where religion is taught or worship held cannot be financed with tax-exempt bonds. (Shay-Byrne 2001, p. 78; Weyl 2006)

**Bonds in Adventist Educational Institutions**

The most current data on bonds issued by Adventist educational corporations was collected by searching the IRS 990 tax return form. Generally the latest data was filed in 2010 except Southern Adventist University. (SAU does not file a 990 tax report, claiming to the IRS that is a church and therefore not legally required to do so.) After identifying the issuer on Schedule K and the CUSIP # along with the date issued, the amount and the purpose of the bond was obtained from the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board database. Also included in the table are three tax-exempt bonds from Southeastern California Conference for secondary schools issued out of the Colorado Educational and Cultural Facilities Authority. (After a public hearing, the Board of Supervisors for Riverside County granted approval in April 2008.) The beautiful new administration building for Loma Linda Academy was constructed from a bond issue.

What the table shows is that significant proceeds from tax-exempt financing are already flowing into almost all Adventist colleges and universities, including all three “owned” by the General Conference. Ultimately after redeeming the issued bonds the total costs will be significantly higher over the life of the indenture.

**Tax Exemption and Prohibited Uses Covenants**

Tax-exempt bonds include a variety of covenants (or agreements) that the Borrower makes for the benefit and security of the Bondholder (the investor). For instance, Bondholders do not want Borrowers to incur additional debt indiscriminately and thereby weaken the ability to service the bond debt. There are other agreements or promises made in the bond transcript that address compliance with the tax codes, private use and continuing accreditation, etc.

For this reason, LSU cannot afford to lose its regional (WASC) accreditation. But the reader is probably not interested in learning about the different lines of bond covenants. Under the current
circumstances rendered by the conservative protestors mentioned above the reader is more likely to want to know about the issues concerning the “prohibited uses covenants” in the LSU bond. And then of course, will the covenant harm or hamper in any way a “pervasively sectarian” institution such as LSU and other Adventist higher educational institutions? The discussion that follows applies to all tax-exempt bonds held by all Adventist institutions, not just LSU as the reactionary critics report. (Peabody 2013)
Religious organizations using tax-exempt bonds all use the same strategy to avoid excessive entanglement with the First Amendment Clause. Religious liberty in the church expresses that this is the nexus where there is the greatest fundamental danger in the separation of state and religion for these bonds. Will gradual steps be taken by the religious institution to strip its identity in any way while attempting to match the unpredictable terrain of court decisions on matters of church-state issues?

It is said that some Adventist colleges claim that they are more religious (“pervasively sectarian”) than others. Legally speaking all Adventist institutions are “pervasively sectarian.” Being pervasively sectarian is like pregnancy, it is impossible to be half or three-quarters pregnant. Southern Adventist University does not file the 990 tax reports as an educational institution and tells the IRS it has the status of a local church and is therefore exempt from filing, but still accepts tax-exempt bonds and federal student aid.

Pervasively sectarian institutions have certain characteristics. In general terms such colleges are selective in appointing Boards of Trustees and in hiring faculty and staff of a particular faith. They selectively accept students of religious faith. They insist on or even compel religious instruction in the curriculum or worship attendance. They discipline faculty along religious lines, place certain limits on academic freedom, encourage conversion of non-Adventist student; as well as present to the public the religious dimensions of the institution, in alumni journals and websites. Despite these properties, recent court decisions have determined that there is no compelling reason to deny government aid to a “pervasively sectarian” college. (CUC v. Oliver 254 F. 3d 496, 2001; and California Statewide Communities Development Authority v. All Persons … CA Sup. Ct., March 5, 2007.)

One more thing contributes to pervasively sectarianism in Adventist colleges. This is the aim of church accreditation by the Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA). Mimicking other outside accrediting agencies AAA sets about to determine if the institution “achieves success in the spiritual domain and that it is truly Adventist.” (Beardsley 2008, p. 16) This item alone is enough to ensure that Adventist tertiary institutions are “pervasively sectarian.”

Over time U.S. Supreme Court decisions have gradually moved closer to permitting indirect government aid to religious organizations if the activities and proceeds are used to provide facilities for secular activities, e.g. residence and dining facilities and academic buildings where the core curriculum courses such as English, Mathematics, and History are taught. For the past several decades the tendency in case law has migrated away from testing for “pervasive sectarian” over to a “neutrality” standard. In a “neutrality” standard it is recognized that the government is not financing a religious project, but merely allowing favorable tax treatment in the same manner that nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporations are exempted from paying income tax. Case law makes it clear that the revenue from the bond must not have the primary effect of advancing or inhibiting religion or fostering excessive entanglement with religion. As Supreme Court Justice Scalia pointed out, “No one would seriously contend, for example, that the Framers would have barred ministers from using public roads on their way to church.” (Locke v. Davey. 540 U.S. 712, 2004) And he might have added, "But the pastor or bishop has a duty to obey the
speed limit even if he or she is late to church."

**Prohibited Uses Covenants and Creationism**

Here is an example of how one of these “prohibitive uses covenant” appears in a tax-exempt bond. The one reported here is from the Loma Linda University’s bond (Series 2007): “No portion of the proceeds of the Bonds were or will be used to finance any facility, place or building used or to be used primarily for sectarian instruction or study or as a place of devotional activities or religious worship …” Under the “neutrality standard” an institution can breathe easier taking care to separate the secular from sectarian activities.

Over the “past 35 years” courts have “ruled that creationism—scientific creationism or Intelligent Design—is sectarian and religious in nature.” (Read 2010) In the partisan divide between conservatives and liberals this single issue is enough for radical conservatives opposed to scientific biology in an Adventist college to drain the water out of the pond and destroy the habitat of all working educators and professors in Adventist higher education.

What is peculiar about the way we observe the broadly defined boundaries that exists between conservatives and liberal is the manner in which the mind approaches such issues as government aid. It is currently thought that the explanation for this persistent (sometimes stubborn) difference in world views lays in differing genetic endowments or, powerful deviations in the way the two brains process information? At least that is what modern sociologists and psychologists are beginning to come to grips with. (Mooney 20012) Pointing out these deep differences is like exposing a naked emperor. This will only cause the conservatives to fight back, vigorously in defense of their beliefs. Admittedly the toxic word “evolution” in Adventist conservative minds creates fear and a hateful connotation for a variety of religious reasons. It does little good to express sympathy for advances in medicine attributed to a broad understanding of scientific evolution and naturalism.

As in other higher educational institutions an Adventist biologist’s teaching responsibility is to convey evidence-based knowledge and wisdom about science that students can internalize and later apply in their professional careers. A big difference today is the fact that in the quest for natural explanations scientists are bound by methodological naturalism. Indeed, if the subject of origins and biological processes cannot be taught because of binding the mind with a “prohibited uses covenant” in the science building at LSU, it might be surprising to some that there are ways to teach scientific biology without corrupting the restraint. In the first place, there are a significant number of Adventist theologians and scientists who believe and teach that biological evolution or origins does not preclude God’s role in creation. (Petersen 2003) For that matter, in secular schools there are many non-SDA scientists who also see God’s hand in evolution. (Witham 1997, p. 33)

Theistic micro-evolution ideology, for lack of a better term, is much discussed and generally viewed favorably in many Adventist conversations, including those taking place in the Geoscience Research Institute. Without question, modern science has drifted away from natural philosophy, which was the method largely used until the end of the nineteenth-century. Gradually the rules of science shifted to methodological naturalism with an emphasis in the
perennial quest for timeless truths. This explains how religious beliefs change and progress, and the process is recognized as one form of secularization. Modernity is always at the leading edges of secularization.

Secular Accreditation & Bonds

The “prohibitive uses covenant” is embedded in the indenture for a reason. The covenant makes it possible for Adventist institutions to participate in tax-exempt bond funding. So let’s discuss how a genuinely pervasive sectarian college, like an Adventist institution, can continue to integrate religion in campus life—while at the same time present secular topics to students in the setting of a “prohibited uses covenant.” (This raises an interesting question. Religious corporations behave as though they are exempt from employment discrimination laws. Since one part of LSU is religious [exempt] and one part secular [nonexempt from discrimination laws] because of the bond, will this have any argument in the lawsuit currently in the Riverside Superior Court involving the cases of three LSU faculty?)

