**Survey Explores Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Among Adventists:**
New data show that attitudes about homosexuality in the Adventist Church are highly conservative, but changing. Acceptance of gays as individuals appears to be on the rise....

**Pacific Union Conference Ordains Theology Professor Jean Sheldon:** A theology professor says she was called long ago to the ministry by the Holy Spirit and sees her recent ceremonial recognition as an affirmation of that call of God....

**Adventist Community Services Responds Immediately to Oklahoma Tornado:** Though the Adventist Church is active in providing on-site relief in Oklahoma, Adventists are urged not to "self-deploy" to the site, but to support ACS Disaster Response by donating through their local congregations....

**First Blind Person to Serve as Senate President in Jamaica is an Adventist:** An Adventist senator who lost his sight in early adulthood is living proof that assistance to the disabled can be well worth the investment, many times over....

**What did the Australian Census Really Tell Us About Church Growth?:** Much ado has been made of a recent census in Australia that seems to...
point to extraordinary growth in the Adventist-identified population. But not so fast....

**Blessing of the Hands at Adventist Hospitals in the Chicago Metro Area:** Health care workers are famous for keeping their hands constantly washed and even gloved, but Adventists in several Chicago Metro hospitals have sought additional blessings by having their hands prayerfully anointed with oil....

**Adventist General Conference Organized 150 Years Ago this Week:** War-torn anxiety and overt fear accompanied what can only be described as a quaint and inauspicious beginning for the Adventist Church 150 years ago. This feature-length news article lays out the background of a meeting laced with overtones of scandal....

**Laila Mickelwait (Part 1), About Her Work Against Sex Trafficking:** Pornography lies at the root of a global sex-trafficking enterprise that victimizes millions throughout the world, 98% women and girls. It is estimated that 30% of Christian women and 50% of Christian men struggle with attraction to pornography. Christianity is in a strong position to offer pathways to solutions. An in-depth interview, Part 1....*(available to all through May 26; otherwise open to AT Subscribers only)*

**Chimney Hotel is for the Birds:** Rio Lindo Academy in Healdsberg, California, is developing world renown as one of the prime stop-off points for one of the most smallest and fastest migratory birds on the North American continent—thousands upon thousands of Vaux Swifts (includes video links)....
Victory Over the Beast, Chapter Seven, Singing in the Courtroom: Dr. Thomsen shows that no conflict need exist between salvation by grace alone and the concept of investigative judgment. He shares Revelation’s vignette of singing in a courtroom and says we can either join that singing now, or run from the judgment in either fear or denial....
Survey Explores Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Among Adventists

Submitted: May 23, 2013

By Carrol J. Grady

Attitudes among Americans regarding various issues related to homosexuality are changing. What do Seventh-day Adventists in the pews really think about this topic? Do most Adventists side with the official church statement [1] that condemns “homosexual practices and relationships” as sinful, while affirming the “dignity of every human being,” including gays and lesbians? How many have found their understanding of homosexuality changing as new information is made known?

Up until about 40 years ago, Adventist opposition to homosexuality was no different from that of most other Christians, indeed from American society in general. However, as continuing scientific research has brought a growing understanding of homosexuality, the consensus of experts shifted and it is no longer included in the list of mental disorders by professional organizations. [2] Today, polls show that a majority (53%) of the American public favors gay marriage. [3] Currently, 12 states, the District of Columbia, and two Indian tribes legally recognize gay marriage, and it is possible that next month the Supreme Court could overturn the Defense of Marriage Act.

Churches, too, began to wrestle with this “new light,” particularly the more liberal churches, while conservative denominations stepped up their opposition. Today, the following denominations welcome and affirm gays and lesbians, and some perform same-sex unions/marriages and/or ordain gay and lesbian clergy: United Church of Christ, Alliance of Baptists, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal, Lutheran (ELCA), Metropolitan Community Church,
most “Old Catholic” communities, Presbyterian Church (USA), and some Quaker communities, as well as three of the four branches of Judaism in the United States. [4] And although the Roman Catholic Church officially condemns homosexual behavior, a recent poll showed that 82% of American Catholics are not opposed to gay marriage. [5] In a 2003 study at a large public university in Texas, in which Seventh-day Adventists were included among a group labeled “conservative protestants” this group had significantly more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than “moderate protestants” and even more negative than “liberal protestants.” [6]

But no published study has previously been conducted to look specifically at attitudes among individual Adventist members. Have attitudes in the pew changed, along with societal attitudes at large? I was interested in finding answers to these questions by doing a survey to find out more about the attitudes of Adventists across the country toward homosexuality, so I enlisted the help and sponsorship of Dr. Aubyn Fulton, professor of psychology at Pacific Union College. Dr. Fulton and I designed the survey itself, while I was responsible for recruiting participants and Dr. Fulton did the statistical analysis of the results. These results were presented formally at the Western Psychological Association Convention in April; what follows here is an informal summary and discussion of what we found.

Our Sample

We decided to identify a representative sample of Adventist churches in the United States, and then ask each pastor to help us invite their church members to complete our survey. The Adventist church is organized into geographically based Unions; we divided these Unions into North (Lake and Mid-America), East (Atlantic and Columbia), South (Southern and Southwestern), and West (Pacific and North Pacific). Then we determined what percentage of the total US denominational membership each of these Unions comprised, and on that basis randomly selected a proportional number of churches from each region: five from the North, eight from the East, 12 from the South and 13 from the West, for a total of 38 churches. We sent letters to the pastors of each of the 38 randomly selected churches explaining our project and asking them to either provide us with an email list of their members, or to forward our survey invitation to their members themselves. Twelve of the 38 pastors (31.5%) agreed (Two each from the north and east, three from the south and five from the west, ranging in size from 22 to 765 members). Ten pastors chose to forward our survey invitation to their members themselves, while two small churches where few members had computers filled out paper surveys and mailed them to us. In one
church the pastor moved shortly after agreeing to participate, so the church secretary announced the survey in the church bulletin and we estimated that half the membership had seen it. We estimate that 919 people were invited to take our survey. We received 441 completed surveys, for a total response rate of 48%.

