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20 Years After the Waco Tragedy: What Have Adventists Learned?

Submitted: Apr 11, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

In 1993 incidents involving guns and multiple deaths were less familiar to Americans than they are today. Adventists were shocked when a shoot-out with Federal police occurred on February 28 at a rural outpost run by an ultra-fundamentalist Adventist splinter group. Four Federal agents were dead, 16 wounded and television helicopters began to circle over an army of police around the modest compound near Waco, Texas.

A stand-off lasted six weeks with constant bulletins on television and radio identifying the group as Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventists. There were interviews with a young man who was introduced as the group’s leader—he was born Vernon Howell and had assumed the name David Koresh—that sounded eerily familiar in tone and style to anyone who sat in Sabbath discussions of end-time events in the 1960s and 1970s. The news also reported that he had been charged with threatening people with guns and accused of child molestation; that he practiced polygamy, even with girls below the age of consent, while insisting on celibacy for the other men.

After the combined police forces overran the Mount Carmel Center on April 19 in an ill-conceived plan to end the stalemate, a total of 86 people lost their lives in this tragic incident. Four of these were the Federal agents shot on the first day, and 82 were residents from the Mount Carmel group, including 20 children, some as young as one year. After thousands of pages of testimony and forensic evidence, it is still debated how the fire got
started as police punched holes in the walls and lobbed tear gas on that April morning two decades ago. Nine people went to prison. The May 3, 1993, issue of Time put the story on the cover.

“How could this have happened with Adventists? Were these people really Adventists?” These questions were never printed in the Sabbath School Quarterly nor even in any of the supplements, but they consumed considerable time and energy among Adventists across North America and in Europe, Australia and New Zealand. They were forced to confront the ugly reality that very pious and conservative, sincere Bible-believing people could let extreme views run away with their minds and lead them to do unthinkable things.

Vernon Howell had been an active member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church until he was disfellowshipped in 1979. A significant number of the people in the Branch Davidian group were still on the books somewhere as regular members of the Church. The Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventists began in 1929 when Victor Houteff, a lay Sabbath School teacher in the Fullerton Church in southern California, felt that he had a message from God for the denomination and privately published The Shepherd’s Rod: The 144,000 and A Call for Reformation. He was soon kicked out and in 1935 moved to the Waco area and invited followers to join him in building an outpost on a ranch. When he died in 1955, Ben Roden took over leadership because—the group believed—the “spirit of prophecy” had selected him. By 1977 his widow, Lois Roden, was the leader and began to publish the concept that the Holy Spirit represents the feminine aspect of Divinity, which received wider attention than anything the small splinter group had done up to that time. Throughout all these developments, the group continued to believe in the prophetic gift manifested in Ellen G. White and honor most of the core doctrines of the Adventist faith.

Crisis Management and Apocalyptic Faith

At the time Pastor Gary Patterson was assistant to the president of the denomination’s North American Division (NAD) and just a few months prior to the incident he was part of a team that presented a seminar on crisis management at a convention for conference staff professionals. “Unfortunately, we did not follow our own advice,” he told Adventist Today recently. “When the event broke upon us, we were unprepared to deal with it. ... It took two or three weeks to put the plan together before we had trained personnel and a central spokesperson to address the media.”

“There were those within the denomination who saw this event as an opportunity to receive
national attention for their views on apocalyptic Scripture and theology,” Patterson recalled. “The news media was focused on a sensational story rather than ... biblical interpretation and ... the more [they] attempted to gain media attention for their views, the more the church became attached to the cult group in the media stories and in the minds of the public.” A crisis team was eventually able to disconnect the denomination from “the extreme views and actions of the Branch Davidians and remove the name of the Church from the news stories.”

By the following year a national telephone survey of the general public conducted by the Center for Creative Ministry for the NAD found only a very small percentage of Americans still associated the denomination with the events in Waco. Some have labeled the successful effort at crisis management as hypocritical because there are still evangelists who seem to the average American to be using bizarre images and themes.

Although the Second Coming of Christ is central to the Adventist faith, there is the risk that the idea that it could happen at any time “may be used in a manipulative, rather than in a motivational manner, attempting to control behaviors out of fear,” Patterson observed. “As the church deals with the fact that it is now 170 years from the 1844 date [which began the movement], it becomes obvious that although the expectation of the return of Christ always remains as a near-term immediacy, yet the purpose of the church is to establish the kingdom of God in the present world, while at the same time looking for its full coming in the 'already but not yet' concept.”

Interest in the apocalyptic has become widespread in both popular culture and secular literature in recent years. It is no longer unique to Adventists. “There are wide varieties of understandings of the future in the broader contemporary Christian world,” Patterson points out. “And in the secular world, notions of potential apocalyptic doom exist in both scientific circles and the media, as well as in the entertainment industry. The idea of apocalypse is not out of mainstream thinking, but views on the nature of the apocalypse vary widely.”

Lessons Learned from the Waco Tragedy?

“The church ... must move away from ... perpetual spiritual infancy,” wrote Dr. Caleb Rosado in a paper reflecting on the Waco incident that was presented to the 1993 meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, “to ... spiritual and social maturity, where it no longer behaves as children, tossed about by every ill wind of spiritual deceitfulness, but as spiritually mature adults (Ephesians 4:13, 14).” An ordained Adventist minister and
sociologist now on the faculty of Warner Pacific College in Portland, Oregon, Rosado predicted that “more apocalyptic cults will ... emerge” in the future. “David Koresh was simply the 1993 model.”

Referring to the analysis of a number of scholars who have studied the Waco incident (and have concluded that Federal authorities did not understand how to deal with religious extremists, thus contributing to the tragic outcome) Rosado suggested that the church “might better serve” if it were “to take a proactive posture of serving as intermediary and assist in the negotiations, rather than merely creating distance between itself and the group.”

As the Adventist movement has grown to perhaps 30 million adherents around the world and significant cultural diversity, it has developed five distinct social dynamics or “operational value system” patterns. Each is developing in a different direction, Rosado told Adventist Today recently. There is a “traditional” church, a “militant” church, a “legalistic” church, a “corporation” church, and a “caring community.” The first three categories are “seen as a sect” by other Christians and the general public and that “has not changed all that much” in the last two decades. The Branch Davidian group came out of the “militant” vane. The “corporation” church tends to be seen by other Christians as an Evangelical denomination and is more middle class, “success–driven, technology savvy, and market–oriented.” This is the mainstream of the denomination in North America. The “caring community” segment is “more inclusive of ethnic minorities and immigrants,” said Rosado. It is “more relevant to society and has moved away from the apocalyptic approach and [the] attitude that we are right and the rest of the world is wrong.” Adventists in this category “see as more pressing the needs of the world, issues of justice, gay rights, women’s concerns, and [are] concerned with the poor, global warming, and the big social issues of the day.”

The result of Church growth and successful missionary efforts in so many nations around the world is that the Adventist movement is stretched between its apocalyptic roots, still present in some circles and even out of control on occasion, as in Waco 20 years ago this month, and its educated, professional, institutional communities, who are “making a contribution to the world” through the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), “our hospitals and universities.”

“In the long term, seeking to manipulate behavior or recruit new followers through the notion of impending doom produces both fearful and hostile people,” Patterson warned.
“The long term motivation of the church is to establish the kingdom of God in the Earth and live in His will, all the while looking to the full coming of the kingdom. ... The Church today must focus on living in the present with an expectation of a return at any moment.”

What does that mean? “We care for the environment because it is our home; we care for our bodies because it is the life we have been given; we work for peace in our world and communities,” Patterson told Adventist Today, “but we know that the only solution to the devastation in our world will ultimately be an apocalyptic event that ... makes all things new.” He has been serving in recent months as interim pastor for New Hope Adventist Church in the suburbs between Baltimore and Washington DC.

Baylor University, a Baptist institution in Waco and home to one of the most prominent sociology of religion programs in America, will host a symposium next week reflecting on the events 20 years ago. Although no Adventist scholar is scheduled among the presenters, Adventist Today will have a journalist at the event and give readers a detailed report.

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Million-Dollar Salaries in Adventist Healthcare

Submitted: Apr 10, 2013

By T. Joe Willey

In a denomination that has long stressed dedication and sacrificial wages, there are at least 52 highly paid Adventist hospital executives receiving annual “total compensation” ranging from $815,000 to $5,079,386.¹ The reportable W-2 earnings in the group averaged $729,434 per individual in 2010. With benefits, retirement, and other perks, this lifted individual executives’ “total compensation” along with wages to an estimated average of $1,346,679 in the same year, according to data obtained from the IRS 990 reports.² There are many more executives on the way up from $196,500 to $815,000. As a point of reference, the annual wage of former General Conference (GC) President Jan Paulsen in 2008 was $87,008.³ If you are looking for a career that provides an opportunity to stack up worldly wealth and help coordinate the healing ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, just about any administrative job in the Adventist healthcare system is your best option.

A Pivotal Decision

Persons closely connected to wage and salary policies for workers in God’s vineyard are aware that the General Conference approved a higher remuneration structure for top administrators and other employees in the Adventist healthcare corporations. The last step occurred during the 1989 Spring Meeting of the GC Executive Committee, acting as a North American Division committee.⁴ Adventist Review reported that the topic of wage-scale improvements provoked a lively and sometimes cantankerous debate. Aspects of the debate continue to the present.

The first session on Wednesday, April 5, 1989, was highly charged with emotion. Some delegates accused the healthcare executives of being motivated by greed and avarice. One hospital president said that “he had finally found something worse than going to the dentist
and that was attending Spring Meeting.”

The meeting chairman, former GC President Neal C. Wilson, favored the new salary structure. At the end of the day he could see that removing the salary caps for hospital leaders was not going to pass, so he called for a motion to table the matter. Church leaders present in the meeting discussed how higher pay had already caused tension between hospital employees and church workers. Individuals who opposed larger wages felt that the decision was contrary to repeated statements from the Spirit of Prophecy, such as: “If a portion of the workers receive large wages, there are others, in different branches of the work, who will call for higher wages, and the spirit of self-sacrifice will gradually be lost sight of.” Several statements from Ellen G. White concerning wages in church institutions were read, and the committee broke away from deliberations at least twice during the day to pray for divine guidance on the matter.

Committee members supporting the new salary cap included a few laypersons and the union conference presidents who chaired the Adventist healthcare systems. During the ensuing debate, 14 committee members spoke in favor, including four from hospital administration, and 13 were against the motion. Five committee members were neutral. In the background David Dennis, then director of the GC Auditing Service, was well aware that the union presidents on the hospital boards were enjoying “nice perks … [including] pampering them with freebie cruises to Alaska and other significant gifts.” Adding a sour note during discussions, Dennis spoke out about the loss of 34 experienced auditing personnel who were lured away from the GC by offers from the healthcare system. Afterward and into the night, Chairman Wilson met with various individuals and drew up “seven safeguards that, if added to the motion, might make it more acceptable.”

Near the end of the next day, after some members of the opposition had left for home, Wilson again brought up the wage matter. He rejected the argument used the day before that removing the salary caps was one more step down the road that would eventually lead to separation of the hospitals from the church. This argument had been expressed artfully by the highly respected GC Treasurer, Don F. Gilbert, who was concerned about placing wages for hospital executives on a worldly standard. Trying to take some of the wind out of the arguments, Donald Welch, then president of Adventist Health System, assured the GC brethren that “his group would recommend lower rates than the consultants’ study.”

Chairman Wilson contrasted the ideal with the pragmatic and said that anyone who objected should come forward and present viable alternatives. It appeared that “the only way for
our medical work to return to the church’s wage scale would be to start new institutions operated on the original medical missionary philosophy that led to the founding of Battle Creek Sanitarium.”