The covenant appears in the bond to assure bondholders that the money they have loaned to the college carries controllable risks. In an about face (that has been going on for years), the religious institution isolates its secular education, similar to an infectious ward in the hospital, from religious courses and activities. (In Walz v. Tax Commission of New York the U.S. Supreme Court indicated the ambiguity regarding the precise scope of the separation between religion and state and concluded that “for the men who wrote the Religion Clauses of the First Amendment the ‘establishment’ of a religion connoted sponsorship, financial support, and active involvement of the sovereign in religious activity,” and went on to further point out that “[t]he First Amendment, does not say that in every and all respects there shall be a separation of Church and State.” 397 U.S. 664, 667, 1970) There is nothing extraordinary about such a practice as it is already the practice. Remember when surplus government projectors were given to an Adventist academy and a label was attached which controlled its use: “Cannot be used to project religious films.”

Future bond markets will not find it reassuring if the religious institution is determined by its own AAA to have “deviated from the Adventist philosophy of education” which in turn threatens the withdrawal of church appropriations, not to mention the possible impact on secular accreditation. Nor is it reassuring when the regional accreditation through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) has issued a “Formal Notice of Concern,” (a notice to an institution that it is in danger of being found in noncompliance with one or more Standards and could lose its accreditation if the noncompliance persists) because of the confusion of teaching scientific biology and preparing students for a future in medicine, dentistry, other professions and biology.

So it is particularly important that all bond-holding Adventist institutions like Andrews University, Southern Adventist University, Oakwood University and LSU strictly adhere to the normal expectation and commitment to accreditation standards expected of an “institution of higher education.” A Bible college cannot expect to participate in bond markets or receive recognition from secular accreditation.
Many science graduates are likely to go on for further academic training. So it comes down to the point that Adventist higher learning must conquer its fear of both secular accreditation and participation in the capital improvements through the bond markets. The church should cultivate a better-informed conservative viewpoint if academic education is to thrive in the future.

This is taken from LLU bond describing how this all comes together: “The University will maintain its accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Universities [WASC] or its successor as bodies that accredit universities or, if none, another nationally recognized body or bodies that accredit such universities.” (California Municipal Finance Authority, Series 2007)

**LSU Administration Was Given a Bad Rap**

The LSU administration was improperly and deceptively castigated by the conservative website mentioned above for not revealing to the Board of Trustees the intrinsic nature of the bond. This accusation is unfounded. Each member of the board has a fiduciary responsibility to understand the covenants made in the bond. For one thing the LSU bylaws govern all expenditures over a certain amount. Also, federal law (TEFRA) requires any anticipated issuance of tax-exempt bonds to be publicly published for at least 14 days. And the details of the legal and financial teams that work out the bond will seek the institutional Board and finance committee approval along the way. Furthermore, the existence of the tax-exempt bond was clearly underscored in the 2010 self-study documents reviewed by the AAA site visitors during its accreditation review: no objections were raised by the evaluation team, or by the vice president of the North American Division, or the director of AAA. (La Sierra University 2010) LSU Board Chairman Ricardo Graham reprised the process when he said; “This bond funding proposal moved through all appropriate channels.” (News Release 2012) What did he mean by this statement?

He was referring to the fact that the North American Division has an oversight policy which governs the risk associated with church-state issues when seeking government funding in any Adventist institutions. It reads in part, “Only such support for church institutions and programs as will aid in reaching institutional objectives without subverting their distinctly spiritual goals shall be considered or accepted.” Accepting government aid “shall be evaluated and approved by the union conference committee and then submitted to the North American Division public affairs and religious liberty committee for review and approval.” (North American Division 1994)

**A Few Insights into Knowledge-based Educational Economics**

Parents and students continue to worry about the affordability of Adventist higher education. Tuition and board and room are their greatest concern. But money for campus maintenance and capital improvements has to come from somewhere besides tuition and fees. Construction and physical plant improvement in both secondary and post-secondary schools are now increasingly dependent on tax-exempt financing.

The cost of a college education is higher in the private sector than in state-supported public institutions. Adventist colleges suffer other economic realities besides continuing rising costs and short falls in enrollment. These colleges are characterized as having inadequate endowments,
limited church appropriations, and donors complain of being “maxed-out.” According to Andrews University president Neils-Erik Andreasen, capital improvements from church appropriations, though increasing, have not kept pace with the growing needs on campus. (Lechleitner 2009) Together the Adventist liberal arts colleges receive about $32 million from church subsidies spread across ten campuses with another $9.1 million to the graduate schools at Loma Linda University. This is a small sum compared to annual gross revenues in Adventist higher education in the neighborhood of $750 million with narrow profit margins. (Totals from 2010 Form 990 for each institution.) Anyway, most of the church appropriations go to offsetting the tuition fees of Adventist students, not capital improvements.

There is still a legitimate concern, of course on the part of thoughtful observers, that Adventist higher education is continuing to become secularized, in large part because of economic realities. Historically this is a common evolution in denominational institutions. The General Conference leaders recognized these challenges at least as long ago as 1928. So this trend did not suddenly appear with the arrival of tax-exempt bonds. It is easy to observe secular progression starting with such small things as changing the name of the institutions (e.g. Southern Industrial School became Southern Training School, which became Southern Junior College, then Southern Missionary College (which sounded too much like a Bible College) to Southern College and finally to Southern Adventist University)

The pivotal intellectual issue is that a university should be free to devote itself to the discovery and promulgation of the truth while limited to the maintenance of ecclesiastical differences or perverted in the promotion of political strife. (Marsden 1994, p. 151) The recent trend in most Adventist colleges in North America has been to move forward into university status. Becoming a university also contributes a quiet acceptance of secularization, even though the faculty and administration believe in the deep truths of the gospel. From a sociological viewpoint time as a principal of secularization creates a similar uncertainty in all inherited religious teachings as knowledge is increased. Secularization and worldliness as is similar in sociology as the equivalence of gravity and acceleration is in the physical world.

Always, there is a conservative ambivalence about a church sponsored school allying itself with the spirit and service of a university. Without answering his own question, Godfrey T. Anderson, past president of both LSU and LLU asked, “Is a Seventh-day Adventist university an oxymoron?” (Spectrum 2009) He was well aware as an academician that “while the teaching of the college is confined within a pretty sharply defined limit, the teaching of the university has no definite limit at all … An educational institution approaches the ideal of an university in proportion as it transcends the narrow limit which is supposed to define the proper province of the college. A university, therefore, was distinguished by its size and the variety of instructions.” (Reuben 1996, p. 62; quoting F. Barnard, president of Columbia University)

The modern university is essentially secular. The search for truth, buoyed by genuine scholarship as a university profession, has its own rights and expectations. Thus, it is difficult to maintain a creative middle ground between religion and science in a university. As compared to college, a university requires a stronger, robust academic freedom and greater progressive vision, and autonomy. Consequently, most educators see the curriculum in a university developing along purely naturalistic lines. (Marsden, p. 107) The field of inquiry in a university is more freely
open without conditions of loyalty to any particular religion or political group. As summarized by the historian Julie A. Reuben, “It is understood that while the teaching of the college is confined within a pretty sharply defined limit, the teaching of the university has no definite limit at all.” (Reuben) Accepting government money, whether in federal student loans or tax-exempt bonds, is an engine of secularization.

It has already been argued that accepting “outside” accreditation after 1935 in the junior (two-year) and senior colleges allowed the schools to quietly step away from indoctrination with a stronger emphasis in education and consequently another engine toward secularization. Secularization was advanced further by acceptance of non-Adventist students and faculty, followed by falling away of church appropriations and now the utilization of tax-exempt bonds for capital improvements. Policymakers and educators in the church have in good faith decided that it is necessary to finance capital improvements with larger and longer lasting indebtedness using such loans from outside investors. Once on a bicycle you have to keep riding or you will fall over. This implies abandonment of the strict and almost involuntary conviction that the second coming is just around the corner. It could also mean that if the Lord returns during the cycle of bond indebtedness over the next few decades the institution is freed of any further liability.