The General Conference Department of Archives and Statistics does not presently collect information on age, ethnicity, or gender, but using information from a 2008 Pew Forum Survey that included Seventh–day Adventists, we can compare our demographics with theirs.

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Our age and gender demographics are fairly consistent with those of the Pew Poll, but ethnically, White members are considerably over–represented, while Hispanic members are under–represented. We contacted a number of ethnic churches, but only one fairly large Black church agreed to participate.

In addition, 428 respondents identified as heterosexual (97.1), six as homosexual (1.4%) and seven as bisexual (1.6%). A Gallup Poll published in October of 2012 reported that 3.4% of the US population identifies as LGB. [5] Our 3% total is close to that.

We asked participants to indicate the length of time they or their family had been Adventists. 25% were first–generation, 23% were second–generation, and 52% represented three or more generations of Adventists.

Participants were also asked to identify their perspective on the Adventist faith; are they conservative or very conservative (31%), moderate (44%), or liberal or very liberal (25%)?
This is a fairly balanced spread.

Finally, participants were questioned about personal contact with LGBs; 65% said they were closely or casually acquainted with a lesbian, and 72% were closely or casually acquainted with a gay man.

Although caution should be used in interpreting the results of this survey, it does provide the best picture we have at this time of how American Adventists understand and view homosexuality. It can serve as a baseline for other studies in the future.

Survey Findings

Let’s begin by looking at the number of those who agreed/strongly agreed or disagreed/strongly disagreed with the following statements in the survey; later we can discuss the differences between the various demographic groups.

First are two statements about beliefs regarding the nature of homosexuality which were close to evenly split. I understand homosexuality to be a result of factors that are beyond voluntary control. Another way of saying this might be that homosexuality is not something people choose. 45% agreed; 55% disagreed. I believe that with the proper motivation and interventions, people who identify as homosexuals can be changed to heterosexuals. A total of 55% agreed that orientation can be changed and 45% disagreed.

The next three questions about acceptance by the church show a majority with attitudes of acceptance. I would welcome a gay or lesbian person who came to my church. On this question there was near consensus, with 94% agreeing to this statement. If a gay or lesbian couple who lived together romantically attended evangelistic meetings in my church and asked to be baptized, I would insist that they quit living together before they were allowed to be baptized. Only 48% would insist on such a couple separating before being baptized, while 52% would not impose this restriction. I think gay and lesbian people should be allowed to be members in good standing in Adventist churches. 53% agreed to membership for gays and lesbians, while 47% did not.

Three statements about participation in church life follow. Attitudes here were less accepting, with the exception of musical participation. I think gay and lesbian people should be allowed to serve as Sabbath school leaders or teachers in Adventist churches. More than a fourth (29%) agreed; 71% disagreed. I think gay and lesbian people should be
allowed to serve as deacons or elders in Adventist churches. More than one in four (28%) also agreed on this, and 72% disagreed. **I think gay and lesbian people should be allowed to share their musical talents in Adventist churches.** Maybe it's their reputation for musical abilities, but 80% were happy to have gays/lesbians provide music for worship services, and only 20% did not want them to do even that.

Next are statements referring to the church’s relation to societal issues. **I believe that Adventists should politically oppose the legalization of gay marriage.** Only 56% of respondents agreed with this statement, while 44% disagreed. Perhaps this reflects the strong role religious liberty directors have played in some areas by urging members to vote against gay marriage because of their belief that it is sinful, in spite of the traditional Adventist belief in liberty of conscience.

**I believe that gay men and lesbians do not have the same rights to equal employment and housing opportunities as straight Americans do.** Over three-quarters (77%) believe that LGBs should have equal housing and employment rights, even if they believe the behavior is sinful; only 23% are not in favor of granting those rights.

The following statement concerns religious belief about homosexuality. **I believe that the Bible condemns homosexuality as a sin.** This is another question which elicited high consensus, with 86% agreeing the Bible calls homosexuality a sin, and only 14% disagreeing. It should be noted that this question states homosexuality itself, not just homosexual actions, is condemned by the Bible. Perhaps this reflects a common fuzziness in understanding of the various terms used in discussing this issue.

Respondents also completed the six items on the “Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men” scale by Herek (2002). This well-validated and often-used measure is scored on a 4-point scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree), with high scores indicating negative attitudes. The average score on the ATLG for our sample was very close to 3, meaning that our average participant agreed with negative attitudes about homosexuality.

Interestingly, many of the demographic variables tracked in our survey were significantly related to the various attitudes and beliefs regarding homosexuality that we asked about. A multiple regression analysis showed that six variables together explained a highly significant 36.7% of the variance in the overall attitudes towards homosexuals as represented by the ATGL score (adjusted $R^2 = .367, F(5,518) = 49.02, p < .001$). In order of the strength of the relationship, liberal respondents, those more acquainted with gay men,
younger respondents, white respondents, women and those who live in the northeast reported more positive attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. For the most part, the same variables, sometimes in different orders, predicted more positive attitudes toward homosexuals participating in various ways in the life of the church, and adherence to beliefs that are generally seen as being positive about homosexuals (that sexual orientation is not a choice, that it cannot be easily changed, and that it is not a sin). Fewer of our demographic variables related to attitudes about welcoming homosexuals to church, or the belief that homosexuals have the same rights as heterosexuals, because the majority of our respondents indicated agreement with these positions regardless of their demographic status.

Conclusions

We should first recognize the survey’s limitation in being representative. Only about a third of the pastors agreed to participate, and a little less than half of the members of these churches completed the survey. It is certainly possible that those who did participate tended to be more liberal than those who declined. There could also be a bias toward the more technically savvy respondents, since the survey was conducted by computer. We also neglected to include a question about educational level, so this element is missing from our analysis. Nevertheless, this does represent one of the most complete samples to date of American Adventists to be asked about their attitudes toward homosexuality.

