## NEWS

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Fear: Blogger Katelyn Pauls has been wondering about fear. She says, “I realized that there are only so many things a person can do without failing. And it doesn’t add up to very many. So all the time that I’ve been choosing “safe” activities, I’ve been missing out on something fun and adventurous. I’ve been missing out on chances to grow through failures....”

That They May Be One: Devotional Blogger Debbonnaire Kovacs considers whether Adventist Christians can become “one in prayer” like Muslims and Benedictines....

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A Whole New View of Sabbath? Dr. Sigve Tonstad Presents at Music and Worship Conference: Has the Adventist Church been misrepresenting the Sabbath for more than a century; and would many others be celebrating its sacred hours with us had we done a better job in marketing its virtues? Feature writer Debbonnaire Kovacs says "Yes"....(Available to AT subscribers)
Adventist Today: Adventist Review Editor is Fed Up with Anti-intellectual Attitudes of Ultra-conservatives


April 4, 2013

Home News March

Adventist Review Editor is Fed Up with Anti-intellectual Attitudes of Ultra-conservatives

Submitted: Mar 18, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

The editorial in the March 14 issue of the Adventist Review took aim at “the well-intentioned but misguided fringes” of the Adventist movement. Bill Knott, the editor and executive publisher of a periodical that began publishing before the denomination formed, declared, “This magazine, for 164 years the journal of literate Adventists, will not be intimidated by those too fearful to read.”

“A tiny minority of Adventists is now wielding unwarranted influence” in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the editorial stated and condemned “their anti-intellectualism … cloaked in memorized and repeated pieties.” The specific issue that triggered Knott’s ire is the idea that is being promoted by some fringe voices “stoutly insisting that no reputable thought leader should read, own, or cite [any] book by a non-Adventist author. They have invaded pastors’ offices, disrupted worship services, and left a trail of litter across a smattering of Web sites.”

Knott pointed out that the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church clearly did not observe this rule. Ellen White’s personal library is fully documented and includes a large number of books by non-Adventist authors. James White, founder of the Adventist Review,
almost continuously advertised a book by Nathaniel Hawthorne, a transcendentalist whose views clearly differ from Adventist doctrine, Knott wrote.

“It is precisely Adventism’s engagement with the ideas, opinions, beliefs, and philosophies of the age that make this movement’s faith statements so compelling,” Knott said. “The faith of Jesus has always been—and should always be—a robust, resilient, and engaging faith that does not hesitate to understand the ideas around us, but tests them all by the clear and timeless Word of God.”
Submitted: Mar 17, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

Sabbath morning (March 16), Dr. Ben Carson, the noted Seventh-day Adventist physician, was not in church. At a little after 10:30 a.m. he began preaching to the faithful of the right-wing American political movement at one of the most prominent events in the nation, the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC). The question in the minds of the large crowd in the Maryland convention center and the larger audience across the country; Will he run for president of the United States?

He was included among 23 names in the famed CPAC Straw Poll conducted among those attending the event and ranked seventh, the highest percentage of anyone who does not currently hold elective office. He got more votes than Senator Ted Cruz from Texas, Governor Bobby Jindal of Louisiana and former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin who spoke right after him, as well as many others.

In a dialog immediately following Carson’s speech, author and radio commentator Eric Metaxas first asked Carson about “the rumor that you are leaving medicine” and wanted to know if this meant the doctor was getting into politics. “In 106 days I will retire at age 62,” Carson responded, noting that as a brain surgeon he felt it was important to step down “at
the top of my game.” Asked specifically about a political career, Carson said simply “who knows” and laughed. The crowd roared.

Ten years ago the idea that a relatively unknown African American had any chance of running successfully for president would have been seen as foolishness, but that was before President Barak Obama. Now the right wing of American politics would love to find a person of color to carry its views into the fray, “which gives Carson an outside chance,” Adventist Today was told by an Adventist who has worked in politics.

Carson “represents the optimism and hope of the future of the conservative movement,” stated Al Cardenas, chairman of the American Conservative Union, in announcing that the doctor would be a speaker at the event. Carson is chief of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore. He has an inspiring background, raised by a single mother with little education in the inner city, he overcame poverty and racial discrimination. His Adventist faith is a very important part of the family’s story and his own character.

Education is a top value for Carson, as it is for many Adventists. He told again the story of how his mother’s insistence on “turning off the TV and reading books” made a difference in his life and did not hesitate to promote his foundation that has given scholarships to more than 5,000 young people to encourage them to succeed in elementary and secondary school and go on to college. He noted that one of the earliest Carson Scholars recently turned up as a resident in his program at Johns Hopkins.

He also spoke of the importance of private charity, emphasizing that young people are selected for scholarships by his foundation in part on their demonstration of humanitarian values. He pointed out that many of the American industrialists of the 19th century went on to found large charitable enterprises with their wealth, “something you don’t see in [socialist] Europe.” He stated his conviction that activities to help the poor should be operated by the church, not government, a concept widely held in many surveys of Americans, including large numbers beyond those who identify themselves as “conservative” in politics or otherwise.

In speaking of the importance of scholarships for young people from less-than-promising backgrounds as well as the middle class, Carson said that one of them “might invent an alternative energy source.” This is one of a number of hints that a Carson run for the presidency might be more broad-based than just the quarter to a third of Americans who
identify with the views promoted at CPAC.

He did advocate some standard conservative positions, at times with a novel rationale. For example, he promoted the concept of a “flat tax” in which all Americans pay the same percentage in income taxes no matter their circumstances, supporting the idea by referring to the biblical teaching of tithing as proof that God wants this tax policy.