In the end it all comes down to parents and students. They expect a “good” or competitive education maintained in part by secular accreditation standards, but also including religious measures prompted by the AAA and the church. The physical facilities must be safe and attractive and the faculty paid reasonably well, etc. Historically there has never been an over-abundance of disposable income in the Adventist schools. The lure of revenues from many sources against expenditures knows few boundaries against the backdrop of rising costs. From the perspective of the policymakers there is a precious balance between teaching the beliefs of the church, mixing sectarian and secular curriculum in the same bowl, and utilizing accreditation, accepting federal grants all the while advancing to university status. Indeed, competition is a fundamental characteristic of every industry—including competition for students in Adventist’s educational institutions.

**Conclusion: Quality Matters**

The Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History George M. Marsden at Notre Dame University observed that schools that maintain their religious identity continue to embrace traditions that are not entirely comfortable or even acceptable in American life. They are sufficiently in tension with the American educational mainstream that they feel obligated to define themselves differently than mainstream institutions, even if they might have to bear the ridicule or even contempt of mainstream. (Marsden 1999, p. 180-181)

Adventist conservatives promote the idea that scientific creationism can be taught in biology as a foundation of modern science in Adventist colleges. This is the kind of tradition that bears ridicule, that kind that Marsden is describing. Mainstream scientists do not accept creationism as science (since the supernatural is invoked during creation week and cannot be observed). Most conservatives recognize that creationism is a faith-based concept. Were creationism only taught as science in Adventist colleges it would bring, as Marsden says, needless ridicule to the church
and great disappointment in the student’s preparation for real life.

Apparently these recent tax-exempt bonds with a “prohibited use covenant” have simply caught the conservative opposition off guard. Without knowing the extent of this funding throughout Adventist institutions they singled out LSU calling its bond an anti-Creation bond. They were wrong.

Not knowing what else to do the prophets of the apocalypse spoke as though; “The end of days are [sic] upon us. Our schools and churches should be a beacon to the fallen world. Far, far too many Adventists have gone out into the fallen world and for decades have returned dragging the evils (yes call it what it is), of the world in with them.” This brings us to the point that better informed voices need to do more to explain why new financial strategies such as conduit funding are required to improve the quality of college education in the face of diminishing appropriations from the church and increasing competition for students to fill the schools.

To paraphrase Voltaire and his attack on the profoundly snobbish country he left behind when he returned from England to France he said, “So how will it be? Do we follow a well powdered courier who knows to the moment the hour at which the King rises and at which he goes to bed … or the academic merchant who is enriching his college or university, who gives lectures for enlightenment to the students and who contributes to the happiness of the world.” (Bodanis 2006, p. 58)

T. Joe Willey is a founder member of the National Association of Professional Employer Organizations. For about 15 years he was the owner of a contract staffing company, a development payroll software firm, and a consulting and publishing agency. He has written 13 business and trade books and served on the board of several large corporations. He was the recipient of 2001 Michaeline A. Doyle Award.

This article is intended for general information purposes only and is not intended to constitute legal advice. The reader must consult with legal counsel to determine how laws or decisions discussed here apply to the reader’s specific circumstances.

References

Examinations for Secondary School Seniors across India Scheduled Around the Sabbath on March 16

Submitted: Mar 12, 2013
By Adventist Today News Team

Of the 60,000 secondary school seniors taking the Indian School Certificate (ISC) Examinations this coming weekend, 1,700 of them in schools operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church have been given a special arrangement. The English II exam is a key to getting into university in India and throughout the English-speaking world and due to some scheduling problems caused by an accidental early release of the questions, the organization in charge of administering it moved the date from Monday, March 4, to Saturday, March 16.

The Telegraph, a major national newspaper in India reported that a compromise was reached after the denomination protested the schedule change. Everyone else will write the exam from 2 to 5 p.m. on that day, but the students at the Adventist schools will arrive at 1:45 p.m., eat lunch and relax, and then write the exam from 5 to 8 p.m., after sundown.

“The episode is reminiscent of Eric Liddell’s refusal to run a 100 meter heat in the 1924 Olympics on a Sunday,” the paper stated, “immortalized in the 1981 film Chariots of Fire.” The compromise plan is designed “to eliminate the possibility of someone relaying the contents of the question paper from centres where the test would be held [at the earlier time].” The students waiting for the Sabbath to end at the Adventist schools will also be required to surrender all mobile phones and other devices that might be used to get information.

In addition to the English exam, students must select three to five other subjects and pass an exam in each. Those are scheduled on other days. English is a required subject in schools under the ISC Council and the exam involves writing two papers for 100 marks each.

“There has been an unwritten understanding between the council and the Adventist Church for the past 54 years that no major exams would be slotted on a Saturday,” the newspaper quoted an unidentified teacher at the Park Street School in Bengal. “Officials of the Adventist Church are unhappy about the council scheduling the exam on a Saturday,” the newspaper reported.

The Telegraph stated that 27 Adventist schools were involved, but the most recent Annual Statistical Report published by the General Conference indicates that there were 168 secondary schools in the Southern Asia Division of the denomination with at least 158 that were complete secondary schools. Nine were boarding academies. The total enrollment was 128,825 of which only 11 percent were Adventist Church members. The total faculty included 6,307 teachers of which 41 percent were church members.
Experiments in Evangelism and Church Planting Continue among Adventists in Europe

Submitted: Mar 10, 2013
By Adventist Today News Team

The first live-streaming of public evangelism by an Adventist preacher on the Internet in Europe came last weekend (March 1-3) in Tirana, Albania. Pastor Miroslav Pujic spoke from the downtown Hotel Tirana International with more than 100 non-members in attendance on site, as well as local church members and staff. Among the group were representatives of Albania's president, an Adventist who is a Member of Parliament, and the director of culture for the City of Tirana, as well as TV personalities.

Twelve off-site groups in Albania met in churches or homes to participate in the event and interacted with the chat moderators. About 100 additional people participated over the Internet, chatting with the moderators regarding the topics and what was going on in the program. Overall, about 1,000 non-members followed the program online.

The Internet allowed participation from groups and individuals not only in Albania, but also throughout the world. Viewers signed in from at least 15 countries in Europe, the Americas and Asia. "Just to give an idea about the impact of the online streaming, I received a report that an organized group of 17 watched all three evenings from Offenbach, Germany" reported Gentian Thomollari, one of the chat moderators, who also added that "120 contacts viewed the program from Elbasan alone," a city in central Albania.

Billed as a LifeConnect event (using the brand name for Adventist outreach on the Internet in Europe), the three presentations were themed "Connect to Escape: Is There Any Hope for Us?" They focused on trust ("Is God Doing His Job?") , forgiveness ("Should I Forgive Someone Who Hurt Me?") and hope ("End of the World: Really?"). Recordings have been uploaded on YouTube.

The church in Tirana spent months preparing for the event. The Adventist Church in Albania and the Trans-European Division (TED) Internet Ministries have worked to develop a strong presence on the web and Facebook. The short video advertizing the event was viewed over 3 million times on the LifeConnect.al web page and it was seen by 286,476 people. A total of 3,210 individuals shared, “liked” or, made some other action on the page.

Innovative Church Planting

A church planting project in Dunstable in the United Kingdom is typical of the new wave of local churches that the TED has encouraged over the last decade or more. Seven years ago a small group of members from the Luton North Church in the suburbs northwest of London decided to plant a community-based church in the nearby town of Dunstable. Its mission was (and still is) to plant an innovative, Jesus focused, spiritually alive, Bible based, grace oriented, culturally relevant Seventh-day Adventist church that will impact, transform and serve the immediate community for the Kingdom of God.
The project has focused most of its ministry on the Downside housing complex situated on the outskirts of Dunstable. It is so named because the 1,100 homes sit on the edge of an important nature reserve, the Blow's Downs. Over the years the complex has suffered from periods of neglect and deprivation, and at one point eight percent of all recorded crime in Bedfordshire took place in this neighborhood.