The survey results indicate that we should be careful not to make sweeping statements about what Adventists believe because there is a wide range of attitudes toward, and understanding of, homosexuality among American Adventists. This makes me think of my own journey. I am a fourth-generation Adventist; my parents worked in Adventist hospitals in Maryland and California. I attended Adventist schools, and spent my growing-up years in Takoma Park, Maryland, then our world church headquarters. I never questioned what I was taught about our church – basically that we were the only Christians who really had the whole “Truth.” In college I fell in love with a theology student and married him, determined to be the best pastor’s wife ever. After ten years in Southeastern California Conference and five in the then Hawaiian Mission, we and our three boys became missionaries in the Far Eastern Division and lived in Singapore for 15 years before returning to work at the General Conference. It was while there, 23 years ago, that we discovered our youngest son is gay and began a long period of learning about and trying to understand this strange and unexpected place where we found ourselves. Our eyes were opened to a world of pain and heartache we had never known. Slowly, our love for these “outcasts” grew, and our
ignorance and prejudices were overcome. I believe it is the same for many of our church members today. Keeping up with growing knowledge about homosexuality, as well as having a family member or close friend who is LGB, fosters understanding and empathy. As more and more gay and lesbian church members “come out of the closet” at ever younger ages, it seems that nearly everybody has someone in their family with a different sexual orientation. As research continues to bring more information to light, and as there is more discussion in many Christian churches and other world religions about how we treat others who are different, I have come to believe that this “new light” is a present truth that the Holy Spirit is bringing to us.

The survey also shows that, despite a pretty general belief (86%) that homosexuality is condemned in the Bible, there is a more nuanced attitude toward homosexuals themselves. Although only a quarter of respondents self-identified as liberal/very liberal, 94% affirmed that they would welcome an LGB person to their church; more than half (53%) said we should allow them to be church members, and (52%) would have no problem with baptizing a gay or lesbian couple who are living together. More than a quarter would even be willing for LGB people to serve as Sabbath School leaders or teachers, elders, and deacons. This indicates that more and more church members are coming to believe we must treat LGB people like everyone else, as members of our family and brothers and sisters in Christ.

Close to half of respondents (45%) report that they understand homosexuality is not a choice, and that sexual orientation cannot be changed. This indicates that the American Adventist Church is moving closer to accepting that homosexuality is not a sinful choice and that it is not something that can be healed or changed.

Finally, as I recall how difficult it was for anyone to even talk about this issue back when we first learned our son is gay, it is easy to conjecture that if a study such as this had been conducted twenty or even ten years ago, the result would probably have shown considerably more negative attitudes than this one. Two of the variables in this study that are high predictors of positive attitudes – close acquaintance with an LGB person, and being a young person – indicate that as we look to the future we are likely to see even more positive attitudes in the church toward our differently oriented brothers and sisters.

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1 http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat46.html
2 http://www.apa.org/about/policy/discrimination.aspx
Carrol Grady is the wife of a retired Seventh-day Adventist minister and has had a ministry for families of gays and lesbians since 1996. More information about her ministry is available at: www.someone-to-talk-to.net
Pacific Union Conference Ordains Theology Professor Jean Sheldon

Submitted: May 20, 2013

By Colleen Uechi

On April 27, eight months after its highly disputed vote to approve women’s ordination, the Pacific Union Conference officially recognized Pacific Union College (PUC) religion professor Dr. Jean Sheldon as an ordained minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Sheldon is the only female professor in PUC’s religion department.

A recognition service was planned instead of sending her new credentials in the mail or having a complete ordination ceremony. She had previously experienced the "laying on of hands" that is the key element in an ordination, but felt simply receiving documents in the mail would not fully address the significance of the event.

“It means a lot to the students that this [ordination] is actually happening, and they need to see an example of it,” said Sheldon. “I think this is a time for celebration. We want to celebrate what the Spirit is doing in the Pacific Union.”

As part of the service, theology majors Samantha Angeles and Lauren Cline read Sheldon’s personal account of her journey to becoming a theologian, from being a secondary school student frustrated with flavorless religion classes, to a freshman journalism major asking God for signs of His desire for her to study theology. Then, when those signs were fulfilled within days, becoming a theology student with a passion for the Old Testament and teaching.

Earlier that morning in Sabbath School, as part of her honors project, Angeles also
described some of the struggles Sheldon experienced as the only woman in several of her theology courses at Andrews University. “She’s a petite woman, but she’s full of so much strength,” said Angeles, in admiration of her under-five-foot professor.

Pastor Brad Newton, executive secretary of the Pacific Union Conference, presented Sheldon with her credentials and certificate of ordination. The students, faculty and church members in the sanctuary gave a standing ovation, which Sheldon acknowledge with a smile and pointed heavenward. Sheldon made a few remarks. Pastor Jonathan Henderson, a former student of Sheldon’s, preached the sermon.

“For me it was just a moment of justice,” said senior theology student Cameron Haley about the event. “She has been a pastor to me, not just a teacher. She’s someone who makes herself available even outside the class to make students feel loved and also to facilitate a connection to Jesus, and that’s what pastoring is.”

Sheldon’s ordination comes eight years after her 2005 commissioning ceremony, during which she participated in a laying on of hands—a New Testament tradition in which both lay and clergy place hands upon an individual as affirmation of the individual’s call to ministry. As a commissioned minister, Sheldon could baptize, preach and officiate at weddings. Commissioned ministers are not eligible for leadership positions such as conference president.

The Pacific Union Conference is the third union conference in the denomination to vote in favor of women’s ordination, following the Columbia Union Conference and the Northern German Union Conference. Sheldon believes that God has called her to be a theologian, citing an afternoon in college when God spoke to her and gave her such a call. After she accepted, the Holy Spirit then anointed her ear, saying, “So that you will always hear My voice” ... her thumb, “So that you will do my will” ... and her toe, “So that you will always walk in my ways.”