Reports in Adventist Review and Ministry magazines indicated that the hospitals were facing financial challenges in retaining top management under church wage caps. At the same time, morale was also suffering. With the federal government enlarging Medicare and the management of the ever-growing healthcare markets becoming more complex, objections to higher administrative wages simply faded into the sand. After that, the law of supply and demand prevailed with a different economic model for highest-compensated employees.

The removal of salary caps did not come easily. It took some arm twisting, including cajoling and a secret ballot at the end of the day on Thursday. Fifty-two members voted yes, and forty-two voted no.

How Much Should Executives Be Paid?
Salaries for key hospital executives were allowed to jump from $81,700 to $116,400. The approved plan included a 10-percent differential for geographic considerations and an additional 10 percent for the three largest hospitals at that time—Florida Hospital, Kettering Medical Center, and Loma Linda University—and the health systems corporate offices. This was three to four times the earnings of other church employees, including some who voted for the change. Once freed from church wage caps, the top hospital executives’ total compensation ballooned (within a few years) to well over a million dollars, using a variety of reward strategies to create more annual pay. Currently almost 50 percent of executive earnings are in the form of bonuses, incentives, and other cash, including deferred nontaxable benefits, gross-up tax payments, travel for companions, and supplemental employee retirement plans not available to lower-paid hospital employees. These supplemental gains were one way to get around the salary caps approved by the GC, and they are not unusual for the nonprofit hospital industry.

When accounts of these executives’ high wages began to appear in the newspapers, many church members raised their eyebrows and wondered what was happening. Others were shocked and outraged to learn of the details. One of the first stories was carried by the Washington Post. The Post reported that Bryan Breckenridge left his job in 1997 as president of Washington Adventist Hospital with a lump-sum payment of $4.74 million, and soon thereafter chief financial officer Edmund R. Peters also resigned with $3.1 million in total compensation for the year. Adventist officials justified these wages by telling the Post
reporter: “The board made a reasonable business decision that retirements for a number of the executives … were not adequately funded in comparison to what they would otherwise have received in a nonreligious organization. The decision was made to do a catch-up, if you will.”

The high-wage controversy is expected to intensify in the future because of the unprecedented financial pressures facing the hospital industry, including the rising costs of medical care and at times cutting back on wages and benefits to the hardworking support staff because of painful budget cuts. Of course, there are other issues too. Lofty executive pay can threaten the tax-exempt status of nonprofit hospitals if not enough is spent on indigent care, education, and outreach programs. Hospital executives defend receiving these wages, saying it has no effect on healthcare costs.

The executives go on to champion high wages as the only way to attract highly trained individuals who can manage a hospital facility with many employees, provide access to the uninsured, and at the same time deliver quality care that saves lives. Also, they defend high wages because some income includes supplemental retirement accumulations before the executives are qualified to receive the money. Given that the base wage may begin around $500,000, it is still disappointing to many denominational church workers to learn of such high wages. Their general reaction comes from a long-held (almost sacred) view that high wages are a substantial deviation from the “philosophy of remuneration maintained by the SDA Church involving sacrificial wages while doing God’s work.” Others who are more pragmatic say that you must pay for expert hospital leadership. The hard questions begin when you ask what hospital executives should make, and why. Wrestling with such questions against the backdrop of the church’s stated remuneration philosophy makes the policy sound like a scolding based “upon the fact that a spirit of sacrifice and dedication should mark all denominational employees irrespective of the position they hold or the department or service they represent.”

All of these earnings in the IRS Form 990—including deferred compensation in the highly compensated group of Adventist executives—totals more than $70 million, with an average of $1,346,679 per executive, starting from an average W-2 base and incentive wage of $729,434 for the group. The retirement benefits for executives are paid out over several years as the employee nears retirement; like a pension, the benefit is not paid after retirement. The total wages are governed by hospital trustees, who are influenced by GC church leadership and the union conferences. Basically, compensation is largely determined by market-wage-rate percentiles obtained by consultants comparing peers at
hospital systems of comparable size, complexity, and performance. An executive who is a high performer is very likely to be recruited away elsewhere. Consequently, the pressure to keep such an executive at the highest possible salary and benefits is driven by competitive forces and the cost of executive replacement.

With the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) in place, hospital health systems are beginning to move away from volume-based incentives for executives to value-based payment models, and consequently boards must be more sophisticated in justifying market data used for compensation. There is a consensus that increased compensation is needed to attract the best and the brightest. This has driven the current management culture to the viewpoint that administrators, according to Naomi Freundlich, “are entitled to a special share of other people’s money. Because of their innate and self-evident brilliance, they are entitled to become rich.”

In economic terms, the Adventist hospitals have gross revenues almost six times greater than worldwide church revenues. Adventist healthcare is big business. These tax-exempt nonprofit hospitals are community institutions deriving in large part revenues from taxpayers (Medicare) and insurance payers. It is not widely known, but the tax reports indicate that some residual revenues are directed in supporting SDA churches, union and local conferences, and educational institutions.

For instance, in 2010 Adventist Health System Sunbelt Healthcare Corporation (the management firm that operates multiple hospitals and nursing care facilities) transferred grants totaling $1,459,050 in general support funds, which mostly went to the Lake Union, Southern Union, Southwestern Union, and Mid-America Union. Oakwood University received $100,000, and Union College received $15,000. Southern Adventist University received $3,320,500, and the Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists picked up $1,040,000 in general support from the Florida–based corporation. The grants are small compared to $2.9 billion in gross revenues reported that year, although the Adventist conferences, churches, and educational institutions receiving this money probably look upon it differently. The other hospital corporations also direct small appropriations to church entities.

Public awareness about hospital CEOs’ big paychecks is increasing, due in part to Wall Street and corporate abuses, but also because the subject tends to vex the public mind when compared to an average annual household income of approximately $56,000. Health economist John Troidl recognizes that “executive pay is always controversial.”

This can show itself in many ways. Individual richly compensated Adventist health
executives may appear in newspapers and business journals on occasion. High wages are becoming more widely known in the media. In 2010, according to public records, Darwin Rembolt, the president and CEO of Simi Valley Hospital in California, had a base wage of $311,580, but total compensation of $1,830,633 and another $1,322,981 in previously deferred benefits he earned upon termination. According to the newspaper, Simi Valley paid a combined total of $1.25 million to two different CEOs in the year Rembolt assumed leadership of the Adventist hospital. 28 “That’s slightly more than the hospital provided in treatment for poor uninsured patients where there was no attempt to collect payment, though hospital leaders say charity care definitions encompass only a fraction of the total care they provide without pay.”29 Given that these hospitals exist to provide quality healthcare and are required to render community and charitable benefits, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is concerned about how much executive compensation (cash) is flowing away from the purposes served by nonprofit tax-exempt hospitals. Congressional leaders say such financial rewards “reveal the need for more regulation on nonprofit entities that rely heavily on government money.”30

The IRS Ensures That Nonprofits Serve the Public Good, Not Insiders
While church leadership is apparently no longer troubled about high executive salaries, the IRS has a strong interest in subjecting nonprofit organizations to what is known as nondistribution constraint, or what is more commonly called the prohibitive inurement doctrine. Simply stated, this means that nonprofit organizations cannot distribute profits to those who control the tax-exempt institutions (i.e., executives, key employees—the insider group). Generally, surplus revenues in the nonprofit corporations are retained for investments, debt payments, selfpreservation, or future plans, etc.

The IRS has the statutory power to enforce limitations on outsized compensation through the IRS’s “Rebuttable Presumption.” Failure to comply can prompt the IRS to revoke the nonprofit status of an organization when it has engaged in transactions that constitute inurement and excess benefits. In fact, the IRS periodically reports that the most common type of abuse in nonprofits is excessive compensation paid to insiders. Wages continue to rise in good times and bad. Within the past few years, the IRS has issued a bulletin that it intends to scrutinize and audit nonprofit charitable 501(c)(3) organizations more closely and determine whether or not the income and assets of a charity are benefiting individuals who have close relationships with their organization. Form 990 is also undergoing revisions to make compensation more transparent.

If the IRS finds that an executive has been overpaid, it can fine both the executives and board members who approved the overpayment, or it can even revoke the organization's
tax-exempt status. To avoid such problems, the board must: (1) base its compensation decisions on appropriate research of the employment markets, and (2) document its decision-making process at the time it approved the compensation. The nonprofit tax-exempt corporation is required to reveal how it established executive compensation. Loans to key employees and insider business transactions must also be reported.

Like other nonprofit organizations, Adventist hospitals are required to disclose how their trustees oversee executive compensation. To get a better understanding of how this is communicated to the IRS, take the 990 tax document (2010) for Adventist Health System, the parent organization for Florida Hospital, as an example. In the paragraph disclosing the process for approval of the compensation, Florida Hospital openly places the burden of the decision on the church and church leadership. The policy reads in part: “As a faith-based organization sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church (the Church), the philosophy and principles with respect to its executive compensation practices reflect the conservative approach of the Church’s mission of service and were developed in counsel with the Church’s leadership.”

Why Should Trustees Give Better Benefits to Executives?
Knowing that officials at the highest levels of the denomination serve as trustees on the hospital boards who approve “fair compensation” for its executives, former Adventist Review Editor William G. Johnsson in 2000 assured readers that such salaries are norms in the hospital business and then asked a question: “The church—our church—has a work to do. It employs many thousands of people in a variety of capacities. In this time of incredible wealth, what is fair compensation for those who work in church-related enterprises?” He revealed that the church actually maintains two disparate remuneration systems and then enlarged on the “wider, more complex issues.” Specifically, he pointed out that ministers, teachers, conference presidents, etc., are paid with church funds (tithes and offerings). For them, Johnsson remarks, the denomination has a uniform plan that creates congeniality and equality. He is referring to the traditional Adventist sacrificial (church or living) wage concept.

Johnsson addressed the second, higher community-rate plan as follows: “All health-care personnel, however, are paid out of hospital-generated funds, and their pay scale is guided by rates in the marketplace.” In the educational/medical leadership context or environment that Johnsson is referring to in his Review article, the wages of the Loma Linda University (LLU) CEO and president can be compared to those earned by the president of the vast multiple campuses of the University of California (UC), including the prestigious medical centers in Los Angeles and San Francisco. UC President Mark G. Yodof’s take-home salary

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in 2011 was $561,000; he is ‘the 152nd highest paid employee [out] of 252,540 on the [UC employee] payroll and is paid from state funds.’ Richard Hart from LLU, with a base salary of $350,000 and total compensation slightly over $500,000 in 2011 (see Table 1 on page 14), probably has fewer headaches, because Yodof administers an institution with 234,464 students, 18,896 faculty, and 189,116 staff.

Speaking on behalf of denominational leaders, Review Editor Johnsson explained, ‘The issue isn’t whether they [hospital executives] deserve high salaries, but what levels of compensation are appropriate in an Adventist context.’ He attempted to address the Adventist ‘context’ question in the hospitals by weakly admitting, ‘This is surely an unhealthy situation that must be addressed.’ But it struck him as ‘unseemly’ to call for a public listing of all salaries.