The Dunstable group has ministered to the local community over the years by providing health screening and health seminars by qualified medical staff, after-school clubs for children, a community soccer club, mother-and-toddler groups, fitness clubs, senior citizens clubs and youth clubs. Every year the group provides a day outing for the local residents.

The project’s latest ministry to the neighborhood has been in the form of a Heart Café, a response to the social crisis of disconnection and isolation which is taking place in many communities today. Heart Cafe tries to address this trend by creating safe and appealing environments where people can talk in meaningful ways. At Heart Cafe people enjoy good food, conversation and the presentation of the Gospel through live music and talks. Overall, the church planting project has adopted an incarnational ministry approach by meeting people where they are, providing a listening ear and practical support.

Every Saturday at 1 p.m., after the morning worship service, the church provides lunch for the community, followed by Creative Church, an informal, inter-generational worship service where families can do arts and crafts, sing, play and learn. There is always a theme for the week, which focuses on a well-known Bible story that teaches important biblical values.

As a result of the good reputation of the Dunstable church plant within the larger community, some of the core group members have been invited to sit on numerous committees and join resident associations that oversee and manage the housing complex. Members of the church plant were also included on the management team that set up a Street Pastors program for Dunstable. The group now has five volunteers trained as Street Pastors who help patrol the town during the night and weekends. Two more group members are in the process of being trained.

Most recently, the Dunstable town council has voted for the Adventist church group to take over the local community center. The group now manages the center and has some kind of activity running there every day of the week.

“This is an excellent example of what community-based ministry can accomplish,” an Adventist pastor in North America told Adventist Today. “There are several places where a similar approach has been implemented in the United States, but it is difficult to get support for them. More conservative members and ministers tend not to support them because they do not focus on making converts, and more liberal members tend not to support them because they think we should just contribute time and money to existing, secular community organizations rather than start new projects.”

“This is the kind of ministry that almost all of our pastors under 35 really want to be involved in,” stated another Adventist minister who has long been involved in community-based
ministries. “But we are generally not providing them with such opportunities. It is stunting the future development of the Adventist Church in North America.”

This story is based on reports written by Julian Kastrati and Simon Martin in Issue 763 of tedNEWS, the official news service of the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
We live in the 7th Creation Day, No More Creating.

Hebrews 4:3 is an important creation text, for it says God has finished creating. This may be why in this present 7th era of creation, we see no new species arising, and in fact we are losing previously created species and lessening biodiversity. Things are not evolving before our eyes, and we have to do computer simulations to try to show how evolution might have worked. Watching over more than 50,000 generations of bacteria reproduce for the last 25 years has shown minor adaptations to artificial changes in their feed broths, but nothing is really evolving.[1] Sadly no little legs have sprouted, no new flagella have formed, no new organelles have appeared to let the bacteria crawl out of their Petri dishes and stake claim to the lab bench in the name of Darwin.

Let God Choose How He Will Create

Understanding that creation days were long ages of time is not the same as agreeing that self-directed evolution is how God created. It is up to God and not up to us to decide if he should have or did use something like the kind of evolution Darwin theorized. Or if the progressive creation by many divine interventions through long periods of time suggested by Intelligent Design theory is a better explanation of how and when he created life.

It is not up to Moses, it is not up to Paul, it is not up to Ellen White to decide that question. Jesus, his Father, and the Holy Spirit are the One God who decided when and how God would create life on earth.

God has left evidence of how and when things were created, in the creation. He has not revealed how and when he created things in the Bible. The Bible tells us who and what, but not when and how.

Moses was told God made everything in heaven and earth, and placed humanity here in a privileged position as the steward of this creation. Moses expressed this in the grand and concise Genesis account. That account is given in language that ancient Egyptians and Babylonians
would understand. And so can we if we read it aright.

Ellen White was shown that it did not happen by unguided evolution, and that atheistic explanations of creation were wrong. She expressed this in language that Christians in the 19th century could be comfortable with. Reading her words in the context of modern DNA genetics, careful Christian geology, and careful Christian biology, makes some of her statements appear dated and unreliable. But if we understand her world, and the underlying truth being given to her generation, we can understand and agree with those truths today.

**We can’t decide this by vote.**

It therefore seems arrogant for any to assume that this matter can be “decided” by a vote! The General Conference in session will have no authority above Moses, none above Sister White, and none above the scientific data. The General Conference can affirm that God is the Creator of all, but they have no power to decide how or when he created, or to dictate to church members how they must think about these questions. Voting will not make the earth one day younger or one day older than it is. Luke 12:25 bids us not try to add a cubit to our height or a day to our lifetime by anxious thought. Surely we should not try to take away or add by anxious politicized votes minutes or seconds or eras to the true chronology of the creation of life on earth.

**The Sabbath is Alive and Well for all Creationists**

Early on in these blogs I defended the Sabbath from the accusation that accepting an Old Earth Creationism was harmful to the Sabbath. That blog had over 200 comments of both appreciation and criticism, showing the topic is pivotal in Adventism. Please reread that blog if you wish to refresh the reasons why the Sabbath is alive and healthy for all Creationists, no matter what chronology of creation you accept. [http://www.atoday.org/article/1204/blogs/hoehn-jack/2012/sabbath-and-old-age](http://www.atoday.org/article/1204/blogs/hoehn-jack/2012/sabbath-and-old-age)

**Dreams and Visions**

I awoke from a dream last week where I was struggling to do something I often do as a physician, but in my dream I didn’t have the tools to do it correctly, my scissors were dull, the suture material was thick and knotted, and what should have been simple and straightforward was frustrating and prolonged. As I awoke I determined to get a set of quality tools available to me at all times, so I would not ever have to struggle as I had been, and then I remembered it was a dream, a vision. The essentials of the dream were: Your patients need quick and easy procedures, your tools need to be effective and efficient, and your job is to have them available.
This was not a heaven-sent dream or revelation, but it was true in its message, although the
details were fabulous, and compounded by my concerns to be the best possible doctor and
appreciated by my patients.

When Ellen White had an inspired dream how much was the essential message from God, and
how much of the vision was determined by Ellen’s age, culture, and preexisting concerns?

Dr. David Paulson was an Adventist Physician who had a building on the Los Angeles campus
of the College of Medical Evangelists (now Loma Linda University) named after him. As a
child I attended church services in Paulson Hall, before the White Memorial Church I was later
baptized in was built.

Dr. Paulson had some of the same questions I have had, but unlike me he could go to someone
who knew the answers, so in 1906 he wrote a letter to Ellen White who replied as follows:

“In your letter, you speak of your early training to have implicit faith in the Testimonies, and
say, ‘I was led to conclude and most firmly believe that every word you ever spoke in public or
private, that every letter you wrote under any and all circumstances, was as inspired as the Ten
Commandments.’

“My brother, you have studied my writings diligently, and you have never found that I have
made any such claims, neither will you find that the pioneers in our cause have made such
claims.

“In my preface to ‘Great Controversy,’ … you have no doubt read my statement regarding the
Ten Commandments and the Bible, which should have helped you to a correct understanding of
the matter under consideration.”[2]

What does Ellen White’s Introduction to The Great Controversy say?

“The Bible…was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it
presents the characteristics of the several writers…He has given dreams and visions, symbols
and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed have themselves embodied the
thought in human language.”[3]

“Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the scenes of the long-continued conflict between
good and evil have been opened to the writer of these pages. From time to time I have been
permitted to behold…the great controversy between Christ…and Satan...”[4]

“It is not so much the object of this book to present new truths…as to bring out facts and
principles...” [5]

Yet Adventists Love “new truths”
It appears to me that Adventists have long enjoyed the “secret knowledge” that we have from Sister White’s dreams and visions. We treasure and value the “new light” or “amazing facts” that she shares from her dreams. I think it makes us feel special and privileged to have insider information on Biblical and Heavenly worlds not otherwise accessible to us. I don’t know anyone besides a Seventh-day Adventist who believes all the following extra-Biblical, human-hands-herself-embodied-in-human-language- Ellen White dreams and descriptions are established-from-God facts:

a. Adam was taller than Eve, and about 14 feet tall.

b. If you pick flowers in Heaven they never fade.

c. Our Heavenly homes have gold shelves inside the doors upon which we place our gold crowns when coming inside the houses.

d. The earth as created had no jagged peaks or valleys, everything was smooth and rounded.

e. There were no swamps or deserts in the created earth.

f. The trees were more majestic than any which now exist and grew upon the heights.

g. Fruit in heaven looks like gold mixed with silver.

h. The entire earth was more beautiful than Buchart or Kew Gardens, Kensington, Versailles or Schönbrunn Palaces.

i. There is no ground to believe that man developed by slow degrees of development from the lower forms of animal or vegetable life.

j. The naked original humans were covered with a robe of light and glory that went away after they sinned and God gave them leather garments from sacrificed animals.