“God ordained me. It’s done,” said Sheldon, although she believes the subject of women’s ordination is anything but finished within the denomination. “I think this whole move to ordain women ... is something the Holy Spirit has done,” she added. “And to me, I believe that this is not the last we will see of the Holy Spirit’s movement.”

Colleen Uechi is editor of the campus newspaper at Pacific Union College.
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Adventist Community Services Responds Immediately to Oklahoma Tornado

Submitted: May 23, 2013

By AT News Team

On Monday (May 20) when an F4 tornado plowed through the town of Moore, Oklahoma, devastating about 30 square miles of suburban neighborhoods and schools, Adventist Community Services (ACS) immediately mobilized volunteers to help. ACS is the domestic community action agency sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States. It is officially recognized as one of the major disaster response agencies under written agreements with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the American Red Cross.

The national disaster response plan assigns each of two dozen nonprofit agencies a particular "piece of the pie" and they coordinate through the National Voluntary Organization Active in Disaster (NVOAD). ACS is assigned the role of managing in-kind donations and has already established staging areas for incoming trucks of bottled water, blankets, cleaning supplies, grocery items, etc., in Adventist churches and schools in Oklahoma.

An emergency distribution center has been opened at the Hope Adventist Fellowship in Moore. Necessities to meet the immediate needs of survivors have already begun to be handed out. Truckloads of supplies have arrived from Adventist churches and other nonprofit organizations in Oklahoma and other Midwest states.

ACS needs the help of thousands of volunteers in churches across the region and elsewhere.
in North America. Hundreds of local Adventist churches, some a thousand miles away, have already opened local collections of needed items.

ACS has published a bulletin insert/handout listing the things needed and giving contact information for volunteers who may want to help. These can be downloaded on the Web (see location below) and distributed in churches and other groups this weekend. This wide mobilization of the Adventist community is necessary if ACS is to provide any help in Oklahoma, an ACS field coordinator told Adventist Today.

Untrained people who want to help often get in the way of needed response, so ACS has issued a statement: "We ask you to do the following to make our collaborative efforts as beneficial as possible to those in need. ... Please do not self-deploy to the disaster area. Individuals who do not deploy with a disaster response agency in coordination with emergency management often create a second disaster. Contact your local conference Disaster Response Coordinator if you would like to volunteer. The best way to help is to give a financial donation to Adventist Community Services."

If your local church or group wants to collect donated goods, be sure to check the "what's needed" list on the ACS web site. "Often, a lot of non-useful items get in the way," a volunteer who has helped with dozens of disasters told Adventist Today.

The ACS website is www.communityservices.org and the ACS direct phone line is (800) 381–7171.

Donors can simply place an offering in any local Seventh-day Adventist church and mark it "ACS Disaster Response." ACS depends on its Adventist support base for funding.

First Blind Person to Serve as Senate President in Jamaica is an Adventist

Submitted: May 23, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

Senator Floyd Morris made history in Jamaica’s Parliament last week when he became the first visually impaired person to be appointed chairman of the national legislature’s upper house. He is an Adventist Church member and an advocate for the disabled, according to the Jamaica Observer newspaper. The 44-year-old lawmaker is well-known in the Caribbean island nation.

In his address during his May 17 swearing-in ceremony, Morris quoted Micah 6:8, the memory verse in the Sabbath School study guide for the previous week and a key text for social justice: “He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

In an interview, Morris said the appointment was proof of God’s faithfulness, and it came despite years of uncertainty about his life’s direction. “What has transpired has proven to me once more that my God is real,” he said.

Jamaica’s prime minister, the Most Honorable Portia Simpson-Miller, said in an interview that she has “always admired Senator Morris’ strong sense of ethics, discipline and principled conduct. I think the Senate will benefit tremendously from his leadership, and I have no doubt he will continue to be an inspiration to many, both here in Jamaica and across the globe,” Simpson-Miller said.
Morris hosts a radio program Seeing From a Different Perspective and jogs each workday with the aid of his driver. He became Jamaica’s first blind senator in 1998. Morris began losing his sight at age 17 due to glaucoma and went completely blind six years later.

He gained assistance from the Jamaica Society for the Blind where he learned to read and write Braille. He has since completed a bachelor’s degree in mass communication and a master’s degree in philosophy of government. He is now pursuing a PhD in political communication.

“Persons with disability must realize that we are living in an era where opportunities for the empowerment of people with disabilities are vastly improving, especially within the context of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,” he said. He added that one of the main goals of this parliamentary year is the enactment of a National Disability Act, which he has championed since 1998.

Everett Brown, president of the Adventist Church in Jamaica, said the denomination's more than 270,000 members were justly proud of Senator Morris' appointment. “Despite his visual handicap, Senator Morris has always demonstrated his faith in God and strong Christian will to achieve, despite the odds,” Brown said. “We are sure that his commitment to his Christian ideals, coupled with his love for the Jamaican people and his impeccable character, will enable him to serve the Senate with distinction.”

About 10 percent of Jamaica’s population is Adventist, and members hold prominent posts in government and business. Adventist Church member and former union conference president Sir Patrick Allen is the nation’s governor-general.

Nigel Coke was the primary reporter for this story supplied by the Adventist News Network (ANN), the official news service of the denomination.
What did the Australian Census Really Tell Us About Church Growth?

Submitted: May 19, 2013

By Danny Bell
Since the release of the 2011 Australian Census Data there has been a flurry of speculation and hype. First there was the shock that more Australians are ticking the non-religious box than before, indicating an increase in those who don’t believe. There was the surprise that 64 percent of Australians still identify with Christianity in some form or another. Then there was the realisation that while this is a good thing, it did not translate into regular church attendance which was only at 9 percent. [1]

A small amount of seemingly good news was (apart from the Oriental Christian conglomerate), the Seventh-day Adventist Church had the next highest percentage of people identifying with it than all other denominations.[2] Church analysts and leaders have used this data, proudly trumpeting it far and wide as an indicator of success.