He also stated that “eighty percent” of health care could be funded by health savings accounts reducing the need for health insurance to only catastrophic coverage and making government programs unnecessary. But he also said that it does not matter if the Affordable Care Act is repealed or not, “we must move on [and] there are better models than we have now” for the health care system in America.

Although the vice chairwoman of the event, in her introduction of Carson and Metaxas, set up the presentations as relating to religion, there were relatively few explicit references to spiritual topics in Carson’s presentation. He did say, “resist this war on God,” urging that “the PC police” should not “come down on people who believe in Jesus” and say so publicly. “PC” is a common reference among conservative Americans to “politically correct,” a label for what they see as liberal values. And Carson did end on an affirmation of Christ’s “values and principles” based on the concept of “love your fellow man.”

Metaxas had in earlier remarks attempted to frame Carson’s faith in terms of an approach to religious liberty that Evangelical political conservatives in America have been promoting for some time. It sees the First Amendment as designed to protect the church from the state, instead of protecting the state from the church. Adventists have historically been more concerned about the later—about religious forces capturing the government to enforce religious teachings such as a national Sunday law, mandated prayers in public schools or Catholic views of contraception. Carson deftly stepped around the issue without stating his opinion.

In some ways Carson’s speech was not as sharp-edged as the talk he gave at the National Prayer Breakfast on February 7 in front of President Obama. That earlier appearance started the Carson boomlet among conservatives and talk of his running for office, maybe even president. On February 27 the right-wing blogger “Allahpundit” revealed that Carson had been asked by White House staffers for an advance text of his prayer breakfast talk and refused because “I don’t write out my speeches and I don’t use teleprompters.” That alone could keep him from being a serious candidate for any office because campaign
professionals almost universally refuse to allow such an approach.

Carson has lived with his family in the Maryland suburbs of Washington DC for three decades. He is an active member of a local Seventh-day Adventist Church. CPAC is one of the most visible political events each year in the United States. “It remains to be seen where this goes,” a pastor in the area told Adventist Today, “but the timing of his speech does raise a question as to precisely what the policy toward the Sabbath would be in a Carson White House.”

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Thousands of Adventist Youth will Protest Gun Violence in March across Brooklyn Bridge

Submitted: Mar 21, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

More than 3,000 teens and young adults from the Seventh-day Adventist Church will march across the landmark Brooklyn Bridge to say no to gun violence at 3 p.m. Sabbath afternoon (March 23). Marchers will gather at Cadman Plaza at 2 p.m. and the march will end at Foley Square in Manhattan. A press conference is scheduled for 2:45 p.m.

Bill de Blasio, New York City Public Advocate and mayoral candidate has confirmed that he will join the March, as have United States Congress members Yvette Clarke and Hakeem Jeffries, and Michelle S. Davis, health administrator with the New York City regional office of the Federal Department of Health and Human Services.

“Scores of youth in our local communities are killed in senseless acts of gun violence,” said a news release from the Greater New York Conference of the denomination. “We are marching for change. Change the statistics! Change the trend! No more violence! It’s time for Compassion. This march will inspire hope in our young people that a bright and prosperous future can be theirs if they say no to violence. This march reflects the need for more compassion in the way we live our lives.”

The event is being organized by Pastor Jose Cortez, Jr., director of youth ministries for the...
denomination’s Atlantic Union Conference that includes the conferences in the New England region. He is being assisted by Pastor Rohann Wellington, communication director for the Greater New York Conference.

“This kind of public witness touching on a controversial issue is rare among Adventists in North America,” a denominational administrator who has worked at the General Conference told Adventist Today. “It is much more common in other parts of the world, including a number of the countries where many of the church members in New York City and New England have roots. It is probably a more understandable [to the general public] and effective public witness than knocking on doors with religious literature.”

Adventist Today will update this story next week. We would be pleased to hear from any participants and observers.

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Scholars to Address Social Justice and Peace Issues at Washington Adventist University

Submitted: Mar 21, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team
Two scholars from Columbia University will speak this coming weekend at Washington Adventist University (WAU) in Takoma Park, Maryland. “Destination 2020: Justice and Provision of Global Social Goods in an Era of Crises, Needs and Increasing Scarcities” is the topic for the 32nd annual Keough Lectures to be held in H. M. S. Richards Hall at 7 p.m. Friday (March 22) and 3:30 p.m. Saturday (March 23).

Paul Mikov is an ordained minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, currently working on the staff of the Boris Trajkovski International Foundation. He teaches in programs on human rights and humanitarian activities at Columbia. He served for nine years on the staff of World Vision International, the largest Evangelical non-governmental organization. For the last six years he was United Nations representative for World Vision.

Jonathan Papoulidis is a senior policy advisor on peace and humanitarian affairs for World Vision Canada and currently a visiting scholar at Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs. He previously served with the United Nations on three continents in peacekeeping, conflict prevention, government reform and disaster recovery. He played key roles in the U.N. missions for Aceh, Indonesia, and the country of Liberia in the aftermath of
armed conflicts.

The Keough Lectures were established as the legacy of G. Arthur Keough, an Adventist missionary in the Middle East who later served as chairman of the department of religion at WAU, then named, successively, Washington Missionary College and Columbia Union College. Dr. Zack Plantak is currently chairman of the religion department and coordinator of the lecture series.

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Agriculture Activist Invites Fellow Adventists to Help African American Farmers, Sign Petition

Submitted: Mar 19, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

George Harris is a local elder in the First Seventh-day Adventist Church of Fort Valley, Georgia, and chief executive officer of the Center for Family Farm Development. He is recruiting volunteers to help him get 100,000 signatures for an online petition which asks the President of the United States to use $1.25 billion from a class action settlement that totaled $117 billion to establish a permanent trust which would provide production loans to small, low-income farms.