When we awake from our dreams we can dismiss them as fantasy or indigestion. Or we can look for the facts and principles underlying the dream. What about Sister White’s dreams—are the details of her dreams more reliable because they were visions? Most of us agree that when John the Revelator saw visions in the night we can accept them as symbolic and not factual. Can we not also accept the details of Ellen White’s visions as symbolic and not necessarily factual?

My suspicion is that Ellen White in vision saw Eden, not the whole created earth. She was still almost a child when first shown a dream of Heaven[6], and her idea that the flowers she picked would never die, are a child’s ideas of Heaven. Her childish view of the crowns and the gold shelves are true childish interpretations of whatever she saw, but not universal Heaven-sent truths, and may be symbolic of the wealth, abundance, and lack of disease in the world to come.

Likewise her opposition to the ideas of unguided, naturalistic evolution which replaced a Creator with undirected self-creation is obviously the truth behind her statements on evolution. I don’t think they can be safely used to rule out a longer chronology of creation, nor the possibility that God created by progressive interventions. They can’t be used to deny that things were also created capable of adaptation and change as part of their Intelligent Design. Some natural selection and common ancestry are not incompatible with the character of God revealed to Ellen White.
How did God create the 2 Adams?

When God sent the 2nd Adam, Jesus was created by a very naturalistic process with divine intervention involving a womb, placenta, vernix caseosus, 9 months gestation, breast feeding, circumcision, weaning, growing and learning, till our Savior was ready to be the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.

There is nothing forbidding God from creating the 1st Adam from the dust of the earth, from using naturalistic processes to create his first Adam. This might include the progressive step-wise creation (which Genesis of course supports) of plants, fish, land animals, primates, humanoids, and the use of some natural womb with divine intervention, and finally a man and a woman who unlike all the created steps before, bore God’s image about 40,000 years ago. What parts were divine interventions and what parts were naturalistic we may not know, but if the first and second Adams were both divinely created the process may have been similar.

This makes Moses’ Genesis 2 vision of the creation of man and woman full of the symbolism of creation, rather than an exposition of the mechanism of creation. This permits the 7 Great Days to be seven ages or eras of creation, 7 progressive steps of creation. It doesn’t have to be this way, but it could be, if the evidence in nature suggests it was.

Sabbath, the most enduring thing God created.

The last and most impressive step of the progressive 7 Creation Days is the creation of worship.

The Sabbath comes again this week as every week. It is the most durable of God’s creations. Darkness made better by light, still comes back every night. The firmament of Day 2 has been smogged and can become toxic. Plants of Day 3 turn into poison ivy and oak, or tobacco. Roses grow thorns and then die. The stars burn out and sometimes crash into one another. Meteorites explode over earth. Day 5 fish become killer sharks and stinging jelly fish. Day 6 rodents carry bubonic plague, lions become killer lions, our beloved dogs become rabid and many pets die of cancers. Most of the things God has created have been subject to decay.

But one thing God made is remarkably enduring and resistant to destruction, as perfect as the day it was created, the Sabbath.

Have you noticed that you can break the Sabbath one week, but it returns perfectly healthy and holy the very next week? Worship is the most resilient of God’s creations. Try it this Sabbath—no matter how badly you broke Sabbath last week or for many weeks, months, or years, Sabbath can be as lovely and refreshing, as awesome and humbling, as healing and restoring this next week as the first one celebrated at the gates of Eden. Remember it with me, this Sabbath, won’t you, as we continue to explore the key doctrine of Creation, not as we would have done it, or as we want God to have done it, but as God has decided in fact to do it. God reveals Creation to us
from week to week and from Sabbath to Sabbath. It may be a bigger, longer, greater Creation story than we have thought about before, but that’s why we have so many Sabbaths to learn it better.

What Do These Numbers Tell Us About the Future of the Church?

Submitted: Mar 9, 2013
By Lawrence Downing

Charles Scriven opined recently that if the Adventist Church does not shift toward a new kind of Adventism, “our church will go out like a spent candle. It’s a matter of time, but it will happen.” (*Spectrum*, Winter 2013, p. 3) Only time will tell if Scriven’s prognostication is correct. What is possible now is to examine growth trends in North American Protestant churches and consider how the data may apply to Adventist congregations.

Church life studies report that the majority of Americans, Adventists included, are members of a congregation with an average weekend attendance of 150 or less. On the other end of the scale, there are a relatively small number of megachurches. (A megachurch has an average weekend attendance of 2,000 or more.) The PATHEOS study found in 2011 that the median Protestant church weekend attendance was 75.

Data from 2010 analyzed by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research found that congregations with a weekly attendance of 99 or less numbered 177,000 with 9 million total attendees. Twenty-five million people attended some 105,000 congregations with weekly attendance of 100 to 499. Churches with 500 to 999 weekly attendance numbered 12,000 with 9 million attendees.

A 2003 study by the George Barna group provided further information relating to church attendance. Barna reported that the average church had an attendance of 89 adult members and that 60 percent of the Protestant churches had 100 or fewer members.

The Church Leadership website reported that for the years 1994-2004 the churches with the smallest weekly attendance (49 or less) and the largest (2,000 or more) grew in numbers. The mid-sized congregations, with weekly attendance of 100 to 299, showed a membership loss of one percent. They also reported that established churches, those that had been in existence between 40 and 190 years, declined in membership.

The above data is not encouraging for North American Adventists. We find ourselves among the groups most vulnerable to membership loss. Many of our churches are mid-sized congregations that have been established 40 years or more. In contradiction to the above findings are the reports from other sources that assure us that the Adventist Church in North America is on an upward trajectory. Example: a March 2011 Religion News Service article by G. Jeffrey MacDonald reports that Adventists are growing at the rate of 2.5 percent a year, “a rapid clip for this part of the world.” This growth spurt is compared to the decline in membership found in the Southern Baptists and other denominations. The 2.5 percent growth rate, MacDonald points out, comes in at a 75 percent better rate than the 1.4 percent Mormon growth rate. To paraphrase Alfred E Newman: What we worry?

Monte Sahlin and others who research growth in the North American Adventist Church provide
data that is cause for concern. They found that recent immigrants account for a majority of those who join the Adventist church. Conversions among those who have been in America a generation or more are far less than the number needed to replace those who have died or who no longer count themselves Adventist.

The recent immigrant who unites with an Adventist congregation comes with religious traditions and practices far different from those found in American Protestant churches. The new immigrants do not have the economic clout of those who have long been in the country. They are therefore less able to provide economic support when compared to those who have long lived in America. This demographic change within the church carries with it significant implications for the educational structures of the church, the Adventist mission impact, and the ability to support existing administrative structures. There is also a sociological component to consider: those who have long been in America do not always feel comfortable to worship in a congregation composed of a high percentage of people from cultures and language groups different from their own. This factor has implicit impact upon our church and its future.

One question that nags at me when recent news articles report that the Adventist church is a church growth leader is this: Why are so many of our North American Caucasian churches stagnant or in decline? Visit four or five Adventist churches in your area. Look at those who are there on Sabbath morning. Check out the majority age group. Note the racial mix. Talk to 6 or 8 pastors who work in non-ethnic churches or ethnic churches composed of second generation immigrants. Ask them for an honest opinion of what they see for the future of their congregations. Ask them whether their conference is hiring pastors from outside the conference and how many churches have been put into districts in the last five years. Visit the youth director of your conference. Ask what percentage of young people will still be active in the church when they reach adulthood. When you’ve done this, let’s talk about whether we should pay attention to the studies that find churches with our demographics face a bumpy road ahead.