Critics of high compensation in publicly funded health programs such as Medicare and Medicaid argue that trustees need to be prepared to address these questions based on denominational values and beliefs that drive its decisions about executive pay. It did not go over well when John Ryan, a reporter from public radio near Seattle, Washington, asked to interview the CEO of Providence Health and Services, a Catholic hospital. Ryan had discovered through public records that the hospital paid its chief executive a cool $2.4 million in 2008. The CEO would not talk to Ryan, but the human resource official at the nonprofit hospital did and explained: ‘So our mission is to reveal God’s love and care for the poor, especially for the poor and vulnerable, through our compassionate care. To be able to do that, we need to make sure that we can attract and retain the best talent. So, yes, we need to make sure that we’re paying at least market for any of our employees that serve.’

Church officials contend that in order to attract well-qualified CEOs and other top executives, it is necessary to follow labor market trends, just as in other businesses. Hospitals may be taxexempt charities, but they are still complicated businesses with narrow profit margins. They need skilled and talented executives to keep them running. Management consultants go on to argue that there is, in fact, no rational basis for why executives should not be paid as much as they are paid. This all boils down to what a job is worth, what an employer is willing to pay an employee to do it, and what an employee is willing to accept as payment for the job.

A few trustees on these hospital boards might be surprised to learn that studies show that a hospital executive’s performance is not related to pay after all. In a recent major study, the New Hampshire Center for Public Policy Studies found that there is ‘virtually no correlation
between hospital [CEO] pay and either quality or cost” at nonprofit health systems.” Another example of how this idea flies in the face is Barack Obama, who is paid $395,188 annually, because few executives have any greater challenge than the president of the United States.

Who Owns Adventist Healthcare?
Less than 30 years ago, nearly every hospital in the country was an independent institution. Today most belong to multihospital systems. Executives understand that as smaller hospitals merge into multihospital systems, executives have the potential to create greater compensation (their earnings are based largely on revenues.) Adventist healthcare is similar, with a multihospital system maintained through five independent regional corporations. With all of the changes, many Adventists do not have a clear understanding of who actually owns these healthcare organizations. For some, the regional Adventist corporations are seen as being financially independent from the church.

Even before the wage change was approved in 1989, Adventist hospitals were divested from the church as not-for-profit organizations. The “right arm of the message” began to lengthen and shrink away from direct financial control of the church, and by 1982 the hospitals were incorporated into separate 501(c) (3) nonprofit tax-exempt organizations with different “owner” memberships (stakeholders or constituencies) and separate boards of trustees. Despite these changes, all of these boards retained senior-level representation from denominational leaders, with the bylaws specifying a church leader as chairman of the board. Only a Seventh-day Adventist in good standing can be a hospital executive or key employee in one of these healthcare corporations. Consequently, a non-Adventist hospital expert, even the most respected in the field, cannot be the CEO (or assume other higher leadership roles) in an Adventist corporation.

The stated purpose for creating this “curtain of separation” was to protect the denomination from ascending liability and exposure to medical-related lawsuits. There was also great concern that if one of these large institutions failed, the church would be financially responsible. Today, the collective Adventist hospital groups are the largest Protestant healthcare corporations in America—although considerably smaller than the Catholic health system. And there is still an argument on the table that this remarkable growth is the result of placing the hospital administration in the hands of professionals and paying them well for what they do.

Some form of that reasoning applies to the presidents and key executives of the financially struggling Adventist postsecondary academic institutions—except by comparison, the college and university executives are paid a pennyweight.
One for All and All for One
Going on to education, there are a few private-college presidents who are getting higher salaries that are also vulnerable to criticism. According to The Chronicle of Higher Education, at least 36 earned more than $1 million in 2009. Have such exorbitant wages entered Adventist higher education in North America, including the professional schools?

This study will compare salaries of the educational executives in the professional schools embedded in the Adventist healthcare systems with those in the Adventist liberal arts institutions (essentially, both are organized into 501(c)(3) corporations). There are three professional schools: Loma Linda University, Adventist University of Health Science (formerly Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences), and Kettering College of Medical Arts. The compensation systems of the executives in these three professional schools will be compared to the liberal arts key executives in the nine Adventist higher educational institutions.

Back up a few years, it is interesting to note that in 1983 Loma Linda University tried to push open the door to improve performance and establish a more equitable wage scale for educational professors in Adventist universities and colleges. The proposal failed, apparently because Adventist colleges and universities did not generate significant surplus revenues like the hospitals. The schools are also in a squeeze to keep down the cost of education.

In 1983 LLU presented a salary study showing the disheartening wage discrepancies between the faculty on the two campuses. At the time, the La Sierra University (LSU) lower-division campus was part of LLU. The LSU faculty members doing similar teaching were paid lower wages than nonmedical basic science faculty at LLU. A biochemistry professor on the LLU campus (with less teaching and with basically the same graduate degree) was paid at least a third more than a chemistry professor at LSU. The administration at LLU proposed to correct the situation. (The professional schools at LLU for most purposes were separate from LSU.)

The study also provided comparisons with church pastors, indicating that U.S. Adventist pastors were already in the 80th percentile compared to their non-Adventist counterparts. Pastors also enjoyed a basket of nontaxable benefits not available to teachers. By comparison, Adventist educators—particularly administrators and full professors—were in the 20th percentile compared to their counterparts. After discussion the 1983 LLU study was deferred to a GC committee.

Two years later, wage concerns came up again during Autumn Council. Clifford Sorensen,
secretary of the North American Division Board of Higher Education, told the church leaders that it was “curious that when we can’t get quality people in industry, we develop incentives. But in getting professors, we say we can’t deviate from the wage scale.” Sorensen mentioned the difficulties of recruiting freshly minted doctorates seeking employment, who look for better pay and benefits at non-Adventist institutions.

By the end of the day, the educator wage discussions had bogged down. The hardening gel of pragmatism set in. It was pointed out that there were not enough disposable revenues to justify improving faculty wages, much less expecting to bring wages into parity with similar Christian institutions. The argument coming out of Annual Council criticized a second wage scale for educators. But six years later, church leaders caved in to the hospital administrators’ request to improve compensation. So in the end, the long-standing church wage continues for leaders, ministers, administrators, and faculty in the undergraduate liberal arts colleges. Table 2 shows current compensation for the three key executives in Adventist higher education.

The annual 990 tax documents also show that some Adventist campuses barely muster expenses (not shown in the tables) and are in debt to union–conference revolving funds and banks. Alumni are not heavy donors, and endowments are small by comparison. The cost of education has continued to rise. Like Adventist hospitals, the union educational institutions are also separate corporations “owned” through a membership or constituency, except for the GC institutions. These higher education boards are chaired by church leaders, and the same union conference presidents serve as trustees on the hospital boards. Institutional revenues for these schools come mostly from student tuition and fees. Significantly, a large portion of tuition revenues is actually derived through government student-aid programs ($142,336,433, according to the U.S. Department of Education in 2010). Appropriations from the organized church have not kept pace with rising costs and are significantly less than government funds. Today, more than ever, both Adventist hospitals (Medicare and Medicaid) and the postsecondary institutions (state and federal student grants and loans) depend on government largess. Both Adventist organizations use tax-exempt bonds to fund capital investments. Generally, the hospitals are more highly leveraged (in billions) than the educational institutions (in millions). The facts are that the church contributes approximately $35 to $40 million (from tithe money) to the colleges and universities against combined overall gross revenues of $752,724,100 (2010 tax documents), or roughly 4.61% of college collective revenues (a third of the church appropriations go to LLU).

Almost everywhere outside of Adventism, the total compensation to academic leaders is bumped up by offering supplemental earnings and deferred compensation, as occurs for hospital executives. For example, the president of Oregon State University, Edward Ray, has
a base salary of $260,700. But by the time all of the extras are added to the total reportable compensation, his annual salary is $587,705, including incentives created to keep improving the institution.

Link Between Executive Compensation and Performance
Based on tax reports open to public inspection, academic leaders in Adventist liberal arts colleges are not blessed with high salaries comparable to executives in Adventist healthcare educational institutions, where incentives and deferred compensation are used to recognize performance. What makes the difference? The disparity between the two classes of Adventist educational institutions is even more dramatic if you compare executive salaries in the healthcare systems (see Tables 1, 3, and 4) against the pay in the liberal arts schools (see Table 2). This may surprise some observers, since many of the same church leaders serve as overlapping trustees in both organizations.

To individuals trained in human resources who are familiar with compensation standards and systems, it appears that current incentive-pay schemes for these two educational organizations in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are inconsistent and flawed. Compensation equality should be based on substantially similar duties and responsibilities, degrees, experience, and administrative skills, etc. They are not. Professional academic leaders at Loma Linda University, Adventist University of Health Science, and Kettering College of Medical Arts receive significantly more remuneration than similarly situated academic executives in Adventist liberal arts schools. (Only the academic leaders are shown in these tables.)

Keep in mind that these postsecondary schools are an integral part of the institutional fabric of Adventism, as are the professional schools. The “educated products” from Adventist liberal art colleges may in fact become future employees of the hospitals, yet the leaders in these colleges and universities who are guiding the education of future workers are not recognized by compensation equalities. It is clear that the three professional schools pay executive wages within the “context” of the residual revenues generated by the hospitals, not according to the church wages binding other executives in the tertiary schools.

For example, in 2010 David Greenlaw, president of Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences (now known as Adventist University of Health Sciences), was listed as having been paid $471,923 on federal returns, as compared to Niels-Erik Andreasen, president of Andrews University, who reported wages of $85,430 (see Tables 2 and 3). Both presidents hold the same academic degree. Henry R. Hadley, who serves as both executive vice president for Medical Affairs at LLUAHSC and as dean of the School of Medicine at LLU, received $491,704 in 2011 (see Table 1) as compared to the dean or provost of Andrews
University, who received $76,672 in 2010 (see Table 2). Gross wage disparities also show up when the dean in the School of Dentistry at LLU is compared to the dean in the School of Medicine ($282,844 vs. $491,704) in the same institution (see Table 1). Similarly, the smaller undergraduate professional school at Kettering College of Medical Arts pays its president $361,836, matched by bonus and other incentives (see Table 4). Kettering is about the same size in head count to Union College, an Adventist liberal arts school that also offers nursing degrees and training programs for physician assistants; however, Union College’s president receives $75,450 annually (see Table 2). Apparently, the primary difference is Kettering’s affiliation with Adventist healthcare, with greater disposable or surplus revenues. Obviously, the pay structures are emblematic of medical economics.

Human resource personnel could argue that these two church organizations are essentially conducting the same business of education, but their executives are paid differently simply because there are greater surplus revenues related to healthcare. Unfortunately, this abundance is one reason why “Healthcare is eating away at our economy and our treasury.”

The church’s philosophy of remuneration in the hospitals appears bewildering to outside observers due to certain unexamined assumptions and perhaps due to ideology that advertises a claim to continue “the healing ministry of Jesus Christ.” But, for one thing, the Seventh–day Adventist Church does not actually control executive high wages in the hospital corporations. Rather, it is the individual board of trustees for each corporation, adhering to competitive forces in the healthcare marketplace. The trustees follow the recommendations of consultants and legal advisors who are not church members. In part, too, there is a mysterious fear that hospital administrators will not condescend to sacrificial wages in the heated environment of what other nonprofit hospitals are paying their executives. In other words, the traditional moorings in the Adventist social culture of working for sacrificial wages have been broken. And it all took place under the tent of spiritual counsel from the Spirit of Prophecy, including extensive writings against following worldly standards.

It is also important to comprehend that there is a certain pride (unless you believe nothing can be done under the circumstances) in Adventist higher education that salaries of administrators and professors remain sacrificial in order to maintain a shared vision of the mission of Adventist education and also to keep tuition affordable. This speaks about an educator’s willingness to accept remunerations that are lower than market rates established for Christian private institutions. Many administrators and professors in Adventist colleges accept a lower salary to the point of personal sacrifice—even greater than Adventist ministers.
What Lessons Can We Learn?