“The White House will give policy review status to petitions [that get] at least 100,000 signatures within thirty days,” Harris told Adventist Today. The thirty days will begin April 14, the date in 1999 when the original court action was settled. As a run-up to the 30-day petition period, Harris is looking for 20,000 volunteer “ambassadors” who will each promise to recruit at least five friends to sign the petition during the time frame.

The case was actually settled 14 years ago. It involved a lawsuit against the Department of Agriculture because of racial discrimination over decades, Pigford v. Glickman. Because government bureaucrats did such a poor job of distributing the original settlement an additional amount has been earmarked for the victims of discrimination. Harris is advocating that most of these funds be placed in a perpetual trust instead of used in a one-time distribution. This would have a significant long-term impact on encouraging and
building small farms owned by African Americans in the South.

“We think that we are an unprecedented Adventist initiative,” Harris stated in an interview. He has deep roots in the Adventist faith. His parents moved from a 105-acre farm in Ohio to Huntsville, Alabama, in 1950 where his father managed the Oakwood College farm and his mother was director of food services. He refers to the last page of a pamphlet by Ellen G. White entitled The Southern Work as the mandate for this campaign. “We have invited the church to take a stand,” he said.

Agricultural development is key to the Adventist position on health, Harris said. For disease prevention “people need to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables.” Oakwood University ended its farming operations some time ago, “but now there is a resurgence of demand for locally grown, organic food.” Small farmers are the ideal vehicle for this kind of product. It does not lend itself to production in massive corporation-run farms and being trucked for thousands of miles.

The new emphasis on good nutrition is fundamental to public health policy, a concept that Adventists have been advocating for more than a century, and it opens opportunities for small farmers to make a decent living for their families and survive over the long term. This is the focus of the center Harris runs and why he is seeking to launch the petition drive.

“Agricultural capability has been underdeveloped from its roots in slavery and through continuing discrimination,” Harris points out. “This year is the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation,” and he wants to see one small, but permanent step toward reversing the effect of the past. “This will help small farmers join the upwardly mobile economy.”

The conference president in the South Atlantic Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—where Harris is a member—has endorsed the petition campaign. Pastor William Winston has loaned the resources of the conference IT department to the project. Two officers of the Adventist Church in North America are also backing the campaign, Harris told Adventist Today; Pastor Ken Denslow, assistant to the president, and Pastor Alvin Kibble, vice president.

Readers interested in more information can contact the Center for Family Farm Development at (404) 378–3803 or visit the center’s web site: www.centerforfamilyfarmdevelopment.com
Adventists Among Christians Left Homeless by Mobs in Pakistan Burning Homes

Adventist News Network (ANN), the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, reported this week that Adventists were among residents of a Christian community in eastern Pakistan where a mob torched their homes and businesses in response to alleged insults against Muhammad.

The unrest began last week after a report circulated that a young Christian man had committed blasphemy against Islam’s prophet. By March 9, the situation had escalated and thousands of protestors began setting fire to property owned by Christians in a Lahore neighborhood.

While some residents sustained injuries, there was no loss of life. Most Christians had earlier fled under threats of violence and police warnings to leave, a representative of the Adventist Church in Pakistan said. Church property and the homes of Adventist members, however, sustained “tremendous damage,” church leaders said. Songbooks, Bibles and sound equipment at the local Adventist church were burned, but the building itself only withstood minor water damage as firefighters worked to control nearby blazes, an Adventist survey team reported.

At least 170 homes and businesses were torched, according to Associated Press reports.
The rented home of local Adventist Pastor Afzal Bhatti and his family was destroyed along with the homes and belongings of at least 40 Adventist families. Bhatti and his family were among residents who left as the mob headed for their community.

“In his haste, Pastor Bhatti left behind his cell phone and ID card,” a church representative said, adding that a protestor yanked his glasses off his face as he fled. Bhatti and his wife, Parveen, returned the morning after the riots to comfort and pray with affected community members. Later, the family began the process of rebuilding their lives by purchasing necessities for work, study and ministry.

Earlier this week, the Punjab State government pledged to compensate each affected family with the equivalent of $2,000. Since then, the federal government of Pakistan has promised an additional $5,000 per family. The Adventist Church and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) in Pakistan are assessing the situation and assisting members of the affected community.

Less than five percent of Pakistanis are Christian, and blasphemy against the Quran or the prophet Muhammad can carry the death penalty. Religious liberty experts have observed that blasphemy laws are often used to repress religious minorities or settle personal disputes. In 2011, Salmaan Taseer, a Pakistani businessman and politician, and Shahbaz Bhatti, the only Christian in Pakistan’s cabinet, were assassinated for their opposition to legislation against blasphemy.

Religious freedom advocates have long urged Pakistan to ease its harsh controls on defamation of religion. “We have always strongly opposed Pakistan's blasphemy laws, which are the source of so much injustice in the country, especially for religious minorities and Muslim dissidents,” said John Graz, secretary-general of the International Religious Liberty Association and director of public affairs for the Adventist Church. “All religious liberty advocates should express solidarity with the affected families and encourage the government to reform this legislation.”

This report is based on a March 12 release from ANN written by Elizabeth Lechleitner.
Death Inside and Outside Eden and Death Inside and Outside the New Jerusalem?

Submitted: Mar 20, 2013

By Jack Hoehn

Sabbath School ORIGINS # 12 suggests that Death before Adam’s fall is the deal breaker for accepting any other form of Creation than one done briefly (in 6 literal days) and recently (a few thousand years ago). Even though everything we know about our universe suggests earth, sun, moon, and stars were created billions of years ago!