While the will is there to share this enthusiasm, as a statistician, I cannot. I see many problems with the way this data has been reported, giving a a generally false sense of security when it comes to our growth as a church in Australia. To those who don’t understand what constitutes real church growth, there can be a sense that we are doing okay, when in fact this is not correct. Knowing all the data, it would be irresponsible to say that we are growing well in the face of an opposite reality—a growth crisis.

What we need to understand with the Australian Census data is that it only records what denominational people identify with. It is not exclusively about church attendance but also
includes people who have had past affiliation with the church. It does not accurately record growth in membership and so the need to view other data is crucial, as it tells a totally different story.

As the population increases, particularly within those states where migrant ratios are high, there will be an increase in those reporting affiliation with the church. Since the last Census, migration has increased substantially and many churches naturally show increases in preferred affiliation.

Despite this, however, the growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia is not a happy picture. The best sources for looking at concise church growth are our own internal statistics in the General Conference Annual Statistical Report.[3] Here we can get precise data which is meticulously recorded every year by our pastors and leaders about what is happening in the areas of growth, employment, institutions and a host of other indicators. Knowing how to read the data is crucial to getting information on real growth, which involves calculations of losses, transfers, deaths and apostasies.

The latest information available on the GC Archives, Statistics and Research web site is for 2011, because 2012 data is still being compiled. One needs to appreciate the mammoth task involved, because it is dependent on first being reported; then it has to be documented, which can span into the following year.

For the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia the data show that the increase in membership through baptisms and professions of faith was 1,359 individuals for 2011. The combined losses of deaths, apostasies and those missing from church rolls (excluding transfers in and out, which are roughly evenly spread), was 887. If we subtract the losses from the gains we are left with a net figure of 472 membership increase in Australia for 2011.[4] This amounts to an average of about 1 person gained for each church group in Australia for the year 2011. Not a very good outcome.

Unfortunately I am not done yet. I wish the prognosis stopped here. If we really want to crunch the numbers on how we are actually doing in Australia, then we need to understand that church growth experts use a concept called **Kingdom Growth**. The idea of kingdom growth is when the church community increases when someone becomes a Christian, leaving a deficit in the non-Christian community from which they came. For the purposes of illustration, if we were dealing in real growth terms it would look like this on a scoreboard:
Christian community +1 Non-Christian community -1

So the church’s gain is the non-Christian community’s loss. Unfortunately the 472 souls added to the church in Australia during 2011 were not all kingdom growth in the true sense of the word. A conservative estimate would be that around half who join the church annually through baptism are classified as Generic baptisms or biological growth.[5] Generic baptisms are when we baptise our own, those who have been brought up in the church such as our children. While it is a time for rejoicing when our youth commit to Christ, it’s not true kingdom growth. The non-Christian community surrounding the church experiences no loss when we baptise one of our own.

It can be explained this way. A church has 100 people attending regularly, 90 of whom are baptized and 10 are youth who have not been baptized. If those 10 youth are then baptised into Christ, how has the church affected the surrounding non-Christian community? The church still comprises 100 people and the community has not been impacted by the Gospel at all. Nothing has changed except inside the Christian community.

The Church’s net growth figure of 472 souls for 2011 therefore can’t be all classified as true kingdom growth. Take away the generic baptisms and we have a bleaker picture than before. If we concede 50 percent as being generic (and this is being very generous), that gives us a final growth figure of 236 for all of Australia during 2011. Divide that among our 519 churches and we are left with a mean average of less than half a person for each church community. Sound cold and calculating? That’s reality, unfortunately.

You could even argue that the 211 people that came in on profession of faith during 2011 were not kingdom growth either, as these entrants are deemed to have had a meaningful experience with Christ before joining our Church. I have not included profession of faith gains as losses, however, because they are still growth for our particular message; but they are definitely not kingdom growth. And in all honesty, we don’t need more bad news just now.

It is not my intention to discourage us or our efforts in soul winning. It is my intention however to dispel the hype that we need to be happy about our growth as Adventists in Australia. We are, in fact, in a growth crisis. Half a soul plucked from the Australian community for every church in 2011 is not exactly Pentecost. Wishing that things could be better and relying on the Census to calm our fears is no substitute for understanding where
we really are in terms of growth.

A sobering thought may be that we have been unaware of our situation and that it sounds remarkably similar to what my favourite little old lady had to say many years ago: "I am filled with sadness when I think of our condition as a people...Grievous and presumptuous sins have dwelt among us. And yet the general opinion is that the church is flourishing, and that peace and spiritual prosperity are in all her borders." Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, page 217)

The solution? I think we need to re-look at our methods of witnessing and evangelism to a sceptical Australian public. The Census shows that Australians mostly identify with Christianity but not church environments. They like the product but not the retail outlet. Maybe it’s time for changes to be made in our approach to the public? Maybe we need to focus more on our own communities instead of going overseas where reward and success are guaranteed? Maybe we need to rethink throwing large sums of money at reaping campaigns when they don’t reap as effectively as they used to? The answers are there if we desire them but we need to be quick about it as many are going to Christless graves and the scoreboards are stacking up against us.

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1. ABS, NCLS, McCrindle Research 2012
2. Source: ABS 2011 Census of Population & Housing (Time Series Profile – Cat. 2003.0)
4. Ibid.
5. There is no real way of measuring this except by anecdotal evidence. I understand that many may query this but if we look through our publications and baptisms we attend we can safely say that 50% is a conservative estimate. In reality it is much higher for many churches. It would be interesting if there was some data on this but I have yet to find any.