When we acknowledge the reality that the church is not what it may at first appear we can give thought to how we can give responsible and reasonable response to our situation. At present, the administrative personnel of the church largely continue to support what has been done in years past. The evangelistic outreach to New York City is one of several examples. What we do not see is a strategic plan to address the outflow of young people from the church. Where is the think tank with the assignment to explore ways that will attract the kind of people that once were the backbone and foundation of the Adventist church? Is there a willingness on the part of Adventist believers to examine the theological issues that no longer speak to contemporary women and men? Where are the risk-takers, the people who will dare challenge the attitudes and theological traditions that deter thinking people from uniting with their local Adventist congregation? Rather than relegate the questioners to the fringe, celebrate their courage and join them as they apply their spiritual gifts and energy toward endeavors that promote the kingdom of God. We in the parish can invite thoughtful people from the world of technology, business, sociology and the other disciplines to apply their skills to make a local congregation more effective and attractive to contemporary Americans. It is the local parish that is the light on the hill, the apple of God’s eye, not a headquarters building in a far-off city.
The Papal Conclave: Do We Have a Dog in this Fight?

Submitted: Mar 12, 2013

Should Adventists care who is selected as the next head of the Roman Catholic Church? Is anyone among the speculated possibilities more or less favorable to anything we care about?

The answers to both those questions may be an immediate “no,” but there are larger issues here that inevitably connect with the Seventh-day Adventist Church whether we like it or not. One of the major factors in the discussions and balloting in the Sistine Chapel is whether or not the new pope should be from a developing country in Africa, Asia or Latin America. For more than a thousand years the popes have always been European, but the center of gravity for the Christian faith has shifted away from Europe to the southern hemisphere.

This shift has actually impacted the Adventist Church to greater degree than the Catholic Church. About 90 percent of Adventists live in developing countries. The next General Conference Session may well elect a president from the southern hemisphere. Some see Elder Ted Wilson, the current president, as a transitional figure because of his years of overseas mission service and the family history that he comes from.

One of the biggest issues in the Adventist Church right now—ordination and the role of women—splits along the lines of developed countries vs. developing countries. Adventist institutions function differently in developing countries than they do in developed countries, sometimes to the consternation of members who discover these differences. A growing share of the membership in Europe, North America and Australia is made up of immigrants from developing nations, and in many places the immigrants have become a majority leaving a widespread impression that this creates barriers to church growth among indigenous people.

As the native-born North American, European and Australian membership ages and declines, there is growing concern in their ranks that tends to split into two polarized viewpoints. On the one hand are those who see most young adults raised in Adventist families leave the church and express the fear that change will not come fast enough to keep the faith from dying out in their tribe. On the other hand are those who are afraid that change will go too far and give away essentials of Adventist identity.

This same three-legged dynamic is present in both the Catholic Church and the Adventist Church, as well as parallel patterns of wholistic ministry through institutions, parochial education and strong, centralized governance processes. There are deep doctrinal differences between the two religions, yet ironically they find themselves dealing with the same demographic and cultural realities these days. How the papal conclave relates to these issues and, more importantly, how they play out in the years ahead for the new pope, will provide some insights that could be valuable to Adventists if they have the spiritual maturity and skills to observe it carefully.

The new pope will not hold a press conference and admit that his predecessors changed the Bible
Sabbath without divine authorization. In fact, he is not likely to even admit that some of the cardinals are legally culpable in cover up child abuse, as has already been admitted in multiple court cases. Leaders of worldwide religions rarely make such dramatic gestures, even if they feel in their hearts that they should. The internal politics of the massive organization tend to dictate what the person in charge can do and say, to a much greater degree than they are willing to admit to themselves.

Yet there will be subtle signs about the future relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, sooner or later and probably later. There will also be straws in the wind that point toward how some of the parallel issues may work themselves out in both religions. Stay tuned!
I tried to heal someone this week.

I have a friend who is extremely sick, as in die-any-day type of sick. Furthermore, he doesn’t believe salvation is for him and rejects Jesus as his Savior and Friend. Lately it has become nearly impossible for him to feel any type of love from God, his family, or his friends because his sickness is clouding his thoughts.

I have done, quite literally, everything I can think of in order to show him the love of God. I have prayed the tears out of my eyes. I’ve tried Bible studies. Prayer circles. Different doctors. Just being a listener. Pastoral counseling. I can’t list all the things I’ve tried. But he got worse, not better. With every change in tactic I expected some type of improvement, yet there has been no change in his sickness or in his soul.

There is no prayer like a desperate prayer. At one point I got so downcast that I asked God to violate his free will and save him no matter what he wants. I was, and kinda-sorta-but-not-really still am dead serious about that despite how I know that the destruction of free will precedes the destruction of true love.

Lately, my best friend and I have been talking about miracles. About how Jesus essentially said that even a little faith could move a mountain if it was hindering the work of God. About how Jesus said His disciples would do greater and more things than He ever did. About whether these and other statements were meant specifically for His 12 disciples in that cultural context or if they are timeless principles.

I thought to myself: If only my friend wasn’t sick, he still might not choose God, but at least the choice would be clearer. If only my friend wasn’t sick, maybe he could feel love again. If only my friend wasn’t sick, his judgment would be normal…

I asked God to give me the authority over this type of disease. I told God He could take the authority away from me after the disease was gone. I had almost asked God that question earlier this month, but I didn’t yet trust myself to ask not out of caring for my friend, but out of doubt that God would do it on His own. I just wanted to give him a clear mind, so that maybe, possibly, prayerfully, he will choose to follow Christ.

So I tried to heal someone this week.

Didn’t work. And I feel dumb.

Thy will be done……so easy to say. So difficult to mean.
I don’t know what anyone really believes; because I cannot read minds. Let me repeat that. I don’t know what anyone really believes; because I cannot read minds.

What I would like to do is pose a question to which I have a personal answer: who believes that the fool has really said in his heart, or mind, that there is no God?

I truly do not know who really is convinced that God does not exist. I am aware that many people who claim not to believe in God do so literally for the sake of argument. That is to say that they are not sure, but are countering the dogmatic beliefs of people like me; for example.

They are in effect playing the role of ‘devil’s advocate’ to make the point that, since there is no quantifiable, falsifiable, empirical evidence of God’s existence, one should not act or sound or be so sure of something that one can’t prove. I get that, and I respect that.

To be perfectly honest, I do not believe that anyone who has participated on this site (that I have read anyway) really believes that God does not exist. Oh, I can think of a few individuals who like to get a rise out of whomever they can; and will say things that would lead most to conclude that they don’t believe there is a God. There’s no doubt about that.

But I don’t think a rational atheist would waste their time with the delusional. A true atheist would seem to understand that “what a fool believes, he sees;” and that it is fruitless to attempt to disprove the existence of the Unprovable.

On the other hand the psalmist David dogmatically declares that “the fool hath said in his heart there is no God.” That is one unambiguous statement, if ever there was one; it seems to me.

My question is do we believe that it is in fact a true statement? Is it true that what a fool does not believe, he does not see. Personally, I believe that it is true.
Chapter 2 in *The Monastery of the Heart*, “A Seeker’s Path,” speaks of two different ways of seeking God—in solitude and in community—and says they are both important.

The solitary, says Chittister, “go deeply into the struggle with the self—both physically and mentally—that comes with solitude.” This path “strips away the . . . companionship of a partner, the counsel of others, the strength of a community. . . .” She is speaking, of course, of the hermit lifestyle, more common during middle age and Renaissance eras, but still practiced sometimes, and she admits that there is a difficulty with this choice—“the human tendency to turn in on ourselves and to forget our obligation to build up the entire human community. ‘Whose feet,’ St. Basil asks, ‘will the hermit wash?’”

I have always said I’d rather be a hermit than a nun. I recognize in myself not only that need for rich solitude in which I experience God most fully, but also those all-too-human tendencies to isolation and self-centeredness.