For example, this week in March 2013 at sundown if you look towards the setting sun you may be lucky enough to see just after sundown a comet PANSTARRS; if you miss it this week, it will take 106,000 years before you see it again. Most of us accept that things like this seem to be true. Astronomers find comets come from the Oort–cloud of particles left over beyond Pluto from the creation of our solar system about 4.6 Bya (which could give us an approximate starting date for the true chronology of Creation Day 1?).

We Can’t Create Life
The lesson emphasizes that we know how to kill things, but we don’t know how to make things alive, which is very true no matter what chronology of creation you think best fits the facts. Again the controversy within Adventism is constantly confused with the controversy between atheist evolutionists and Bible believing creationists who cannot accept the chronology of the Young Earth Creation model. The constantly repeated error (I am tempted to use the word “lie” but I think it still is an error made with good intentions but faulty theology) is that if you don’t accept that earth and everything in it was made very quickly and very recently, you have joined the infidel atheist camp!

Creationists of all types agree that life had to have been created by God. We don’t claim that life even over billions of years could have happened by itself, by accident, by chance, by purely natural self-directed chemical events or folding of proteins. Creationist evolutionists may believe that God remains in the shadows, behind life but sort of hands-off. Intelligent Design progressive creationists (Old Earth Creationists) think God was directly involved in directing His creation at every step, but that these steps were over ages, and not done recently in 144 hours.

**What the Bible Does NOT Say**

Romans 5:6 does NOT say, “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the plants and animals.” [It says Christ died for humans.]

1 Corinthians 15:22 does NOT say, “For as in Adam all plants and animals began to die, so in Christ all plants and animals stop dying.” [It says human death was solved by Christ’s death.]

2 Corinthians 5:17 does NOT say, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here! And it takes about 1 week for all this to happen just like the first creation, so hurry up and get with it folks!” [Most of us have found that the New Creation is a slow and progressive creation over much longer than one literal week, not an instantaneous one by any means.]

**Death Inside and Outside of Eden**
There was no Tree of Life created during any of God’s Creation Days until he planted a garden in Eden. There was darkness, there was no firmament, there was no land, there were no plants, there was no visible stars, sun, moon, birds, fish, animals of any kind; it was a very imperfect, incomplete earth before God intervened. God the Creator fixed all these problems and it was a very good earth, but what that good earth was like, if it was like the earth we now have (which I think is still good although imperfect) or if it was a Disneyland earth of perfection is a matter of debate. He created life but Genesis has no record of an anti-death mechanism created until, in Genesis 2, He puts a Tree of Life into the Garden. Plant death of course was God’s plan inside and outside of Eden from the beginning. (Genesis 1:29, 30).

Animal death before the fall outside or inside of Eden is not as immediately obvious in Genesis, but Satan seems permitted to have power over the beautiful reptiles before the fall. And since humans were created mortal (Adventism is clear on this) why would Adventists think that animals were created immortal? So I maintain that animal and plant death was part of the pre-Eve/Adam fall world inside and outside of Eden, except for the creature or creatures with access to the tree of life. The reason for this is not that God wanted death in the animal and plant kingdom, but because Earth was the venue for the Great Controversy with Christ and Satan.

Death Inside and Outside of the New Jerusalem

Will there be any death in the New Jerusalem? Well of course there will be the second death. Revelation 21:8. “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

But Revelation 21:4 promises, “There will be no more death.” Whether this means there will be no more human death, or no more plant and animal death is not specified. It is wonderful that there is at Tree of Life in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:2). But why do humans need a Tree of Life if there is no more death? Why do we still need the antidote if there is no poison?

As Eden was a special place, different from the created world outside of Eden, so the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of Heaven appears to be a special place on this earth,
at least at the beginning of eternity. Ellen White presents the New Jerusalem as a walled city surrounded by the resurrected hosts of the lost and fallen angels.

During the millennium Isaiah 34 suggests there will be vultures and owls, ravens, jackals, and hyenas—all scavengers and carnivores on the desolated earth suggesting at least animal death on earth. Earth after the millennium when the New Jerusalem returns to earth is still a battlefield of Christ with Satan and their competing philosophies of life. Revelation 22:15 agrees, “Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.” So even in the future, even with the New Jerusalem earth remains a place with death (murderers) outside of Eden restored for some period of time. Isaiah 66:22–24 hopefully are temporary and symbolic? At least until, as Adventists believe, all outside the New Jerusalem will be purified with cleansing fire.

What does this mean?

I’m not trying to create a new Adventist eschatology. I’m just showing that within our existing Adventist eschatology there seems to be a time when Eden restored is like the first Eden, a safe and holy place on a planet that was and will remain for some time into the future a battlefield between good and evil, between Love and Selfishness, between Christ and Satan. To demand that there be no plant and animal death on earth before the fall of mankind is a false requirement not required by the Bible.

I have previously blogged on why, according to C.S. Lewis, animal and plant death would exist in a good God’s world of freedom and choice before the fall of man, and why God would want to protect his newly created children in a special safe Eden with a Tree of Life from an outer world in conflict with danger and death.

“Wages of Sin as death can apply to angelic fall and rebellion long before the creation of man.

a.) Death as the result of sin could result from Satan’s fall long before Adam’s fall. As C.S. Lewis writes, “The origin of animal suffering could be traced, by earlier generations, to the
Fall of man—the whole world was infected by the un-creating rebellion of Adam. This is now impossible, for we have good reason to believe that...Carnivorousness, with all that it entails, is older than humanity...It seems to be, therefore, a reasonable supposition, that some mighty created power had already been at work for ill on the material universe, or the solar system, or at least, the planet Earth, before ever man came on the scene... If there is such a power, as I myself believe, it may well have corrupted the animal creation before man appeared...some animals live by destroying each other.” (CS Lewis, Problem of Pain, pages 133–135.)

b.) Romans 5:12 clearly speaks of human death, not animal death, and Paul’s argument loses nothing if we believe that animal and plant death existed before the human fall.

c.) Romans 8:18–24 “the groaning of creation” is surely true, but gives no indication when that groaning started, likely from Satan’s fall and banishment to earth, and then from Adam’s fall, and then from Noah’s Flood, and now again from environmental exploitation.