Danny Bell lives in Western Australia. He has been a pastor, chaplain, family court mediator, counsellor and editor of Trench Mail, a men's ministry publication. He is currently leading a church plant called Lion Hearts which focuses on attracting men. His passion lies in making the Church relevant to the Church’s largest unreached people group—men.
Blessing of the Hands at Adventist Hospitals in the Chicago Metro Area

Submitted: May 21, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

Health care with all of its sophisticated science and high-tech innovations still boils down to the hands of women and men who "dispense medication, perform surgeries and mop floors," wrote reporter Michelle Manchir in the Chicago Tribune last week. This is why chaplains at Adventist Midwest Health System hospitals in the Chicago suburbs perform the annual ritual of the Blessing of the Hands.

Most of the 1,400 staff members at the hospitals in Hinsdale, La Grange, Bolingbrook and Glendale Heights "were eager to have it done," the newspaper reported. "It's a nice reminder that there's a spiritual component to what nurses do," Chaplain Mark Woolfington said. "Many of our staff are Roman Catholic [for whom] a blessing takes on a little bit different significance."

The ceremony involves a prayer, anointing the hands with oil and thanking the staff members for their work. It is done in small groups as the chaplains visit each unit throughout the month, including night shifts. "Some turn it down ... but most are happy to have it."

"It means a lot to me," patient care technician Rosa Zapata was quoted. "I know God is guiding." Amy Kosowski told the Tribune reporter "it makes me a better nurse," helping her to let patients know that she cares about them. It gives her "that extra edge to be a good nurse and protect my patients," she stated.
"It may be something new to many Seventh-day Adventist Church members," a veteran pastor told Adventist Today. "It is common to ask for God's blessings on meetings, new or refurbished buildings, vehicles and printed materials. In health care the hands of the professionals and trained workers are all more important than any of those things, so it is a logical extension of a long tradition."

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Adventist General Conference Organized 150 Years Ago this Week

Submitted: May 22, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

This week in 1863, in the midst of the United States Civil War, a small group met in Battle Creek, Michigan, and formed the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, commonly called the GC by employees and members of the denomination. Six state conferences had organized over the previous three or four years and each sent delegates to the meeting.

The minutes of the meeting are only seven pages. The constitution and bylaws that the delegates developed during the meeting cover a little more than one page. The document specified a governing body of only three members called an "executive committee," the terminology still used in most denominational policy materials.

There were 10 delegates from Michigan, the state conference that hosted the session. Eight were ministers, including many of the most important personalities in the early Adventist movement. Two were lay representatives. New York sent four delegates, Ohio and Iowa sent two each and Minnesota and Wisconsin sent one each. Only 20 individuals made up that founding group.

Organization had been a hot issue. James White, the most prominent spokesman for the formation of a denomination, argued practically that he should not have to own the movement's publishing operation personally. It had been paid for with donations and should belong to all the members through some representative system.
Others felt that a formal organization was the first step toward worldliness, apostasy and all kinds of problems. The Amish and others insisted that no organization beyond local congregations that elected their own bishops were Biblical in any sense, and many in the first generation of Adventists took a similar view.

The state conferences had formed slowly. Initially they were simply an annual gathering and then committees were formed to oversee property such as large tents used for evangelism campaigns and local meetinghouses in a few locations. Most Adventist congregations met in homes.

Elder White had become a target because of his activist stance and one item of business in that first GC Session was the report of an investigation of White. The Battle Creek Church had voted at a special meeting on March 29 "to lay before the General Conference, in relation to the charges and reports that are in circulation concerning" White the fact that "no one had reported any grievances" and the 70 "fervent testimonials" in his support. The GC had not even been initiated and the politics had already started.

The delegates responded to the issue quite conservatively, allowing White to step aside although the majority evidently wanted him to serve as the first GC president. They also voted to publish an announcement in the Review opening up two months for people to file any comments they wished about White.

John Byington was elected the first GC president, a farmer from upstate New York and lay pastor who had been an activist in the anti-slavery movement, hiding fugitives on his property and helping them escape to Canada in defiance of Federal law. Adventists were involved in humanitarian work and took stands for human rights even before a denomination existed; it is part of the Adventist heritage.

Uriah Smith was voted GC secretary and E. W. Walker the GC treasurer, but neither of them were members of the executive committee. It included Byington, John N. Andrews and George W. Amadon. Andrews would become the denomination's first official missionary and one of the denomination's major universities is named after him.

"One object if the General Conference is to secure uniformity of action throughout all the states," the delegates voted, and then appointed a committee "to draw up a constitution for state conferences," despite the fact that at least the Ohio Conference already had one. Tension over "uniformity" instead of a more flexible and diverse unity began at the very first
GC Session and continues to this day.

Historians estimate that in the 1860s there were only a few hundred Sabbath-keeping Adventists. They were scattered across the northern tier of the U.S. east and Midwest. There were none in the South, which was currently in rebellion against the Federal government and very likely only a handful in California, although within a few decades it would become home to the largest settlement of Adventists on the globe.

The Seventh-day Adventist denomination began as a very small, regional fellowship of mostly house-church groups in the United States, but it was soon to develop a world vision and a broad concept of mission. Within a few years it had started a hospital, a college, schools and city missions. It soon began to connect with believers in other nations and began sending missionaries, both officially sponsored and independent, self-supporting workers. The prophetic gift exercised by Ellen White, who was still in her 30s at the time of the GC founding session, constantly spurred innovation, expansion and a broad vision for the movement.

Today the Adventist movement is organized in almost all of the countries recognized by the United Nations, holds worship in more than 800 languages and has more than 30 million adherents. There are more Adventists on the globe than there are Jews or Sikhs or Baha’i, all venerable world religions. Yet the Adventist religion is less than 200 years old, a youngster in this class.

The news media has noted that the official recognition of this anniversary evidences ambivalence on the part of GC leaders. "There's not a whole lot of cheer to go around," stated the Religion News Service (RNS). "Not even for all the good they have accomplished through their faith across the world while they wait" for Jesus to return. The Christian Post noted "8,000 schools ... more than 16 million medical outpatient visits" each year and "millions of dollars [in] charity" as it described the impact of the denomination today.