The other path she speaks of is the intentional community, such as a monastery or convent. She describes the strength of being “immersed in a community, accountable to its standards . . . responsible for making the human community ever more human, always more of a community.”

I recognize the need of community for myself and the strength the communion with other believers gives me, and perhaps had those historic communities not asked for so much more than God calls for—celibacy, self-abnegation, frequently a salvation by works kind of thinking, they might not have had as many extreme difficulties as they did (and do).

In Chapter 3, “A Single Vision,” she goes on to speak of the premise of her book, which is that “the Rule [of Benedict] does not necessarily require community of place—the geographical confinement of all the members of one community in one location.”

Whether we are near to or far from other members of the body of Christ, “the Rule asks two major things of us: First, we are to be constant at prayer. . . . Second, we are to live a single vision of life together, even when apart. . . . We are to go the way together in heart and mind and soul.”

It made me think of us—this community of thinkers and bloggers, debaters and writers we call *Adventist Today*. We are flung across not only a continent but a world, yet we may speak together in what we (probably amusingly to God) call Real Time.

It made me think of that name—*Adventist Today*—what does it mean to be Adventist in 2013? In March? This day? Are we still constant in prayer, no matter what our differences of belief and opinion? (Topic of an earlier part of this book.) Are we striving to “go the way together”,

---

**In the (Cyber) World but not Of It**

Submitted: Mar 13, 2013
By Debonnaire Kovacs

Chapter 2 in *The Monastery of the Heart*, “A Seeker’s Path,” speaks of two different ways of seeking God—in solitude and in community—and says they are both important.

The solitary, says Chittister, “go deeply into the struggle with the self—both physically and mentally—that comes with solitude.” This path “strips away the . . . companionship of a partner, the counsel of others, the strength of a community. . . .” She is speaking, of course, of the hermit lifestyle, more common during middle age and Renaissance eras, but still practiced sometimes, and she admits that there is a difficulty with this choice—“the human tendency to turn in on ourselves and to forget our obligation to build up the entire human community. ‘Whose feet,’ St. Basil asks, ‘will the hermit wash?’”

I have always said I’d rather be a hermit than a nun. I recognize in myself not only that need for rich solitude in which I experience God most fully, but also those all-too-human tendencies to isolation and self-centeredness.

The other path she speaks of is the intentional community, such as a monastery or convent. She describes the strength of being “immersed in a community, accountable to its standards . . . responsible for making the human community ever more human, always more of a community.”

I recognize the need of community for myself and the strength the communion with other believers gives me, and perhaps had those historic communities not asked for so much more than God calls for—celibacy, self-abnegation, frequently a salvation by works kind of thinking, they might not have had as many extreme difficulties as they did (and do).

In Chapter 3, “A Single Vision,” she goes on to speak of the premise of her book, which is that “the Rule [of Benedict] does not necessarily require community of place—the geographical confinement of all the members of one community in one location.”

Whether we are near to or far from other members of the body of Christ, “the Rule asks two major things of us: First, we are to be constant at prayer. . . . Second, we are to live a single vision of life together, even when apart. . . . We are to go the way together in heart and mind and soul.”

It made me think of us—this community of thinkers and bloggers, debaters and writers we call *Adventist Today*. We are flung across not only a continent but a world, yet we may speak together in what we (probably amusingly to God) call Real Time.

It made me think of that name—*Adventist Today*—what does it mean to be Adventist in 2013? In March? This day? Are we still constant in prayer, no matter what our differences of belief and opinion? (Topic of an earlier part of this book.) Are we striving to “go the way together”,

---
believing in the same kingdom and the same God, even if our pictures are different?

We say we wish to create a place where we are safe to discuss our differences, sure of respect and support. Do we, in fact, each watch over, care for, *safeguard* the presence and person (cyberly speaking) of that irritating blogger whose point of view we hate?

“The bearer of the monastic heart, either alone or with an intentional group, must radiate what is within to a wider world and respond to it.”
What really happened on Mt. Sinai?

Submitted: Mar 13, 2013
By Andy Hanson

A quiz prepared by Andy Hanson

There are some facts about what happened on and around Mt. Sinai that you may not be aware of. See if you don’t agree after taking the Official Sinai Quiz. (Hint: there may be more than one “right” answer!) People who email me answers to all 16 questions in the next two weeks will be awarded the honorary title, “Sinai Scholars.” The correct answers will accompany the award ceremony right here on the first week in April. aphanson@csuchico.edu

The Official Sinai Quiz
1. How many times did Moses climb Mt. Sinai?
2. Did Moses climb the mountain alone? If not, what was the total number of people that climbed with him?
3. How long was his longest stay on the mountain? Did he do it more than once?
4. Where was Moses when God uttered the Ten Commandments? Is there more than one version?
5. How many commandments did God give to Moses on Mt. Sinai?
6. Where was Joshua when Moses received the original tablets of stone?
7. What happened to the Golden Calf when Moses returned?
8. Did God punish Aaron for his role in the Golden Calf debacle?
9. Who first informed Moses that there was a Calf party going on?
10. How was Israel punished for their worship of the Golden Calf?
11. Did Moses ever get a good look at God? If he did, did anyone else?
12. Was there a banquet on Mt. Sinai? If there was, who attended?
13. How many times did Moses persuade God to change his mind?
14. In what capacity did angels assist Israel during and after this time period?
15. When Moses was not on Mt. Sinai, where did he go to speak to God? Who sometimes accompanied him?
16. What’s wrong with the usual depiction of the Ten Commandments Moses carried down from Mr. Sinai?

Answers to these and other astounding facts can be found in Exodus 19:24;24:1,9,10, Exodus 20, Exodus 24, Exodus 34, Deuteronomy 4, Deuteronomy 5, and Acts 7.
A Son of the Great Advent Movement Seeks his Roots in the Great African American Migration

Submitted: Mar 13, 2013
By Debbonaire Kovacs

It was a red letter day for Oakwood University when Pulitzer Prize-winning author, Isabel Wilkerson, came to speak on her award-winning novel, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*. It was a new day of another kind for Oakwood’s Director of Literature Evangelism, Jason McCracken. Because of what he heard, McCracken embarked on a journey that has its own epic proportions for thousands of African Americans—the search for his roots.

Isabel Wilkerson, according to her website, “spent most of her career as a national correspondent and bureau chief at *The New York Times*, is the first black woman to win a Pulitzer Prize in the history of American journalism and was the first black American to win for individual reporting.” She spent fifteen years researching and writing this book, interviewed more than 1200 people, and dug through archives. It had all started long before, with her own parents’ stories. Like an estimated six million other African Americans, they left their homes, families, and all they knew in the implacably “Jim Crow” south and sought a new life under a sun that was arguably not as warm, in the north.

A full Oakwood sanctuary of students, faculty, and community people listened with fascination as Wilkerson told stories and pointed out that the lives of all Americans, not just this six million “refugees within their own country,” were irrevocably changed by this migration, most of which occurred between World War I and the 1970s.

“Music as we know it would simply not be what we listen to had there been no Great Migration. So much of what we listen to grew out of the music that has been transplanted to the North from the hearts, the minds, and the memories of people who left,” said Wilkerson. [http://blog.al.com/breaking/2013/02/pulitzer_prize_winner_isabel_w.html](http://blog.al.com/breaking/2013/02/pulitzer_prize_winner_isabel_w.html)

She mentioned names such as Toni Morrison, Lorraine Hansberry, John Coltrane, Berry Gordy, and Motown Records itself. She told the story of the Owens family, who gave their youngest son James the middle name of Cleveland, the city they would eventually move to. They called him Jesse, and “he wasn’t fit for the cotton field,” said Wilkerson. “He was fit for track and field!” Today nearly every American of any ethnicity or background has at least heard the name of Jesse Owens, quadruple gold medal running star of the 1936 Olympics.

One of her listeners was Jason McCracken, who is from Sao Paulo, Brazil, but now lives and works in Huntsville. He says he was excited that an African American was telling stories no one had heard before. He bought her book and read it on a plane trip out of the country.