The Great Controversy pre-existed the creation events. There were “sinners” on earth long before Adam and Eve were created. A sinful Satan and sinning angelic host cast to the earth before the creation might imply that the creation events themselves may have been happening on a battle field.

If each of creation’s Days were accomplished in disputed territory, where God’s ways and God’s laws were being actively opposed by Satan’s ways and Satan’s philosophy, might this not explain why the geologic record of life on earth appears to be one of repeated conflict?

**Dear Fellow Adventist**

You were born into a wonderful world that existed long before you or anyone you know was born. This world you know shows both the goodness of God and the badness of Satan. Your life has been a balance between the wonderful good and the terrible evil. In spite of this you have seen that God is good, and have put your confidence in Him and the hoped–for return of His Son.

Does it really destroy all your hopes and strengthen all your fears, if God has created over a longer period than 144 hours?

Does it really steal from you your confidence in God and the Bible if humankind in the image of God was created 6,000 years ago or 60,000 years ago?
Will you really give up Sabbath observance if God didn’t create everything in 6 literal days, but instead in 6 Heavenly Days of unknown length?

“In the Beginning God created the heavens and the earth” remains true no matter what kind of Creation chronology you support. As Sister White reminds, “Just how God accomplished the work of creation he has never revealed to men.” (PP113) (I do wish she had also said, Just when God accomplished the work of creation he has also not revealed to men!) But I am not asking you to accept YEC/OEC/ or the secular chronology of life on earth. I am asking that IF you were convinced that in fact God had done things a different way or with a different chronology than you now believe, would that cause you to give up on God in disgust?

I don’t think so! I have confidence that your faith in God is not, as Satan slandered Job, “Disappoint Job and Job will curse you!” I think many sincere Adventists I know might be disappointed if the true history of Creation is longer than they used to think. But most would choose to stick with God even if He created in a different way than they used to think. Like Job, they may sit for a while and mourn the loss of their simple but inadequate beliefs, but eventually they will testify to Satan and the world, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.” I trust Him as my Creator, no matter how and when He chooses to create.
Fear is something that affects everyone. Some people laugh and brush it off, not realizing how deeply it affects them. Others are controlled by it, letting fear decide their course in life. No matter who you are, you’re afraid of something.

Recently I've been getting to the base of some of my actions and realized that there is fear deeply rooted in most of my actions (or lack of action). Fear of failing, letting people down and not meeting their expectations for me. Every choice I make, everything I do is carefully calculated so that I can’t fail. But as I was searching, I realized that there are only so many things a person can do without failing. And it doesn’t add up to very many. So all the time that I've been choosing “safe” activities, I've been missing out on something fun and adventurous. I've been missing out on chances to grow through failures.

An American writer, Elbert Hubbard, once said, “The greatest mistake you can make in life is to be continually fearing you will make one.” This fear of failure, of messing up, severely affects your life and productivity. When I realized that I was afraid, I began to notice all of the things I hadn’t done and all of the opportunities I had missed because I was afraid. Even the career that I wanted, I was afraid to pursue because I didn’t know much about it. Unknown situations like that take all of the control out of your hands and you don’t know if you will succeed or fail.

But the beauty in these situations is that God doesn’t want us to be afraid. In 2 Timothy 1:7 it says, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” He knows that we will fail sometimes. He knows that we are human and that we aren’t perfect. But He doesn’t want us to live our lives in fear. He wants us to break out of our shells and do great things for Him, knowing that “we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength.” It says in 2 Corinthians 12:9 and 10, “He said to me, ‘...my strength is made perfect in weakness.’ ...Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities...: for when I am weak, then I am strong.” The times when we can’t handle everything and it seems we are going to fail, those are the times that we need God the most and He can show His
strength in our situation. God’s strength can be shown when we realize that we can’t control everything and we need to rely on Someone who actually has everything under control.

This isn’t to say that we won’t ever fail. Yes, we will. But that’s because sometimes, failure can teach you more than succeeding ever could. Even if it just the lesson that we need to rely on God, failure is a powerful teacher. It shows us that we’re not in control. It gives us the freedom to realize that we are human and could never be perfect. It can help us strengthen relationships and learn more about ourselves. Failure can be a good thing. It’s all in your attitude.

Someone once said, “Don’t let fears control your destiny.” Today I pray, for myself and all who need it, that we can let God take control. I pray that we can move out from under the thumb of fear and live life to our full potential. I pray that we will boldly live out God’s purpose for us while relying on His strength and wisdom to get us through. And I pray for the humility to recognize failure and to learn from it rather than let it beat me down.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13

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Submitted: Mar 20, 2013

By Debbonnaire Kovacs

This week our little group read chapter three of Joan Chittister’s The Monastery of the Soul. One of the things this chapter invites us to consider is a part of the Rule of Benedict that says, “Perform the Opus Dei [the work of God] where you are. . . Those on a journey are not to omit the prescribed hours [of prayer] but to observe them as best they can.”