"I would love for [Jesus] to come this second," Janice Maitland, a member of Ephesus Church in Manhattan, was quoted by The Christian Post. "Once He returns there will be less suffering. We will be restored back to our perfect way, so that's always our desire. It always has been and always will be." She added, "I think it's presumptuous as human beings to tell God when He should return. ... We can only hope that He will come as soon as He can but we can't tell Him when to come."
"Adventists are fundamentally caught between hope and reality," a retired theologian told Adventist Today. "That tension is at the very core of Adventist faith and it only gets more taut as more and more generations come and go." A growing number of Adventist families in North America, Europe and Australia have multiple generations of believers, "so it becomes a very personal tension in more and more families. It has been a creative tension for many people, while others seem unable to handle it in a creative, compassionate, Christ–like way. It sometimes results in very strange ideas and behavior."

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Wanted: A Leader of Leaders


May 28, 2013

Wanted:

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Can Less Faith Bring More Belief?

By Chris Barrett This blog is not about faith in the sense of having faith in a person or similar. It is about religious faith. Here's an example definition: “a strong belief (faith) in God or the doctrines of religion, based on a spiritual apprehension, rather than proof.”

When I use the term “belief” in the title and in this blog, as compared with faith, it is in the sense of having come to believe something as truth or fact based on evidence and reason, rather than a spiritual apprehension which requires no evidence or proof.

A popular Bible based definition of faith is “..the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen.” Now, we could go on forever about what people “hope” for, and the unseen things people consider real, but we are going to look at the concept of faith itself.

If faith is the evidence and substance of both what is hoped for and what is not seen, at least two suggestions arise: First, that faith itself is simply what happens within the mind of the person involved, effectively, a decision. Secondly, that the resulting state of mind, or mindset, is ultimately the sole evidence for the reality of the things that are hoped for, but not seen.

Some may like to suggest faith can be bolstered by, or associated with evidence that lies outside of this human, mind based, experience. However, the moment one does this, to the degree that evidence exists, faith is no longer faith. It is belief. Empirical data or evidence based belief, and faith, are mutually exclusive, for where evidence encroaches, faith, by
definition, ceases to exist.

It seems from this wish to bolster faith that there is a desire for and belief that evidence actually matters, yet, in my opinion, the Biblical definition of faith demands it be “blind”. It believes in what it cannot see, and its evidence is in itself. Strangely, in spite of this, people long to fortify their faith with evidence, yet, by doing so, they effectively relegate faith to second place and allow the erosion of its territory. Even if this is not giving faith second place, it most certainly is giving themselves ultimate authority over their view of “truth” as seen through their faith. Of course, this does not address the equally self granted authority required when they set out to interpret data, be it Biblical or scientific.

At the end of the day, it is human reason that determines truth as perceived by each and every individual. **Whether that person accepts empirical data, as seen through scientific eyes, or any of the vast array of faith based, potentially imaginary realities on offer, all are evaluated and selected by human reason.** Even the person claiming the most “blind” faith is forced to admit they have either selected their “faith” by reason, for it is one among many, or worse, they simply accepted it “hand me down” fashion from others, who previously reasoned it the best from among the many, or perhaps also received it “hand me down”. Long live tradition.

Thus, I argue that everybody builds their belief and/or faith by reason. They grant themselves the authority and ability to do this. So, a few reflections: what do you do when things believed by faith contradict reality as viewed by the collective reason of a vast majority of humanity? One example is the theory of Evolution. Do you reject, or ignore such evidence based conclusions, and allow only faith to decide? If so, how do you justify that you used reason to obtain your faith, but now refuse to allow reason to challenge a conviction you hold dear, but have also, at least partially, reached by reason? If you were to change your mindset and believed only what could be seen, evaluated, and empirically shown, would the scope of things you believe about how this world is increase or change?

**Perhaps the real question is:** Is there a place for faith, and if so, faith in what? Does it not seem strange that things like angels and God, require faith to affirm their reality, yet we in turn use their existence as evidence that faith must remain?

Why should we not simply believe that which is empirically demonstrable, and let the chips fall where they may as evidence comes to light? Of course, there will be many things for which we have no answers. There may in fact be many experiences, especially on a
subjective level, that we cannot explain, but why do we have to? What is wrong with simply not knowing the answers – yet? Is it not, in fact, rather foolish to try to interpret that which we cannot explain, especially if we present those interpretations as fact?

I propose that religion may be nothing more than the collectively evolved and highly polished outcome of the human imagination over the millennia as it tries to interpret experiences or observations that it cannot otherwise explain. We have learned that ancient civilizations thought gods caused the inexplicable thunderstorm, but this has long ago been exposed as creative imagination. I propose that all faith based statements or interpretations place themselves at the same risk of exposure in the future. So why go there? The gaps are shrinking and revealing a more unified landscape with every scientific discovery.

All data requires interpretation, but, with the collective weight of human experience doing this, at least in theory, it should lead to greater consensus. I believe the opposite is true for faith in the context of religion. History shows that the moment one leaves behind rational, empirically based thinking, the shades of imagined reality permitted by faith based interpretations are endless. Thus, the likely outcome of faith is less, rather than more consensus.

Consensus tends to lead to harmony, respect, unity, and tolerance, and I find no historical or contemporary evidence that faith in any form will deliver this. I find the opposite. Currently, I believe faith destroys common belief in many truths about our world, and hinders unity on any scale beyond the church, club, religion, or group to which one belongs. The tribe is a deep seated result of human evolution, and religious faith plays right into tribal power, too often with evil consequences. Religion, the historic vehicle for faith, is arguably the most divisive idea ever developed by humanity.