Much of the deep-seated public resentment toward executive pay in healthcare can be attributed to an awareness that tax-exempt nonprofit hospitals are community institutions paid for in large part by taxpayers. However, the attitude against high wages in Adventism is somewhat different. Criticism is colored by a cautious moral veneer that many young Adventists acquired: a belief in the cultural value of working under conditions of sacrificial wages in readiness for the second coming. For many there was a strong belief that no worker in “God’s employment” expecting to hasten this event should be paid beyond a living wage, thus providing resources sufficient to enlarge the field of workers. Some argue in more explicit terms: that it is morally wrong to pay a person exorbitant wages. Unfortunately, most people are aware that the healthcare marketplace has many hands reaching in to take a piece of the financial pie. Americans are likely to spend $2.8 trillion this year with $800 billion through Medicare insurance programs. It is what is driving the federal deficit. According to Time magazine, the healthcare industry has the means and will to keep it that way.42

“If you look into the seeds of time, and say which grain will grow, and which will not,”43 it was probably not possible to predict the extent to which executive compensation would grow after 1989. Adventist hospitals are not operating in normal free markets. Executive hiring is not open to the public, and the supply of money from the government is intended for a specific purpose to support the necessities of maintaining a workforce to deliver healthcare and sustain the organization. If high prices call forth a greater supply of goods, this benefit has to be weighed against the burden such prices impose on those least able to afford them. It is well known that individuals least able to pay are the ones (without Medicare and private insurance) being hit with the highest rates of medical care.44 If such prices pose a genuine hardship, the poor may stay away from treatment centers and hospitals.

Ultimately, in this regard, church leaders face a dilemma. Do their remuneration decisions seek to promote justice and virtue of its workforce while at the same time carrying out the “healing ministry of Jesus”? Is the upward spiral the future for Adventist healthcare, where the solution is to buy more hospitals and raise executive salaries to six and seven figures because of volume?

As we have seen, the denominational leaders in 1989 reluctantly agreed to low-end market benchmarks for hospital executives—but then along came the bonuses, incentives, supplemental retirement plans, and other perks for a few executives. Under great distress at the time, Chairman Wilson in Spring Meeting told those who opposed richly compensated
executives that anyone who objected should present viable alternatives. The trouble is that when one is in pain or facing the danger of dying, one can hardly object to an imbalance in wages by personnel who derive income from insurance or Medicare designed to pay your medical bill.

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 has served on the board of several large corporations. He was the recipient of the 2001 Michaeline A. Doyle Award.

1 This report is based on “cash” accounting, using information obtained from IRS 990 reports. Highly paid executives participate in what some call “top hat” benefits. Thus some numbers in a report may not represent what an individual took home as pay for that year or even in subsequent years. No method is without certain issues arising, because highly paid executives seek to shelter earning from taxation. The IRS designed the Form 990 to capture any possible compensation for its auditing purposes. The compensation in 2010 represents what the nonprofit corporation recognized as an economic event or in most case the cash paid to the employee in that year. At the least, this is a reasonable snapshot of what it cost the corporation to maintain employment. Adventist Executives Base Compensation Bonus & Incentive Compensation Other Reportable Compensation Retirement & Deferred Compensation Nontaxable Benefits educational executives included in the study are from U.S. colleges only, as listed by acronyms in Table 2. College executive compensation is much easier to identify, because it is simpler and they are not trying to shelter income.

2 Data open to public inspection was obtained from the IRS 990 tax document filed in 2010 from each of the regional healthcare corporations that make up the Adventist hospital system. These include Kettering Adventist Healthcare; Adventist Health System/West; Adventist HealthCare (Maryland); Adventist Health System Sunbelt Healthcare Corporation; Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences; Loma Linda University Adventist Health Sciences Center; and Portercare Adventist Health System.


4 Sharon Anderson Wilson, “Health–Care Pay Scale Stirs Controversy,” Adventist Review (Special Report), April 13, 2000, pp. 19–23 (http://www.adventistreview.org/thisweek/storyhealth.htm). Until 1968 every employee in the Adventist Church was paid a living wage without consideration of local or competitive wages. Nurses were the first to be given an exception. Then in 1978 most other employees in Adventist hospitals—other than top administrators—were shifted to community rates.
7David D. Dennis, Fatal Accounts: The Audacity of an Adventist Auditor’s Quest for Transparency (Riverside, CA: Adventist Today, 2009), p. 44.
9Spangler and Newman, p. 25.
13ibid., p. 25.
14ibid., p. 24.
15ibid., p. 25.
17Spangler and Newman, p. 23.
18No matter what you call the compensation, it is still money removed from the hospital revenues to fund the total wages of the executives. Even deferred nontaxable wages will eventually end up in the pockets of the executives.
20Avram Goldstein, “Troubled Hospital Gave Out Big Raises,” Washington Post, Dec. 1, 1999. The executive compensation levels reported on the 990 tax documents appear difficult to interpret because these are reportable wages, not just W-2. Accountants argue that whether it is taxable or not, the totals should be viewed as money removed from the system that does not go to the charitable purposes of the institution.
23“Philosophy of Remuneration,” North American Division Remuneration Book (Office of

24The 990 tax document reads in part that Adventist Health System Sunbelt Healthcare Corporation (AHSSHC) is “operated, supervised, or controlled by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist in accordance with 509(a) (3)(B)(1).”


26See the 990 tax documents (2010) from Adventist Health System/Sunbelt, Inc. and Adventist Health System Sunbelt Healthcare Corporation.


28Kisken and Wilson, p. 3.

29ibid.

30ibid.

31The IRS 990 tax document was the source for the data used in this article. 32ibid.


33ibid.

34ibid.

35ibid.

36Nanette Asimov, “UC Sees Rise in High Earners Despite Money Struggles,” San Francisco Chronicle, Aug. 27, 2011. According to UC Executive Vice President Nathan E. Brostrom, UC has a $22 billion annual budget at its 10 campuses, three national laboratories, and five medical centers.


38Freundlich, p. 3.


42ibid., p. 20.

43William Shakespeare, quoted from his play Macbeth, Scene III.

44Brill, p. 22.
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Virginia Church Launches Adventist Experiment with Multi-site Church Planting

Submitted: Apr 7, 2013

By Jeff Boyd, Assistant Editor
Community Praise Center (CPC) is a Seventh-day Adventist congregation in Alexandria, Virginia, with a weekly attendance of 1,200. March 30 it launched a second campus in another suburb of Washington DC. This marked the beginning of one of the first multi-site church growth strategies in the denomination.

Pastor Jennifer Deans and her ministry team began Sabbath services at the new campus near Dulles International Airport in November to prepare for the official Easter weekend debut, which featured streaming a portion of the service from the main campus. Deans will continue to preach at CPC-Dulles, though live-streaming of sermons by Senior Pastor Henry Wright will be used once or twice a month.

This is not the first time CPC has launched a new ministry. In 2006, CPC planted Restoration Praise Center in Maryland, which now has about 600 members and yearly tithe of $1 million. As CPC continued to grow after the Maryland church plant, its main building in Alexandria again became crowded. “The New Testament model is to spread truth here and there,” not to concentrate people in one building, explains Wright. Rather than construct a larger building, Pastor Dean Waterman was brought onto the pastoral team to coordinate additional church plants.
The new location near Dulles was selected for two primary reasons. First, the neighborhood met the criteria set by the Potomac Conference Vision 2020, which calls for each community or people group with a population of 20,000 or more to have an Adventist presence by the end of the decade. Secondly, about 60 CPC members already lived in the area. These 60 members could provide the core of the new congregation however they maintained a high level of commitment to CPC and desired to remain connected to it. With an awareness of the growing trend in America toward multi-site churches, Waterman then advocated the launch of a sister campus rather than an independent church plant.

The multi-campus model offers a number of potential advantages, Waterman points out. With multiple pastors on staff, Deans can invite other leaders to train church members in specific skill areas or provide other needed resources. For example, she arranged for the CPC Minister of Worship to train CPC-Dulles members in leading music and worship. This model also allows one budget with multiple sites. Furthermore, the location itself is important, allowing CPC members to bring friends to a local event, rather than driving to another community. “We opened a new site not to make the drive shorter for current members, but to make the drive shorter for bringing friends and neighbors,” says Waterman.

Additionally, each campus can be flexible in order to fit the context of the local community. For instance, CPC is primarily an African American congregation, but CPC-Dulles is reaching out to a multi-cultural community. To increase interaction with the local community, the congregation is researching local service partnerships. At Christmas, members walked through two local malls handing out encouragement cards, praying with people and giving donations to families in need.

Although most outreach efforts to date have focused on Adventists—announcements were sent to 400 Adventists in the area who have no local membership—there are already 10 to 15 people worshiping at CPC-Dulles who do not have a background in the Adventist Church. Additional outreach ideas are under discussion.

Finances are a critical component of this ministry model. CPC has invested $300,000 in HD video equipment, allowing the congregation to share content with outlets such as the Hope Channel, TBN and local television. Waterman stresses that smaller congregations that wish to grow by using this model could purchase less expensive streaming systems that would be suitable for most purposes, possibly for as little as $3,000 to $4,000.
“Technology is important, but not the most important thing,” explains Waterman, emphasizing that being a healthy congregation and having a vision for making disciples are both more important. Wright makes this same point. “The idea is to transplant the DNA of a successful, growing church from one place to another. To do this you need a dynamic, growing congregation so the DNA you plant is also dynamic. A dead church can’t do this. It must be alive. Members bring dynamism with them.”

CPC leaders acknowledge that at least two other Adventist attempts at a multi-campus approach proved to not be sustainable, though the model has been effective in other denominations and non-denominational churches. “We are learning as we go. Tweaking as we go,” says Wright. If this ministry experiment is successful, CPC plans to open two more campuses in Clinton, Maryland, and Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

In addition to new locations, CPC is expanding its online presence in the form of an Online Campus, where users will have access to an eBible, counseling service, a chat room, and a place to share prayer requests. Wright’s sermons are currently viewed online in 95 countries, causing church leaders to consider how to provide for the spiritual needs of these remote viewers. The Online Campus will allow people to be active members regardless of their geographic location.

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Teacher at Adventist Secondary School Awarded an Einstein Fellowship at the National Science Foundation

Submitted: Apr 10, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

Ophelia Barizo, who teaches science courses as part of the faculty at Highland View Academy in Hagerstown, Maryland, has been awarded an Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship at the National Science Foundation (NSF). She will serve for 11 months starting September 1 (2013) in the Emerging Frontiers in Research Innovation Division under the supervision of Rosemarie Wesson.

Just 27 educators science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) across the nation have been selected for this year’s Einstein Fellowships. Each will work in a United States government science agency for the year of their fellowship and then return to regular teaching positions. All of the educators are classroom teachers in elementary and secondary schools.

The program is administered by the Triangle Coalition for Science and Technology Education, a nonprofit consortium, for the Federal Department of Energy. It was created by Congress in 1994 and includes the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration (NOAA), as well as NSF. The fellowships enrich the teaching of the educators and provide practical insight for science administrators regarding the STEM education of American young people.
Highland View Academy is the residential secondary school operated by the Chesapeake Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It currently has an enrollment of 116 students in grades nine through twelve. Barizo teaches biology, chemistry, environmental science and forensic science at the school, where she has been a teacher for more than 16 years. She also taught art classes for four years.