In today’s multicultural world, this rule brings to my mind the image of devout Muslims stretching out their prayer rugs no matter where they are—in malls, in airports—and praying at the prescribed times. No matter what one thinks of Islam (which means “submission”) or of Muslims (which means “submitted ones”) I think one can almost envy the sense of unity that must bring—knowing that one is praying with thousands—millions!—of others at that very moment.

Chittister expands on this part of the rule this way:

We are to pray by ourselves, if necessary, “as best we can,” but in the way the community, as community, is praying, so that our hearts and minds stay in the place where our bodies cannot now be.

One of the commitments our group made to each other the first time we met is that each morning we would pray for ourselves and our needs, each evening for the world and its needs, and each day at noon, we would pray for each of our group by name. In particular, we were to pray that each one would “listen with the ear of the heart.”
This week, our group leader asked for specific feelings about how this discipline of prayer is affecting us. Some spoke of difficulty in praying for our own selves. Others said that was the easy part. Many say that remembering right at noon is hard, but that it gets done somewhere around that time, and the prayer itself is blessing them. (I can only say, phone alarms are wonderful things!)

For myself, something new had happened during this past week. I was having no difficulty praying at noon (thanks to the phone) and I knew each person enough to ask for specific things for that person besides the listening with the ear of the heart. Each week I’d learn a little more and be able to pray more intelligently. But it was only last week, oddly, that it suddenly occurred to me that I was being prayed for by everyone else at (somewhere near) that same moment!

I don’t know why I hadn’t real-ized that. (Made it real to myself, that is. Did you ever take that word apart? Interesting!) It was a very comforting and illuminating sensation. I was being held, not just in the Everlasting Arms, but in the arms of my friends, held up to God, “held in the light,” as the Friends like to say. It made for oneness. Like the Muslims. Like the Benedictines.

Like the Body of Christ.

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Adventist Today: New Pope, Old Prophecy?

Submitted: Mar 21, 2013

By Andre Reis

Jorge Mario Bergoglio, an Argentinian Jesuit since 2001 and Archbishop of Buenos Aires since 1998 has been chosen as the new leader of the 1.2 billion Catholics worldwide. For Adventists, this has been a time of renewed interest in the Papacy and its place in traditional Adventist prophetic interpretation.

Although slightly less prominent in our neck of the woods, the interpretation of Revelation 13 that pits Catholicism against Adventism in the end times is still a sine qua non of subequatorial Adventism. Recently, the leading televangelist for the South American Division stated that although the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI was not a prophetic fulfillment per se, it does show the continued importance of the Vatican in eschatology. It is unclear, however, exactly how this particular event would even fit the traditional Adventist interpretation of the "importance of the Vatican"! [1]

But that was before the election of Francis I. Since then, the Adventist blogosphere has been ablaze with Adventist versions of Jesuit conspiracy theories [link http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesuit_conspiracy_theories]. Finally, they aver, Ellen White’s veiled hint that the Jesuits' may have a role in the new eschatological horizon as they did in the Middle Ages (GC 215–216), may become a reality.

But is the Papacy really the undeniable fulfillment of Revelation 13? Or could Francis I be the "eighth king" of Revelation 17?
As many have attempted to demonstrate, there are several problems with the traditional historicist approach to these chapters. First, projecting the importance of the message of Revelation millennia in the future all but annuls its relevance to its target audience, i.e., the seven, literal churches of Asia. This is just too expensive an exegetical move.

Revelation is introduced as a revelatory work (apokalypsis means "unveiling") that needed to be read, understood and applied to the daily life of its original readers (Rev 1:3). It is at once book, prophecy, and personal letter (1:4; 22:16). The church of Ephesus ran the risk of losing its status as a Christian body (2:5), the number of the beast could be figured out by engaged readers (13:6), and whoever tampered with the contents of the letter would incur severe temporal and eternal punishment (22:18–19).

Scholars have long emphasized the need to take an ever closer look at the book's Sitz im Leben, its original milieu in first century Asia. This important tenet of hermeneutics may indicate that the most sensible approach to Revelation is to read it primarily with an eye to its immediate social, religious and political background (most likely pre–70 A.D. Jewish Christianity).[2] And if we put the tendentious labels aside (e.g., preterism, futurism etc.), we may gain a new perspective on some features of Revelation. If this is correct, other entities may emerge as stronger candidates for the beasts of Rev 13 than a religious movement thousands of years removed from the churches of Asia.

For example, an intriguing interpretation posits that the beast from the sea (13:1–10) symbolized the Roman emperor vying for veneration as Dominus et Deus (possibly referring to Nero) and the beast from the earth (13:11–18) symbolized the local arm of the Roman government which enforced such adoration by building images and temples dedicated to the Emperor. Surprisingly, according to Suetonius, Nero's name was veiled in at least one contemporary riddle which went like this:

\[
\text{Count the numerical values of the letters of Nero's name,} \\
\text{And in "murdered his own mother", You will find their sum is the same.}[3]
\]

Both values add up to 1,005 in Greek gematria. This is indeed a striking parallel with the riddle of 666 as "number of the beast" (Rev 13:6). This important evidence may be one more nail in the coffin of the Vicarius Filii Dei interpretation which lingers stubbornly in the global Adventist South. But this is just one possibility. The fact is that the definitive culprit, guilty of such bestial actions and disguised in a sea of symbolism, remains at large.
And what about the seven kings of Revelation 17? Could any one Pope be one of them?

Scholars have pointed out the parallel of the harlot in Revelation 17 with coins minted during the reign of Vespasian (c. 70 A.D) which depict the Roman empire as Dea Roma, "goddess Roma", seated on the seven hills of Rome.[4] This would be hard to miss for the original readers. Several lists of possible candidates for these seven mountains which represents seven kings, five of which had already "fallen" by John's time, have been proposed by all schools of interpretation. The five may indicate a series of Roman emperors, but it's simply impossible to be precise. However, an emphasis on the list misses the point of the chapter, which is meant to culminate with the imminent fall of Babylon in Rev 18. The message is clear: worldly powers antagonistic to God will ultimately be destroyed, or, as one Adventist pastor put it, "Revelation has one clear message: God wins!"