He had already become interested in the story of his own family, because of a startling event just
a few weeks earlier. He had been making a series of presentations concerning Master Guide scouts. After the meeting, “a tall young man in his late 40s called my name and said, ‘I played with you on Chestnut street in Albion, Michigan when you visited your aunt.’ I was shocked!”

In the late 70s, McCracken relates, he visited relatives in Michigan and “played in the streets” with this cousin. The cousin later went to Alabama A & M University and never returned to Michigan. McCracken had never had any further contact with him. That evening, they spoke on the phone and re-cemented an old bond.

So when McCracken heard Wilkerson speak, he was ripe for the questions of who his family were and where they came from. His grandmother had probably been one of the more desperate seekers of a new life in the north during the Great Migration, leaving Dublin, GA for Albion, MI because her mother was white and her father black. McCracken knows of the stories of this grandmother and her descendants, but nothing of her 11 brothers and sisters. As he talked it over with his brother in Huntsville, they speculated that there might be 4-500 relatives of whom they know nothing.

How to begin? Easy—this is not the 20th, but the 21st century—you make a Facebook page! McCracken is in the beginning of what may turn out to be a great journey of its own, and it can be traced back, in part, to the stories little Isabel Wilkerson’s mother and father told her.

More info: http://www.isabelwilkerson.com

And, especially if you are or know a Kurtz or Coates, watch for Jason McCracken’s new page on Facebook. You can find his personal page there now.
Alfred Booker Jr. Academy, formerly Smyrna Seventh-day Adventist School, could be approved for 70 student spots in the Louisiana Scholarship Program. This is a program that uses tax-funded vouchers to pay for students to attend private schools, and since ABJA currently has ten students in grades K through 8, the voucher program could make an unprecedented difference to the school, the Smyrna Seventh-day Adventist church next door, and the community.

In order to become part of the program, ABJA had to become an official nonpublic school. Principal Sheldon Eakins explained that this involved paperwork about teachers' credentials, standardized testing and more. He originally planned to apply for 25 student spots, but a state Dept. of Ed. official toured the facility in February. Seeing a 25-year-old building with seven classrooms (only two of which, both with SMARTboards, are presently in use), a computer lab and library, a lunchroom, and a gym, plus a playground, the official told them they were eligible for 70 students. So they began the process of training, learning about student eligibility, etc. The school has already invested close to $300,000 in bringing quality education to the community, and will make further improvements, as well as hiring more teachers, if the approval goes through and the school attendance acquires the ability to jump seven-fold.

"The whole purpose of joining is that we have a commitment to service not only our own churches but the whole community," Eakins said. "How are we reaching out to those and witnessing if we're not proactively going after the kids?" Eakins said students are not required to be Seventh-day Adventist, but religion class is included. "We teach Bible. We are a Christian school. We have chapel." (theadvertiser.com)

School voucher programs have been very controversial all over the U.S., with proponents saying it will help lower-income students get into better educational programs and create a healthy competition among schools which will improve educational quality, and opponents saying it will allow indoctrination of vulnerable children with Bible teaching. Within the Adventist community, some are opposed because they fear that using tax funds for private schools will give the government too much authority over school programs.

In Louisiana, the progress of the voucher program has been rocky, with a state judge declaring it unconstitutional in November of 2012, but the education superintendent, John White, vowing in February that the state will find a way to pay for it next year, anyway, regardless of the progress of appeals.

Eakins said parents of his students have responded positively to being part of the program, and some students have already applied, though actual approval has not yet been received.
Rob Bell is in a new place with a new book. *What We Talk about When We Talk about God* is his first publication since leaving Mars Hill, the off-beat mega church near Grand Rapids, MI, that he founded in 1999. Bell is now writing, teaching, surfing and working on media projects in Southern California.

Despite these changes, people who are aware of Bell's earlier material—books, speaking tours and Nooma DVDs—will find themselves in familiar surroundings within these newly printed pages. His signature cadence, humor and minimalism remain. Beyond these stylistic cues, major themes from previous works find new traction—the scientific wildness of *Everything is Spiritual*, the moral trajectory of *The Gods Aren't Angry*, and the assumption from *Velvet Elvis* that all truth is God's truth.

Readers of theology and philosophy will also find continuity with Bell's established method of interacting with heady theology in subtle ways. Bell avoids the jargon of academia, and he rarely quotes the theologians he is wrestling with, but these thinkers are quite present just below the surface. From a communication perspective, this is one of Rob Bell's greatest gifts in ministry. He guides readers over the difficult terrain of theodicy, epistemology and moral philosophy—all covered in this latest book—in ways that focus us on the important issues without the distraction of opening a theological dictionary. Bell demonstrates that wrestling with life's most important questions does not require esoteric terminology. Only a certain type of reader can appreciate Peter Rollins' style of writing in *How (Not) To Speak of God*, but anyone can understand Bell's reference to Rollins as “my friend Pete” (p. 95).

Moving from superficial observations to the heart of the book, Bell writes about vision, about seeing and knowing God. “This is a book about seeing, about becoming more and more alive and aware, orienting ourselves around the God who I believe is the ground of our being” (p. 15). This book is neither a traditional Bible study on the character of God (though biblical material is used throughout) nor a treatise on the classical “proofs” for God's existence. Rather, it is an exploration of what we find when we take a step back from these questions and consider broader themes of human history, moral development, pain and meaning, integration, progressive revelation and implications of resurrection. We find a God behind it all, bigger than it all, connecting it all, and therefore it all matters—“what our experiences of God do at the most primal level of consciousness is jolt us into the affirmation that whatever this is, it matters. This person, place, event, gesture, attitude, action, piece of art, parcel of land, heart, word, moment—it matters” (p. 110).

This journey of seeing and knowing God proceeds by asking three questions: Do I believe God is with me always, throughout all of life's experiences? Do I believe that God is really for me, that God is for everyone? Do I believe that God is truly ahead of me, calling me to participate in
God's beautiful kingdom of peace and community and beauty and compassion in ways that are in harmony with the long arc of justice?

These are troubling and probing questions with significant ramifications. The chapters devoted to each question left me wanting further exploration. This easily could have become a very long book (otherwise known as a seminary library). As covered in Drops Like Stars, the artist must know what is essential and have the courage to strip away all else. Bell takes quite seriously this philosophy of art, leaving us to take his work further with our own conversations, journals and blogs.

Central to this quest to know God—to see God with, for and ahead of us—is the theme of integration. This notion is explored throughout the book in ways that made me feel like I was holding the Bible while watching Tom Shadyac's documentary, I Am. Reconciliation, interconnections, interdependence. We are on an amazing quest to holism—to realize and foster our deep connections with God, with each other, with our world, with all creation, and with the dimensions of our own being (e.g., our logic and intuition, our heads and hearts, our doubts and faith, our joy and suffering). Considering this list of couplets, am I open to the paradox of both in my search for truth and wholeness, to “both/and” ways of thinking as Chris Blake teaches?

Given this overview of the book's major themes (and I admit to omitting many of the contours), there is one topic that Seventh-day Adventist readers will quickly press up against—the history of life on earth. Like many Christians, Rob Bell does not require young-earth creationism in order to value God's work in history. I do not claim to know how exactly Bell understands issues of creation and evolution, but his ideas seem to be some form of theistic evolution. Adventist authors have quite thoroughly covered the scientific and theological implications of this issue—why it is compelling to some of us, and why it is seen as heresy by others of us—so I will not attempt to settle the controversy. I simply note that the issue is lurking in these pages, knowing that readers with various understandings will view his work with their own particular lens. In the end, I do not believe that Bell's central questions and lines of reasoning are dependent on this one concern. That is, regardless of what one believes regarding how God brought the observed complexities of life into existence, the questions Bell asks are worth contemplating.

May we slow down, meditate deeply on the Word and on our experiences, listen intently, and be open to God's ever-unfolding revelation of truth about Godself, about us, and about the universe God has placed us in. This is an important theme in the Adventist story—present truth.

Reviewer's Initial Comments:

NOTE 1: Ivan, I hope you enjoy the gift from the two Andrews University alumni who stood in front of us in line to meet Rob Bell at the pre-release shindig.