Barizo was recognized by the National Science Teachers Association last year as one of two teachers at the high school level honored for creating contemporary, effective STEM curriculum in the classroom, according to PASCO, one of the largest companies dedicated to educational technology. In partnership with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation her students use sensor technology to gather data on water quality, monitor dissolved oxygen, pH and salinity to learn about environmental issues in their community and develop possible solutions.

Barizo also won the 2012 Shell Science Lab Challenge in her region for the mushroom project her environmental science students do each year. She has raised some $750,000 in grant funding for the school’s science projects, technology, textbooks, field trips, native trees and perennials and professional development for teachers. She and her environmental science class are featured in Pearson Education's 2011 Environmental Science textbook. She has a master’s degree in chemistry from Ateneo de Manila University and a master’s in teaching from McMaster University in Canada.

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Will Oakwood University win Home Depot’s $50,000 online contest?

Submitted: Apr 10, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

By this time every Seventh-day Adventist in North America must have heard that Oakwood University hopes to round up the largest number of votes in the Retool Your School contest being conducted by the Home Depot chain of stores in collaboration with the Historically Black Colleges and Universities. It involves getting the word out to supporters and convincing them to go to the national company’s web site and click the right button. Of course, it also means that supporters have to be willing to wade through some of the company’s ads.

Because of the historic practice among Adventists to stay away from commercial activity on the Sabbath, Oakwood’s spokespersons have been suggesting that their alumni, students, family members and friends not click from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Consequently other schools have surged ahead on Saturdays, but so far Oakwood has regained the lead each Sunday. Oakwood is one of the smallest institutions in the category, less than half the size of the school in second place.

The last day to help Oakwood University win a prize is April 15 when many Americans will be distracted by a different responsibility—the deadline to submit income tax returns. Oakwood is viewing this as a “David and Goliath” story, according to a news release from the denomination’s North American Division. As the only historically African American higher education institution in the Adventist movement, Oakwood has been an underdog since it began as an agricultural and technical school in the 19th century.
If the university wins the $50,000 first prize, it will use the funds to construct an outdoor pavilion and kitchen so that it can share its campus with visitors and neighbors. If it wins the $25,000 second prize, the plan is to use the funds to install a watering system for the sports fields.

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Adventist Today receives Award from Associated Church Press

Submitted: Apr 9, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

One of the Christian publishing industry’s top awards was given to Adventist Today last week for the November–December 2012 issue with a cover article on “Aesthetics and Intelligent Design.” Adventist Today was given an Award of Merit by the Associated Church Pres (ACP) at its annual awards banquet on April 4.

Most of the Protestant and Catholic periodicals, including web–based publications, are members of ACP, as is Adventist Today. “Many Adventist magazines belong,” explained Adventist Today editor J. David Newman, including the Adventist Review, Ministry and many of the union conference papers. This is the second time Adventist Today has received an award from ACP. “Our designer is Chris Komisar,” Newman noted, who had a key role in winning this year’s award.

The joint staff that produces the Adventist Review and Adventist World announced yesterday that they received nine and two awards, respectively. Together, the two publish on a weekly schedule so they have more issues to submit to ACP. Ministry, the Journal of Adventist Education and the Canadian Adventist Messenger also won awards this year.

The other periodicals are published by various organizations within the denomination’s structure. Adventist Today is published by an independent foundation with the sole purpose of providing quality journalism and a full range of opinion for the Adventist movement, as...
well as space for poetry, creative writing and the arts.

Subscribers to Adventist Today receive the quarterly journal. Those who purchase an electronic subscription can download a PDF of the print magazine at the same time that it is mailed to regular subscribers and donors. The weekly Email AT Update with news headlines is available free to anyone who signs up with an Email address.

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What Really Happened on Mt. Sinai? – Answers

Submitted: Apr 3, 2013

By Andy Hanson

Andy Hanson supplies the answers.

Since no one took the Official Sinai Quiz I posted on March 13, I have not been able to share my title of Sinai Scholar with anyone else. For those of you aspiring biblical researchers who are at least curious enough to read the answers, I have provided them, courtesy of the New International translation.

THE OFFICIAL SINAI QUIZ

1. How many times did Moses climb Mt. Sinai? 9

2. Did Moses climb the mountain alone? If not, what was the total number of people that climbed with him? Not always; 74

3. How long was his longest stay on the mountain? Did he do it more than once? 40 days and nights; twice

4. Where was Moses when God uttered the Ten Commandments? Is there more than one version? He was standing with the Israelites at the foot of Sinai.

(The first commandments were given to Moses, written by the finger of God on stone tablets near the top of the mountain. Moses broke those tablets when he witnessed the Golden Calf party.)

5. How many commandments did God give to Moses on Mt. Sinai? Two versions of the Ten Commandments—Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5—along with 13 laws regarding servants, 11 personal injury laws, 8 property protection laws, 11 social responsibility
laws, 6 laws pertaining to justice and mercy, 2 additional Sabbath laws, 10 annual festival laws, and 5 additional laws recorded in Exodus 34

6. Where was Joshua when Moses received the original tablets of stone? Somewhere on Sinai, but not with Moses

7. What happened to the Golden Calf when Moses returned? It was reduced to powder, mixed with water. The Israelites were then forced to drink it.

8. Did God punish Aaron for his role in the Golden Calf debacle? No

9. Who first informed Moses that there was a Calf party going on? God

10. How was Israel punished for their worship of the Golden Calf? 3000 Israelites were hacked to death by Levites and then the rest of the population was decimated by a plague.

11. Did Moses ever get a good look at God? If he did, did anyone else? Yes; along with 70 Elders, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu. He also spoke to God “face to face” in the Tent of Meeting.

12. Was there a banquet on Mr. Sinai? If there was, who attended? Yes; God, 70 Elders, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu

13. How many times did Moses persuade God to change his mind? Three

14. In what capacity did angels assist Israel during and after this time period? At least one angel was charged by God to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. He was tasked to be Moses’ counselor as God gradually wiped out the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, and Girgashites. Hornets were to assist in “driving out” the Hivites, Canaanites, Hittites, and Jebusites.

15. When Moses was not on Mt. Sinai, where did he go to speak to God? Who sometimes accompanied him? The Tent of Meeting; Joshua

16. What’s wrong with the usual depiction of the Ten Commandments Moses carried down from Mr. Sinai? There were two separate tablets of stone, not one two-headed stone separating the first four and the last six commandments.
Post Script: Jack's Last Words on Old Earth Creationism

Submitted: Apr 10, 2013
By Jack Hoehn

Since 2011 I have been blogging on this Adventist Today web-site about how Adventists (and other Christians who believe Jesus Christ is a historical reality that they personally or intellectually have proved) can understand how Jesus created in a manner consistent with the physical evidence. I have suggested ways that the revelatory commentary on nature and science by Moses to Isaiah to John to Ellen White can be understood in new and perhaps more helpful ways in the 21st century than in previous centuries.

I have suggested that physics, chemistry, biology, geology, astronomy, anthropology, medicine, and psychology could be understood as explanatory to revelation. I maintain that instead of attacking solid and honest science, we could use scientific truth to refine our Biblical opinions on the details of creation.

I also believe that the Adventist Great Controversy teaching holds the theological key to understanding the true history of life on earth. I think I have said enough to make the point that real Seventh-day Adventist believers who live an Adventist life style and value and support Adventism, can do so with an Old Earth Creationism that disagrees with a Young Earth Creationism being demanded by some of our Adventist administrators, popular speakers, and theologians. (Adventist pastors, educators, and scientists on the other hand are much quieter about this, due perhaps to more familiarity with the real world and the real evidence.) It is a question of chronology, it is a question of how to understand Biblical inspiration, it is a question of what to do with Ellen White’s inspiration.

Gentle Readers versus Not-always-gentle Commenters

Some of these blogs have had 100 or 200 responses from as many as 20 or 30 different correspondents. During this same time A-today website has had as many as 100,000 readers in a month (not all mine of course) but the point is that there is a large readership that are a silent audience.

Since many more read these blogs than comment on them, I am now, at the close of my articles, asking the silent reader audience to remember when they read that some of the comments to these blogs come from individuals who have been led far from basic Christianity by their acceptance of scientism or naturalism as a replacement for orthodox Christian beliefs. They still have an attachment to believers by tradition, or perhaps a desire to ratify their defection from the faith when others come to agree with them? Others are trying to be little saviors themselves and wish to rescue us from our folly. That may be kind of them, but really most Adventists do not want to be rescued from the real Savior. We are trying to understand Him, not dump him. (See endnote (1) for a funny comment on former-Adventists told to me many years ago by Adventist theologian Edward Heppenstall.)

A Theology of Fear?

On the opposite side as you read you will find comments that come from concerned SDA individuals (many who use pseudonyms) who suggest that all who try to reinterpret the Bible teachings will come to the same “Christ was a good teacher, but not God” end, “so don’t go there.” This theology of fear has been the official teaching of the Adventist Review and our Sabbath School Lessons for over a decade. If you accept the teachings of science, you too will become an atheist, is the cry. I have tried to call back to these right wing Adventist voices, if you don’t accept the truths of science, you will be making atheists of many others!

Rigid dogmatism on the details of creation, a blind but selective literalism in reading the Bible, rejection of the facts of science instead of offering an alternative theology of science will destroy this church. You surely think you are defending Truth, or the Bible, or the Church from heresy, so we thank you for your good intentions. But in fact you are the Truth’s, the Bible’s, and the Church’s worst friends. Creedalism, Rigid Orthodoxy, Tradition is not the Adventist way. We were a movement called to oppose those tendencies. Making Ellen White to be infallible is idolatry! Making your understanding of the Bible and your preferred way of understanding Creation and the history of life on earth the obligatory standard for all, is not an exaltation of truth, it is an exaltation of self.

Trying to enforce your ideas on the chronology of creation by votes at the next General Conference or actions by institutional boards or by pressure on our institutions or the teachers in our schools, on scientists and biologists and geologists and physicists and physician members in our churches, by firing them or disfellowshipping them or censoring any mention of alternative ideas in our official publications is the spirit of popery. You have become the Jesuits you fear.

Jack’s agenda
I do have an agenda. I close with it.

1. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Creator of heaven and earth and all that in them is. He is the Savior of the world, and belief in Him is our only hope of rescue from eternal death.

1. Seventh-day Adventist were called by God to come out of error and to promote truth. We did so in 1844 in a fallible and error-fraught way, learning subsequently from our mistakes. Truth is progressive and we are required to continue to move and adjust our understandings when newer views correct previous misunderstandings. God intended for Adventism to be the religion of the world, and not a narrow sect. It is not God who is encouraging us to become rigid and narrow in doctrine or practice. Adventism does not need to replace other religions, but we should be able to bless all religions, and make them better. There are 12 gates into the New Jerusalem. I highly value my Adventist gate into Heaven, and wish to keep it wide open and welcoming for others, but I have no desire to close the other 11 gates.

1. The Bible is the inspired word about God and is true but not inerrant. These writings have been preserved for us, but were not written to us, and these books need to be understood in the context of the time and place they were written, and the talents of their writers and subsequent editors. Obviously-inspired Ellen White is not inerrant but she is consistently truthful even when she was not always accurate. Belief in the Bible or in Ellen White is not necessary for salvation, although belief in the God they testify to is. We are saved by faith in Christ, not by faith in Genesis or in Patriarch and Prophets.

2. A simple chronology of creation is compatible with belief in God and acceptance of His plan of salvation. But so is a complex chronology of a longer-term creation. The Bible has no authority to dictate how God created or when. Ellen White has no authority to dictate how God created or when. The General Conference in session by vote has no authority to dictate how God created or when. Only God has the authority to create how and when he wishes and to reveal to us through physical evidence, logical inference, and inspired revelation clues to when and how He has created.