Yet another problem for approaching Revelation as "history written in advance" is the undeniable imminence of the parousia to Jesus himself, Peter, Paul and the apostle John (cf. Mat 24:56; Mar 13:31; 1 Cor 1:17, 8; 4:5; Phil, 3:20; 1 Tess 4:13–18; 5:1–10, 23; 2 Pet 3:3–4; 1 John 2:18). To John the Revelator, all things would "soon take place" because the end was "near" (1:1, 3). How do we reconcile this fact with the view that probationary time would extend to very distant, preordained time markers (e.g., 538, 1798, 1844, 1929, 2013 etc.)?

Needless to say, a neatly organized chronology is simply not self-evident in Revelation. And the many and sundry diverging historicist interpretations in our midst (a la Hal Lindsey) bordering on wild conspiracy theories indicate that this model simply does not work.

But perhaps that is precisely the point of the symbols: the blessing reserved for students of the book does not lie in deciphering every symbol, but is rather in the continuous search to understand the deep things of God. All the symbolism militates against zeroing in on a single interpretation.

Adventists have long held that by placing Revelation as a transparency over the book of Daniel, a clear and unequivocal eschatological picture will emerge. But is Revelation solely dependent on Daniel? In fact, in order of sheer number of allusions, Revelation uses the book Isaiah more than it does Daniel, followed by Ezekiel. And although alluded to less than Daniel, Ezekiel exerts more influence on Revelation.[5] Obviously, this does not remove the importance of Daniel as a warehouse for some of the most important imagery in the book, it
simply expands the interpretative horizon by adding those other apocalypses of the OT. And if Isaiah and Ezekiel do not seem to contain timetables for the end times, how does this impact the interpretation of Revelation, which draws heavily on them as well for its eschatological visions? In other words, the historicist interpretation of Daniel may not provide the key for the interpretation Revelation after all.

Another metaphor may help. What if Revelation is a first century version of an autostereogram, you know, those "abstract" paintings that require you to relax your eyes, focus on the whole, and be patient? When done right, all of a sudden, voilà!, a 3D picture pops up out of nowhere. The same with Revelation—all those intriguing, sometimes confusing and at other terrifying images, sounds, smells, and colors are meant to show one thing: the reign of Christ, the Pantokrator.

Sadly, however, whenever new attempts are made to grapple with the biblical text and what it has meant to Christians from all ages (and not only to self-proclaimed end-time Laodicea), the outcry is loud and clear. "We should not move away from the landmarks!" Most of this rejection clearly stems from the pages of the Great Controversy, where Ellen White, the infallible interpreter of Scripture to large swaths of Adventism, has laid a clear and scathing condemnation of all that Catholicism stands for.

But Ellen White was far from the rigid interpreter of Scripture some have made her out to be. She insisted she was not infallible[6], that we should lay her writings to one side and never quote her again unless prioritize the Bible,[7] that her writings were not as inspired as the ten commandments,[8] that we should continue studying Scriptures to see "if these things are so" and accept every ray of new light, even if it contradicts what we have held in the past.[9] She acknowledges that her interpretations of prophecy in the Great Controversy were largely dependent on Adventist theologians of her time (such as John Andrews and Uriah Smith)[10] and cautioned her readers to avoid demonizing the Catholic church.[11]

I find strength in the fact that Adventism emerged because a group of students of Scriptures took the promise of the Second Advent seriously. I'm glad this gene has been passed on to all future generations of Adventists. Nevertheless, their at times overzealous stance on prophetic interpretation stretched historicism to its very limits, something Ellen White was apparently reluctant to revise. And while I agree with Knight that apocalypticism has often been a successful way of galvanizing a movement's raison d'etre (and often tragically so, remember Jonestown and Waco?), Adventists need to take a closer look at our motives when approaching these ancient sacred writings.[12]
The characteristic sectarian overtones we often hear in our midst, similar to that of other apocalyptic movements of the past (e.g., c. 100 B.C. Qumran) may well be the product of a psycho-social phenomenon rather interpretative prowess. And when we put these theories to a strict exegetical method (even by the grammatical-historical standards) there is simply not an unequivocal scriptural thread running from the pages of Daniel and Revelation to buttress our sense of prophetic security, let alone the most extreme Adventist doomsday tracts and TV campaigns.

By attempting to pinpoint the correspondence of Revelation's symbols to specific historical figures, in part in order to meet our need of corporate reassurance rather than unveiling Christ, we end up weakening its raw eschatological relevance. And no doubt having the Pope as a collective target to shoot at has strengthened our sense of "community".

But despite being the advocate of questionable doctrines and having a shady political past in Argentina, I wonder what role Francis I will play in the spiritual lives of our fellow Catholic Christians all over the world. One thing we can be certain about: if he fulfills the promise of modeling the altruistic example of St. Francis of Assisi, his impact could be quite profound on the whole of modern Christianity, akin to that of Mother Theresa.

We'll just have to wait and see.

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[1] Even George Knight, an outspoken critic of many of Adventism's "secret handshakes" also suggested that by jettisoning the traditional interpretation of Revelation 13, Adventism could end up neutering itself. (The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism (Review and Herald, 2008).