1. We need Adventist theologians to be freed from dogmatism to explore better ways of expressing the doctrine of Creation. We need Adventist scientists to be free to explore alternative chronologies and mechanisms of Creation. We need Adventist schools and teachers to become seedbeds to nurture thought and reflection on larger ideas of creation in Adventist students. Our institutions should host Christian thought leaders including Theistic Evolutionists like: Francis S. Collins (2) and Keith B. Miller (3); Intelligent Design theorists like: Stephen C. Meyers (4), Michael J. Behe (5), or Casey Luskin (6); Old Earth Creationists like: Hugh Ross (7) and Fuzz Rana (8); and world Christian thought leaders like John C. Lenox (9) or Peter Hitchens (10); to engage in constructive Creation dialogue with our scientists and theologians. (These names in the footnotes also serve as an excellent introductory reading list for those willing to engage their minds in the Christian discussion of a broader Creationism than 144 hours a short time ago.)

1. Please don’t agree with me until you are convinced by your own study and prayer that this is right. But please don’t try to stop the discussions in an open and vigorous Adventism, trying to move forward towards the truth as it is in Jesus. Let your leaders know that you do not want Creationism to be dogmatized by rewriting our fundamental belief # 6. Let your teachers know you want them to teach all the truths about creation to your children. Let them understand all the different Christian views on creation, and that the Adventist position is we move to a better understanding of truth, when it becomes clear to us.

Thank you for listening to me for these many months.

"And for Adventism’s sake stop being a fossil about fossils," he concluded with a smile and a sigh.....

Jack Hoehn (11)

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(1) In 1969 or 1970 Jack had a conversation with Dr. Edward Heppenstall who was then teaching at Loma Linda University, asking him why those who had left Adventism often hung around its edges sniping at it. “Jack,” he said in his lovely slow British brogue, “Jack, It’s like the policeman who was walking down the block when a small boy came running towards him crying at the top of his voice. He tried to catch the little chap, but missed him, so shrugging his shoulders the policeman continued on down the street. A few moments later the same little boy still running as fast as he could but crying out loud came towards the policeman again. This time he caught the child in his arms, and picking him up said, “Now sonny, what’s the matter with you?” The little boy caught his breath and then sobbed, “I’m running away from home, but my mother won’t let me cross the street!” ”

(2) Francis S. Collins, “The Language of God” (A genetic scientist presents evidence for belief as a Christian Evolutionist. Not my favorite, but worth a hearing.)

(3) Keith B. Miller, “Perspectives on an Evolving Creation” (Editor with multiple contributors. Puts more Christian into Theistic Evolution than others have.)

(4) Stephen C. Meyers, “Signature in the Cell” (DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design—We are not making these things up, no God of the gaps
(5) Michael J. Behe, *The Edge of Evolution* (The Search for the Limits of Darwinism—ID Science at its best.)

(6) Casey Luskin et al, *Science and Human Origins* (The Discovery Institute Center for Science and Culture. I’m told Casey has an Adventist wife, absolute proof of his keen intelligence! His website is [http://www.discovery.org](http://www.discovery.org))

(7) Hugh Ross, *Why the Universe is the Way It Is* (Reasons to Believe founder and most impressive proponent. Many, many resources at his website [http://www.reasons.org](http://www.reasons.org))

(8) Fazale Rana, *Who was Adam?* (A Creation Model Approach to the Origin of Man, what to do with Humanoids, Neanderthals and Genesis.)

(9) John C. Lennox, *Seven Days that Divide the World* (The Beginning According to Genesis and Science, another Oxford Don in intelligent but sincere love with Jesus.)

(10) Peter Hitchens, *The Rage Against God* (How Atheism led me to Faith, unlike his more famous brother Christopher).

(11) Please contact Dr. Hoehn directly if you wish to ask questions or have personal concerns. John B. Hoehn, M.D., 176 Iris Lane, Walla Walla, WA 99362. E-mail—drhoehn@msn.com

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Silence

Submitted: Apr 10, 2013

By Debbonaire Kovacs

Joan Chittister writes:

Silence. . . brings us beyond the noise of chaos and clutter and confusion of a spinning world to the cool, calm center of the spiritual self. The Monastery of the Heart, Ch. 5

David writes:

My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from him. (Ps. 62:5)

God, speaking through Isaiah, says:

Coastlands, listen to me in silence, and let the peoples gain new strength; let them come forward, then let them speak. (Is. 41:1, emphasis added.)

I have often noticed that some Christians—well, many people, Christian or not!—seem to be afraid of silence. I think that to come before God with our prayers, speak them all, then say Amen and go away is rude. God wants to speak to us, too, and he’d like the courtesy of a
hearing.

Along with a large dose of humility.

What have you heard or felt in the silence this week?

________________________Join in the discussion:

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The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches from the Fault Line Between Christianity and Islam

By Eliza Griswold
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010
Book Review by Edwin A. Schwisow
I remember the night precisely—Thursday, December 20 at the Sports Palace (Palacio de Deportes) in Mexico City. The Seventh-day Adventist Panamerican Youth Congress of 1984 had just opened, and Neal C. Wilson was addressing a near-capacity assembly of 18-35-year-olds in the cavernous echo chamber-of-a-building better known for hosting Olympic soccer in 1968. Now, 16 years later, the stadium still reverberated with national pride—as did the nearly unintelligible caroming words of Wilson, CEO of world Adventism, as he gave one of the strangest speeches I had ever heard from the lips of a General Conference official.

His was a message of disquiet and near-desperation—he said that, far from having carried the gospel to the very corners of the world, in fact most of the world's inhabitants had never heard of Jesus as Savior, let alone of Seventh-day Adventists as the end-time remnant. Really! I thought. What is he trying to do, depress us to the depths of despair? All my life I had heard that the “work was almost finished, and Jesus could come any day.” Now this!

Wilson told us youth that evening that to reach the billions yet unreached, we must devise a "Global Strategy" to reach particularly the heavily non-Christian sectors of the globe around the equator, known as the 10/40 window. It would be most difficult, he said, but it had to be done before Jesus could appear in the clouds of heaven.

The speech seemed to fall flat, though out of courtesy for the man and his office, we all stayed by until closing prayer. Would we ever hear about "Global Strategy" again? Indeed we would, and we have been hearing about it ever since (now known as Global Mission), though certainly not with the complex anthropologically underpinnings documented in the book “The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches From the Fault Line Between Christianity and Islam.”

Written by Harvard University Nieman Fellow Eliza Griswold, “Tenth Parallel” provides a postgraduate course in the deeper issues behind the reasons Christianity in general has fallen so woefully short within the window 10 degrees north of the equator in Africa and Asia. (The tenth parallel—the line of latitude 700 miles north of the equator—is where Christianity and Islam often collide. More than half of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims live here, as do 60 percent of the world's 2 billion Christians. The conflict is shaping the future of each faith.)

This is an area of encroaching deserts and hot contest between tribal traditions defined loosely by Islam and Christianity. Here religion far from being a strict issue of the heart,
is a life-and-death political choice, where a family or tribe that converts is seen as a traitor to everything good in its long-held traditions. But the biggest issue is the encroachment of deserts on arable farmland and the increasing unpredictability of seasonal rains. When every square centimeter of shrinking farmland is being contested to the death, and converts to an opposing faith are routinely marked for murder, "reaching the Muslims for Christ" becomes a task beyond the ken of normal human understanding and empathy.

These elements of the contest are not routinely discussed in church mission reports, but they must be recognized if we are to squarely face the reality of the task, as evangelical Christianity increasingly resorts to "Prosperity Gospel" in Africa, promising riches untold to those who come over to Christ's side, urged by preachers worth millions of dollars and being driven about in the best vehicles Rolls Royce can manufacture.

The task now seems far greater than it did 30 years ago in Mexico City. Islam and Christianity appear more antagonistic than ever, grappling primarily in a contest exacerbated by encroaching deserts and crop failures in formerly richly cultivated lands. It's easy within this context to blame the other side for the curse of God and call for its extermination.

That during the past 30 years the Adventist Church has recognized the companion need of enhancing its development-and-relief program is indeed a point in our favor. But even so, Global Mission appears to need far more funding and human resources than once imagined. It's a great challenge for which our traditional process of missionary endeavor seems inadequate. “Tenth Parallel” is a book researched and written by an on-site academic who traveled about extensively for seven years, interviewing Christians and Muslims alike, in-depth, seeking the keys to the area's future.

In 1984 the term "Global Warming" was meaningless. Now, it is impacting the equatorial regions with pivotal consequences. Griswold's book, available at reduced price in hardback, is a worthy investment in Sabbath-afternoon reading as the days lengthen in the northern hemisphere and we ponder anew why the Lord appears to delay His return and what ought to be done about it, from the human perspective.
Take 6 25th Anniversary

Submitted: Apr 10, 2013
By Debonnaire Kovacs

Recipe for Success: Take six men with amazing voices (Claude McKnight, Mark Kibble, Joel Kibble, Dave Thomas, Alvin Chea and Khristian Dentley though they have included a couple of others over the years), and put them in a recording room. Add “crystal clear harmony, . . . syncopated rhythms, innovative arrangements, and funky grooves that bubble into an intoxicating brew of gospel, jazz, R&B, and pop.” (www.take6.com) What do you get?

“The baddest vocal cats on the planet!” according to Quincy Jones, trumpeter, composer, arranger, record and television producer, and American icon for over 60 years. And he’s not the only one. Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, Brian Wilson, Ella Fitzgerald and Whitney Houston are among those who consider this group the pre-eminent a cappella group in the world.

This year Take 6 is celebrating their 25th anniversary, so Atoday is here posting a short history—in reverse. (If you like your history chronological, you should read this article from the bottom up!)

The group is not only celebrating their first-ever album, Take 6, they are also re-cutting it for re-release later this year. The 25th anniversary tour so far includes concerts in Colorado, California, New York, and Europe. But they may also show up in Huntsville, Alabama later this year, perhaps even at Oakwood University, where their roots were first nourished, back when it was Oakwood College.

According to www.al.com, Founding member Claude McKnight said, “There are some songs on [that first album] that we don’t do at all in concert anymore, so to re-record them, their original arrangements, and to get those songs back under our belt has been more than a notion, but it’s been very, very cool and a nostalgic thing for us.”

Recent Events According to the group's website, "Take 6 triumphed among a gathering of stars including Celine Dion, Lionel Ritchie, Justin Timberlake, Stevie Nicks, Ne-Yo, and more. At Walmart's 50th Anniversary celebration, Take 6 captivated the audience with their rendition of the Louis Armstrong hit, What A Wonderful World. Showing the global reach of this phenomenal group, Take 6 closed the show with Ladysmith Black Mambazo to a standing ovation! Two weeks later at the behest of legendary Producer Phil Ramone, Take 6 thrilled a sold-out audience at the Songwriters Hall of Fame"
Awards performing with and honoring legendary singer-songwriter Ben E. King on his classic 'Stand By Me.' As a group that knows no musical bounds, they then brought the house down with their tribute to folk icon Woody Guthrie with This Land Is Your Land.”

**Rewards through the years** Take 6 is the most awarded vocal group in history. They have received ten Grammy’s, ten Doves, a Soul Train Award, two NAACP Image Award nominations, and according to the Wikipedia article on the group, “have collaborated with other artists such as Stevie Wonder, Whitney Houston, Don Henley, Ray Charles, Queen Latifah, Joe Sample, Quincy Jones, Marcus Miller, Brian McKnight, Gordon Goodwin, k. d. lang, Luis Miguel, Ben Tankard, Al Jarreau, and CeCe Winans.”