[2] There is strong textual evidence that the Apocalypse was written in the early decades of the first century rather than in 95 AD, possibly even before the fall of Jerusalem, when Christianity was still strongly connected to Judaism. Such intimate relationship with
Judaism had been noted by R. H. Charles in his seminal early 20th century commentary on Revelation; another author calls Revelation the "Jewish Apocalypse" (Cf. John W. Marshall, Parables of War (Wilfrid Lauer University Press, 2001).


[9] "If ideas are presented that differ in some points from our former doctrines, we must not condemn them without diligent search of the Bible to see if they are true. We must fast and pray and search the Scriptures as did the noble Bereans, to see if these things are so. We must accept every ray of light that comes to us." (ST May 26, 1890).

[10] See the Introduction to The Great Controversy.


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A Whole New View of Sabbath? Dr. Sigve Tonstad Presents at Music and Worship Conference

Submitted: Mar 21, 2013
By Debonnaire Kovacs

Have we as Seventh-day Adventists been misrepresenting the Sabbath for the century and a half that we’ve been in existence? Might the rest of the world have a better chance of understanding its blessings if we saw it in its fullness, ourselves? These questions were explored by one of the general session presenters at the recent Music and Worship Conference, held at Andrews University March 7-9, 2013.

Dr. Sigve Tonstad, a native of Norway, has an amazingly broad background and education. He has degrees in theology, medicine, Biblical Studies, and New Testament Studies, from Middle East College in Beirut, Lebanon, Andrews University, Loma Linda University, and the University of St. Andrews, besides studying at Duke University. He has worked as pastor, physician, theologian, and writer, sometimes all at the same time.

His two presentations at the conference will be the subject of two feature articles here at Adventist Today. The first was called “‘Or the alien in your towns: Sabbath and Justice in the Commandments.”

Dr. Tonstad began by talking about “resident aliens,” a subject of great controversy here in the United States and elsewhere. We divide them into “legal” and “illegal” aliens, but Dr. Tonstad pointed out that the most extreme example is a refugee. In the days before his presentation, news reports had stated that the number of Syrians fleeing their country had now passed one million—and that was only the registered ones. Dr. Tonstad’s daughter works with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and had sent her father a copy of the speech the Commissioner had recently made. In that speech, the Commissioner referred to the fact that many faiths work to help refugees. “There is a sense,” said Dr. Tonstad, “in which people’s perception of God is someone who would be kind to refugees.”

And that would be the center of his talk. Numerous times in the Torah (he took attendees through several, reading aloud together, just in Deuteronomy alone) God says, “Remember that you were an alien” (italics supplied). He began with what he called “a quiz question,” and promised that the first one with the right answer, at the end of the session, would receive a free copy of his book, The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day.
Is the radical message of the Sabbath in the Torah a more considerate view of the poor or a new view of the self?

Tonstad began by looking at the two iterations of the fourth commandment. In Exodus, the one with which most Seventh-day Adventists are most familiar, the Sabbath is given as a memorial of creation. Specific and exhaustive instruction is given as to just who gets the day off: “you,” (“thou,” actually, a lost English singular form of close personal “you,” used only to close family members and friends or to those who are younger or lower caste than the speaker), male servants, female servants, oxen, donkeys, cattle, and the aliens in your towns.

In Deuteronomy, rather than memorializing the Sabbath, the Sabbath memorializes deliverance. “Remember that you were a slave in Egypt.” Tonstad thinks that Adventist emphasis on Sabbath as a memorial of creation, while vitally important, has left out equally important aspects of Sabbath. “The Sabbath has a socio-economic and a socio-ethnic dimension,” he said. “The economic dimension is about non-labor and is specific for slaves and the underprivileged. The socio-ethnic dimension is specific to resident aliens. It singles out and recognizes concern for these groups. Immigrants and the economically vulnerable have favored status in Sabbath. Equality that may not exist anywhere else exists on Sabbath.”

He believes that, just as the Sabbath is meant to remind us that we were created by God, then enslaved, and now delivered, so we are to remember that we may, in our turn, deliver. “The Sabbath,” Dr. Tonstad said, “is meant to create and uphold a sensitivity to the disadvantaged and displaced person. Networks of Sabbaths, from weekly Sabbaths to seven-year Sabbaths to the great year of Jubilee, were meant to “sabbatize” society. Especially the Jubilee, which re-equalizes the economic layers of society.”

Tonstad listed what he called the Sabbatarian tenets:
1—weekly Sabbath is rest and dignity for poor
2—Sabbath year is rest for land
3—jubilee is re-set to prevent huge inequalities from growing

“We don’t talk about economics much in our churches, but the Bible talks about it a lot, especially in the context of the Sabbath. Economic and political issues have somehow been washed out of Adventist theology.”

He said that the U.S. “housing bubble” came from whole idea that land has a monetary value and people can own it. In the Bible, God owns the land and it can’t be sold in perpetuity. He went on to speak of some of the increasing number of non-Adventist authors who are writing about the
importance of the Sabbath. Here are a few:

Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*
Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*
(Tonstad pointed out that he disagrees “profoundly” with some of what Brueggemann, in particular has to say, but that concerning the Sabbath, “he is right on.”)
Norman Habel, *Moral Ground*

In conclusion, Dr. Tonstad said that the Sabbath has a socio-economic import that has not received its due. The Sabbath is a divine commitment more than a divine commandment—God commits himself to stand up for the poor.

A young person won the free book by saying that the answer to the “quiz question” was both—a radical new view of the self and of the poor. Dr. Tonstad agreed. “The Bible inscribes slavery on all believers. The one thing not to be forgotten, then, is who I am—who we are. Really, it’s a new view of God.”

Perhaps it’s time for Adventists to catch up with others who are seeing Sabbath, not as a doctrine or thou-shalt-(not) but as a remedy for the problems of society.