**2001** During a Black Music Month celebration, Take 6 performed for President George W. and Laura Bush at the White House.

**1988**, shortly after the group changed their name to the one they have kept, their self-titled debut CD wowed pop and jazz critics, scored two 1988 Grammy Awards, and made the Top Ten Billboard Contemporary Jazz and Contemporary Christian Charts.

**1987** The group, called Alliance, signed with Reprise Records/Warner Brothers. They learned that there was another group with rights to that name, so they had to change it—not for the first time. According to McKnight, "Take 6 was all about a democratic process of sitting in a room together and throwing a couple of hundred names at each other and Take 6 was the one that got the most yay votes [laughing.] It pretty much was a play on the Take 5 jazz standard and the fact that there are six of us in the group, so it became Take 6."

**1980** It all began in the bathroom. . . At Freshman Estates, the freshmen men’s dorm at Oakwood College, McKnight searched among his classmates for voices to form a quartet, which they called the Gentlemen’s Estates Quartet. Tenor Mark Kibble reportedly heard them rehearsing in a bathroom (where else do you get such great acoustics?) and joined them for that evening’s performance, adding a fifth harmonious voice. Later, Mervyn Warren joined them, and (since they were no longer either four or freshmen) they named themselves Alliance.

**In the beginning. . .** Actually, of course, the foundations of the group began long before. The original members were all raised in Seventh-day Adventist homes, all taught the principles they now consider the foundation of their group and reason for their long success: “faith, friendship, respect, and love of music.” (take6.com)
When al.com asked McKnight why Oakwood has been “such fertile ground for singing talent (including a cappella group Committed and McKnight’s brother, Grammy-nominated R&B singer Brian McKnight, Claude says, ‘What has happened for many, many years is that people from all around the world have gone to this college. Thirty or 40 different countries are represented at Oakwood at any given time, even though there are probably only 1,500 or 2,000 students there at any given time as well. It's a small, concentrated pool. The Seventh Day Adventist religion is very conservative, or has been in people's upbringing. So there's kind of less emphasis on rhythms and instruments as much, and more emphasis on harmonies. So there are always choirs and quartets and trios and all manner of groups on campus.’”

More info:
www.take6.com
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Take_6
http://www.al.com/entertainment/index.ssf/2013/04/take_6_by_the_numbers_grammy_w.html
And of course there are lots of clips on youtube where you can see and hear Take 6 doing what they do best.
Introduction

This book is an experiential journey, with the Bible as its own interpreter, through the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12. It is my desire that, in addition to considering these messages as heaven’s inspired warnings about the last-day events and issues of the great controversy prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ, you will also look upon these messages as God’s medicine for your own life. To know about the deceptiveness of last-day political and religious movements, to know the timetable of future prophetic events, is of only limited value unless you are also able to detect and overcome the Babylon and beast ‘viruses’ within your own life now. Failure to treat these ‘viruses’ now will seriously impair your spiritual immune system, and thus compromise your ability to resist all the last-day attacks of the enemy on your life.

The motivation and inspiration for this book comes from two statements in the writings of Ellen G. White. In the years following the 1888 General Conference in Minneapolis a great deal of resistance arose against the plain teachings of the gospel of God’s grace as the sole basis of salvation. As Ellen White responded to this agitation, she pointed out that there was more to the third angel’s message of Revelation 14 than many had previously considered.

“Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel's message, and I have answered, ‘It is the third angel's message in verity.’” [1]

She also wrote about the crucial importance of the gospel doctrine of justification by faith alone (imputed righteousness) in this way:

“The thought that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not because of any merit on our part, but as a free gift from God, is a precious thought. The enemy of God and man is not willing that this truth should be clearly presented; for he knows that if the people receive it fully, his power will be broken” [2].

In full agreement with these statements, I submit that the resisting and breaking of the power of the enemy is far more dependent on the past redemptive event of the death of Christ on Calvary’s cross than on our vigilance about current and future events. The secret of a certain future victory is found in our embracing of Christ’s victory at Calvary’s cross, and in receiving all the benefits that flow to us from that cross. “Jesus, keep me near the cross, there a precious fountain; free to all a healing stream, flows from Calv'ry’s mountain.” [3]
I am indebted to two writers, who in the 1970s and 1980s, started opening the box of the three angels’ messages to powerfully illuminate the solid experiential gospel elements therein. I refer to Morris Venden’s *The Three Angels Messages* [4] and Robert J. Spangler’s *Marked.* [5]

These books, along with the previously mentioned statements by Ellen White, in their approach to the Scriptures are fully supportive of the historical-prophetic applications to both past history and in the unfulfilled event still to come. Additionally, the authors of these books challenged readers to dig deeper in the mines of the Scriptures to let the Bible be its own interpreter in the ongoing work of decoding these messages and in making practical applications to everyday living in preparation for the soon coming of Christ.

Unless you personally know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, your alertness to current end-time events will not of itself provide the necessary and adequate preparation for Christ’s return. Using railway terminology, we could put it this way: “Knowing the timetable is not enough; you must also know the Conductor.” There may be some who maintain that raising our fear level through currently breaking news is exactly what is most needed at this time. But fear is of only limited value in maintaining a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ. When the sensational elements evaporate, so does a genuine, lasting revival.

Writing about the limitations of such fear, Ellen White noted that “the shortness of time is frequently urged as an incentive for seeking righteousness and making Christ our friend. This should not be the great motive with us; for it savors of selfishness. Is it necessary that the terrors of the day of God should be held before us, that we may be compelled to right action through fear? It ought not to be so. Jesus is attractive. He is full of love, mercy, and compassion. He proposes to be our friend, to walk with us through all the rough pathways of life.” [5] In accord with this, and with Revelation itself, I urge that we consider Revelation as first and foremost the “revelation of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:1).

As you survey current world events, there can be no doubt that our redemption is nearer than when we first believed (Rom. 13:11), and that the continual fulfillment of the prophetic waymarks indicate that our journey is almost o’er. Now is the time to replace unhealthy fears with the assurance of the solid hope we have in Jesus.

It is my prayer that this study will lead you to know more of God’s truths as found in the three angels’ messages, not just as correct doctrinal and prophetic information, but as His personally prescribed medicine for your own life. Is it possible that the Babylon and the beast ‘viruses,’ residing in the lies of the enemy, may be present in your own life, even without your knowledge, thus making you susceptible to final end-time deceptions? Now is the time to replace all the subtle lies of the enemy with the powerfully penetrating truths of God’s word, for He “desires truth in the inward parts” (Psalm 51:6) so that you will develop in your life an impenetrable immunity against all of Satan’s deceptions.

As we survey God’s leading in the church’s history since 1844, we can without hesitation acknowledge that the Seventh-day Adventist Church had its birth in believing that the three angels’ messages contained God’s marching orders to take the everlasting gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue and people. Our pioneers heard and heeded these words, and the Seventh-day
Adventist church became a worldwide movement. We have geographically gone into much un-entered territory—far and wide. Now is the time to explore the deep and still un-entered territories in our own lives, to let the Scriptures as God’s MRI scanner expose the deep, hidden and unknown parts of our own lives. “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). Only the Great Physician, Jesus Christ, can do this work for us. As you listen to His voice speaking to you through this most familiar Bible passage of Revelation 14, I pray that you will grow in a renewed understanding and appropriation of His offer to give you the benefits of His complete victory in Christ—now!

As you read this book, it is my prayer …

- that the Scriptures will become the personally prescribed medicine of the Great Physician to heal your life from all sin-disease;
- that you will let God fill your life to overflowing with the fullness of His love so that you will not need to look for love in all the wrong places. The joyous contentment of resting in the security of His covenant-love will do more than anything else in building up your internal resistance to overcome all last-day deceptions of the enemy.
- that the practical experiential applications of the three angels’ messages to your daily life will powerfully amplify the credibility of your Christian witness as you develop in your life an authentic testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ. “The theme of greatest importance is the third angel's message, embracing the messages of the first and second angels. All should understand the truths contained in these messages and demonstrate them in daily life, for this is essential to salvation.” [1]

“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let Him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

To responsibly decode and understand the three angels’ messages, we also need, first of all, to consider the perspective of the original audience to whom John was writing. This will enable us to understand in a very real way many of the needs of the early Christians, and that their needs might be very similar to our own current needs.

Thus the Bible-based experiential applications of Babylon, the beasts of Revelation 13 and other prophetic symbols in this book are not substitutes for, nor replacements of, the traditional historical/prophetic paradigm of these symbols. [6] Rather, the experiential amplifications of these symbols are essential to enable believers to be more than conquerors through Jesus Christ in the final apocalyptic showdown of the great controversy between Christ and Satan no matter how the final events of the time of trouble may play out. The focus of this book will not be on current or future prophecies, but on the kind of persons we must become in Christ to overcome all the assaults of the enemy. We want to discover, above all, how the sufficiency of Jesus Christ can encourage us in all our current trials.
[7] Because we have more to fear from within than without, we must permit the Scriptures to probe deeply the thoughts and intents of our hearts, especially our cultivated and cherished internal strategies arising from self-deception fueled by self-justification.

Our victory is found, not in our fearful watching of unfolding of prophetic events, but in our complete confidence in the sufficiency, supremacy, and sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sin-bearing Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world.

**The best protection against the beast is the genuine worship of the Lamb!**

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**Chapter 1**

**The Three Angels’ Messages**
Heaven’s Hope for Disappointments

During the 1830s and 1840s some very sincere Christians in New England started to study the Bible prophecies pertaining to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Some of these Bible students concluded that the coming of Jesus coming was very near. In their fervor, they even set a date for this event: October 22, 1844. Thoroughly convinced about the unshakableness of their conclusions, they made every possible preparation to meet Him in peace on that day. But on the morning of October 23, they found themselves still here on planet earth. Jesus had not come! Instead of dining at heaven’s banquet table with Jesus in person, they now faced contempt and scoffing by friends who mocked, “I see you’re still here!” What a disappointment! Disappointment with the Bible! Disappointment with themselves! And worst of all, disappointment with God! Why had He let them down?

About 1800 years earlier, the first Christians had experienced a similar disappointment. On the first day of the week, the day of Jesus’ resurrection, two heavy-hearted disciples trudged down the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. As a fellow traveler joined them in their walk, they shared with him something about the crushing intensity of the shattered hopes of their recent disappointment. “But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened” (Luke 24:21). Their traveling companion was Jesus Himself, but at the time they did not recognize Him. It would have been so easy for Jesus to give them a quick cure them of their discouragement by just telling them, “Get over it; Just take a good look at Me. I am Jesus! I actually walked out of the grave this morning.” Instead, Jesus first directed them to the Old Testament, as He “expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27). Here we find one of God’s appointed methods for the curing of disappointments: Bible study leading to a revelation of the person of Jesus Christ. As you first discover Jesus in the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit will enable you to also sense His personal presence in some of life’s most difficult circumstances.
God Uses Disappointments to Teach Us

In the years following the Great Disappointment of 1844, God used a similar method to bring hope to some very discouraged believers. As some engaged in a renewed study of the Scriptures to discover where they had gone wrong in their previous Bible study, they began to focus on two Bible passages, both from the book of Revelation. Here the disillusioned Advent believers started seeing reasons to hope again, and to not toss overboard their faith, as had so many others. In Revelation 10:8-11 they saw themselves as the people who had “eaten” of the “little book” [Daniel]. Their ingestion of the promises and prophecies of this book had given them a sweet expectancy of Jesus’ imminent coming, but their disappointment had made the book “bitter” in their stomachs. Through a continual search of the Scriptures, they gradually realized the reason for their disappointment: they still had a prophetic task to fulfill, outlined in Revelation 14:6-12. In the messages of the three angels, the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church heard God’s marching orders, “Go and tell it to the world, to prepare people everywhere for the soon coming of Jesus.”

This command motivated them for the worldwide mission of taking God’s last-day message to the entire world. Gradually it dawned on them that God had used their recent disappointment to spark the rise of a last-day prophetic movement with a message for the whole world. Moreover, as these Bible believers discovered God’s calling as found in the three angels’ messages, they also found therein God’s prescriptions for the healing of the still fresh wounds of their recent disappointments. Truly, God used the disappointment to stretch them. Likewise, could God not also use whatever disappointment you may be facing to stretch you so that you may know and experience His magnificent purposes for your own life?

God’s Cure for Disappointments Today

Today, the messages of the three angels can still bring help, healing, and a renewed sense of God’s purpose to individuals facing disappointment—disappointment with themselves, disappointment with others, disappointment with their church, and even disappointment with God. The three angels’ messages gave to our pioneers a solid biblical mandate for mission as carried out in the worldwide evangelistic outreach of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But with the passing of time (more than 167 years since the Great Disappointment), doubts, discouragement, and disappointments have gradually infiltrated the lives of many. We hurt because of unfulfilled expectations, the most significant one, perhaps, being that we are still here. Is it possible that a renewed study of the book of Revelation could restore dimmed hopes and repair broken dreams?

Through the years I have listened to many outspoken as well as silent questions among so many Adventists concerning their Christian experience. While few have doubted the prophetic mission and the biblically inspired credentials for our church as found in the three angels’ messages, yet they may often question, on the personal, experiential level, the authenticity of their own Christian experience.
Here are some of these questions -

· If I know so much correct Bible doctrine, why do I still experience so many personal problems?
· Even though the three angels’ messages have given me certainty that I am a part of a great and biblically inspired prophetic movement, I still wonder—why do I have so little personal assurance about my own salvation?
· Why is it that some of my most severe disappointments have come from people within my own church? I have read about the “patience of the saints” but it seems that what I need is much more patience with the saints.
· Why is it that, even when I have stayed updated on current prophetic events, such knowledge has not led to lasting life-changes in me?
· Why is there a lack of genuine joy in my life?

From my own study of Revelation, and particularly of the three angels’ messages, I want to offer you hope and practical help for many of these and other perplexing questions. But to receive Heaven’s answers to these questions, you must be willing to think, look, and even live “outside the box” of your own cherished traditions—just as the early Advent believers did. Rather than relying on the recycling of past religious slogans with greater fervor, is it possible that God could use your personal disappointments as a path to know Him better?

The Need for Continuing Bible Study

Perhaps you have embraced with an unshakeable certainty the doctrinal truths of the three angels’ messages. You have comfortably settled into membership in the church, and you want nothing to upset your comfort level of knowing that you know the truth. You have accepted the Scriptural findings of the early Adventist pioneers, but instead of being motivated by a quest for continual search for truth (like they were) you have perhaps come to believe that you know it all—particularly the historical-prophetic sequences of end-time events. Could I challenge you to partake of the spirit of the pioneers in early Adventist history—a continual quest for truth, heartily endorsed by Ellen G. White?

*Increased Light to Shine:* “When the books of Daniel and Revelation are better understood, believers will have an entirely different religious experience.”[10]

*The Danger of Self-satisfaction:* “A spirit of pharisism has been coming in upon the people who claim to believe the truth for these last days. They are self-satisfied. They have said, ‘We have the truth. There is no more light for the people of God.’ But we are not safe when we take a position that we will not accept anything else than that upon which we have settled as truth. We should take the Bible, and investigate it closely for ourselves. We should dig in the mine of God's word for truth. . . Some have asked me if I thought there was any more light for the people of God. Our minds have become so narrow that we do not seem to understand that the Lord has a mighty work to do for us.” [11]
A Sign of Growth: “Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God's word, and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative, and seek to avoid discussion” [12]

To guard us against the complacency of a know-it-all attitude, remember the observation of the apostle Paul who said, “Now I know in part…” (1 Cor. 13:12). We do not know it all! And neither is this book the final word on this subject.

Many of our pioneers saw much of the book of Revelation as a commentary on the rise and fall of nations viewed from the historical-prophetic perspective. Let us to their insights add the discoveries of solid biblical scholarship and the insights of other Bible truths in order to expose and challenge the hidden sins and dysfunctions of our own deceitful hearts. Let the book of Revelation be verified not only by its prophetic commentary on human history but also by its incisive applications to human nature.

Is it possible that the enemy may have infiltrated our understanding of the messages of the three angels and, without our knowledge, may have placed in our minds certain obstacles (based on his lies) to prevent a further and deeper study? The result has been a neutering and a diluting of these divinely inspired messages. Lately we have seen a resurgence among some Adventist authors in calling people back to the early apocalypticism of the three angels’ messages. George R. Knight in his book, The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism, [13] suggests that Adventism needs to be on guard against neutering by losing sight of their apocalyptic mission. A book by Robert Folkenberg, Jr., Getting Back to the Heart of Adventism, [14] calls for a return to the heart of Adventism as found in the three angels’ messages. Other voices proclaim with fervor that we need to proclaim the “undiluted three angels’ messages.” What are some possible symptoms of these diluting and neutering processes?

The Diluting and Neutering of the Three Angels’ Messages

When you refer to a product, such as soap or liquid cleansers, as being full strength, you believe that it will do a thorough job of cleaning. Of course, you can dilute these products and thus reduce their effectiveness. Many, sad to say, have thus come to believe that the proclamation of the three angels’ messages consists of “telling the truth like it is” and often doing it in the style of “Cry aloud, spare not.” However, that kind of proclamation often repels people rather than attracting them to the Savior. Is it possible that thus we may unwittingly dilute the messages of the three angels, when instead we should proclaim them full strength with the love of Jesus? Here are some possible ways in which we may have diluted the three angels’ messages.
We may dilute these messages…

- when we believe they are primarily for others and, therefore, do not apply to us because we are already members of the remnant church.
- when we use their contents as doctrinal ammunition against others.
- when we see only the historical applications of the Babylon and beast symbols but fail to discern where experiential principles of Babylon and the beast may apply to our own lives. Have we ever used the methods of the beast to do the work of the Lamb?
- when we major in the convenient truths, which affirm our denominational identity as found in the three angels’ messages, but fail to personally apply any inconvenient truths to ourselves—truths that call for transformation of our own lives.

Additionally, we may also unwittingly be involved in neutering these messages. Neutering means that an organism has lost its ability to reproduce itself. It is one thing to convince people about the doctrinal content of the three angels’ messages; it is another for such individuals to become authentic bearers of the gospel—persons who have the contagious Spirit of Christ inside of them, and who are not just noisy gongs and clanging cymbals promoting forms of godliness without its power.

We May Neuter the Three Angels’ Messages . . .

- when we major in talking to ourselves about ourselves—“we have the truth,” “we are right,” “we are a special people”—while we fail to notice the intoxicating effects of the sin-disease in our own lives.
- when we cherish these messages as ways to impress others with our theological orthodoxy and doctrinal correctness.
- when there is little or no lasting spiritual fruit (love, joy, peace, et cetera) in our lives as a result of these messages.

During the early 1960s, students from an Adventist elementary school students in the Los Angeles area were invited to appear on a nationwide syndicated radio program featuring the sayings and opinions of children. The host asked the students, “What is a Seventh-day Adventist?” to which an eager fourth-grader replied, “They go to church on Saturdays, they don’t eat pork, and they don’t like Catholics!” Is it possible that far too many people know what Adventists are against and not what they are for, even though Ellen White once wrote that “of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world.” [15] “Foremost” means that we should do it better and with greater enthusiasm than anyone else does.

The Amplified, Undiluted, Full-Strength Three Angels’ Messages

The time has come for an amplification of the full three angels’ messages in personal
living. Far too often we lean on the contents of these messages as if all they contain is heaven’s accreditation statement for our church and its end-time mission. With the Bible as its own interpreter, we must seek to discover all the possible practical applications for our own lives.

Here are some possible ways in which we would give the undiluted three angels’ messages in their full strength.

1. We would major in making prominent the great center of attraction, Jesus Christ. Thus we would have more to say about the Lamb than about the beasts.
2. We would humbly continue to search the Scriptures so that the Holy Spirit could expose our own dysfunctions and sinful strategies.
3. We would take the three angels’ messages as God’s medicine for our own lives before giving these messages to others.

A word of caution here is necessary. While you will find very few references in this book to the historical applications of the three angels’ messages, be assured that we have not abandoned these. The credibility of the three angels’ messages rests not only on solid, verifiable historical applications in past history but also on the principles of the three angels’ messages as amplified through authentic experiential applications in the lives of believers. Ellen White was one of the first to call the attention of the people in her day to the life-changing possibilities found in the three angels’ messages.

A key issue in the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference was the suspicion and fear that the teaching of salvation by grace alone in Christ would dilute the distinctiveness of our denomination. In her writings, she also wrote with conviction about the power found in the message of Christ’s imputed righteousness (justification) to radically break Satan’s power.

“The thought that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not because of any merit on our part, but as a free gift from God, is a precious thought. The enemy of God and man is not willing that this truth should be clearly presented; for he knows that if the people receive it fully, his power will be broken” [16]

If we would heed this counsel, would there not be a spiritual revolution among us? Thus the undiluted, amplified, full-strength messages of the three angels would have enough power to cleanse from all sin, set us free from all bondage, break all the power of the enemy over us, restore us to total spiritual health, and thus develop within us an immunity to all last-day deceptions. As we apply these messages, first to our own lives, both through responsible biblical scholarship and a vital personal relationship with Christ, we are the decoders who through authentic personal testimonies will powerfully transmit God’s last-day message to a dying world.
Life Applications

Questions to Ponder

1. Have you ever been fascinated by certain sensational late-breaking news of end-time events? Please list some.

2. In what ways has your knowledge of such sensational last-day events significantly and permanently changed your life?

3. What are some disappointments you are currently facing? Do you believe that God could enable you to process such disappointments to show you more clearly His calling for your own life.

4. What are the convenient truths in the three angels’ messages?

Why do you cherish such truths? List any inconvenient truths you should embrace at this time in order for God to stretch and change you?

Text to Remember

“But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day” (Proverbs. 4:18).

Truths versus Lies

Replace the lies of the enemy with these truths that will set you free.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Lies or half-truths of Satan</strong></th>
<th><strong>God’s Truths</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I already know everything there is to know about the three angels’ messages.</td>
<td>It is God’s desire for me to grow through the continuing study of His Word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m afraid of “new light” because I don’t want to be deceived.</td>
<td>My resistance against, and my fear of <em>new light</em>, may signify that the enemy may already have deceived me on some level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My current knowledge of doctrinal truths will give me a distinct advantage in facing last-day deceptions.</td>
<td>My satisfaction with my current knowledge of doctrinal truths could constitute a barrier of pride in preventing me from allowing God to stretch me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of doctrines is to give me assurance where I am doctrinally correct so that I can tell others where they are wrong.</td>
<td>The primary purpose of doctrines is to reveal Jesus Christ, and to expose where I am out of alignment with God’s purposes that I may receive His correction for my life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Write out any half-truths or lies that you have previously believed...*

*Replace such lies with the solid truths of the word of God.*