So, I suggest that, perhaps, it is time for less faith and more belief. Perhaps when belief trumps faith we will have created room for tolerance, respect and the realization that one human being is equal to any other human being. It would be wonderful if religious intolerance could stop fueling bloodshed and evil. I suggest faith is perhaps the greatest offender in this package. If so, what should we do with it?

Let's reason our way to a sensible world!

Now, it should be noted that some readers may find this blog offensive. Some will wish to
call the carpet cleaners. It is perhaps worth noting that I do not seek to destroy anyone's sense of the spiritual or numinous. I happen to have had, and continue to have experiences I would define as spiritual. I can rule out that any were drug induced. Some of these experiences may well be the result of confirmation bias, and others are clearly beyond current explanation. I accept them on face value, but make no effort to interpret them with conclusions that require faith. I can do this, and yet have a deep sense of awe, perhaps even worship, when I sense the wonder of what IS. This is firmly grounded in an awareness of the beauty of nature and its blood, its magic and its misery. While I sense a deep connectedness and mystery behind it all, I choose to refrain from interpretation. I suspect it is the constant desire for understanding that has carried the evolution of faith to a place that seems, at times, devoid of reason and full of the fantastic, the incredible, and the imaginary, the imaginary world of mythology, theology, and doctrine.

We live in an age where there is so much evidence based knowledge about our world in which to believe. Is faith a shackle that cripples the freedom of thought and the joy of being human?
Sufficiency and Sharing

Submitted: May 22, 2013

By Debbonnaire Kovacs

Well.

I had to think about how much self–revealing I wanted to do here. This week’s chapter in The Monastery of the Heart has now reached me right where I live! Or rather, where I’ve just moved out of, all too recently.

Here’s what she says on the very first page of this chapter:

Benedictine spirituality does not see indigence, abject poverty, stringency, and parsimoniousness as a lifestyle to be desired, let alone a high–level signal of holiness.

The monastic ideal is about the ability to understand the difference between need and want, between having what is necessary rather than doing without what is necessary—simply for the sake of doing without.

First of all, it is clear that this is in direct contrast with many monastic orders (Christian and otherwise) who make vows of poverty, and even more so with hermits (more than now,
but still existing) who live on next to nothing. Or, in some cases, live on begging, in the
belief that the charity they invoke in others is a blessing to those others, besides being
humbling to them.

For me, that is not the issue. I was raised in dire poverty, not because of a vow, but because
my father’s 60–hour work weeks at minimum wage were not enough to care for a family of
seven* that included one seriously handicapped child. ("Because no then–known method of
birth control worked for my mother, not because we believed in the “quiver–full
philosophy.”) That’s not really the issue, either. The issue is that poverty became a virtue.

A true Christian, especially one who believed Jesus was coming soon and the whole world
needed to hear about it, was to scrape by on the very least possible pittance, and give the
rest. Wanting more was suspect. Thinking one needed more, working and planning to get
more—that was just wrong!

The result has been that I’ve unintentionally prevented myself from any kind of financial
sufficiency. I began to realize the unhealthiness (not to mention unbiblicality (is that a
word?)) of this by my 30s, at least. I began to try to stop shooting myself in the foot. . . with
indifferent success.

My husband, Les, helped hugely in this new reconfiguring of my inner reality. But living here
in Berea is where I’ve begun to really make true to myself what I’ve always believed: that
having more money can make you able to help more people. That paying for a service you
could do for yourself can help someone else who may be struggling to make a living, and
that expecting fair pay for your best work can make you able to do that.

I do absolutely believe that we need to know the difference between a need and a want, and
I’m grateful for my childhood—poor in things, rich in learning and exploration and
questions (yeah, we were Adventists who did actually ask the hard questions!)—which
taught me beyond forgetting that we can do with a great deal less than most Western minds
think. Knowing that, I also love being on the giving end of the spectrum more often. It’s fun!
I always knew it would be. Receiving, let me just say, for those who don’t know, is not. Good
for you, no doubt, but not fun.

In a Monastery of the Heart, (writes Chittister)
seekers live
with one eye on the needs
of everyone else
as well as their own.

And with an eye to the fact that, in general, what those needy ones want is not a hand-out, but a hand up. Some are truly unable. Some, like my dad, are working themselves to death in a fearfully unjust system. We can change it. And we must.
PART 1. Laila Mickelwait speaks about her work against sex trafficking. Next week we will publish Part 2, looking at Mickelwait's nonprofit, New Reality International.

Laila Mickelwait received a BA in Political Science & International Relations from the University of California Riverside and a Master of Public Diplomacy degree from the Annenberg School of Communications and the Dornsife School of International Relations at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles in conjunction with the U.S. Department of State. She has spent time working with Habitat for Humanity, the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, the World Federation of United Nations Associations Millennium Project in Washington D.C., and the National Journalism center in Washington D.C. In 2006 Laila became keenly aware of the need to practically serve those suffering from poverty, disease and injustice and she founded New Reality International (NRI) a non-profit global missions organization. Laila subsequently joined Exodus Cry, an international anti-slavery organization as the Director of Awareness and Prevention, and later became the Manager of Policy and Public Affairs. Laila can be reached at lailamickelwait@exoduscry.com.

Jeff: Tell me a bit about Exodus Cry.

Laila: Exodus Cry is an anti-slavery organization that works domestically and internationally to fight sexual slavery. Our Director, Benjamin Nolot, who founded Exodus Cry, also wrote, produced and directed the award winning documentary, Nefarious: Merchant of Souls which we use as our primary awareness tool. Exodus Cry was born out of a prayer meeting, and we do identify ourselves first and foremost as a prayer movement to end slavery. We work in three primary areas—prevention, intervention, and restoration.
In the work of prevention, we have several components: prayer, awareness and reform. Prayer isn't confined to prevention, but is really the foundation of Exodus Cry. The film makes the concluding point that sex trafficking is a moral and spiritual issue, and that money and education alone will not solve this evil. The Bible says we don't fight against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers. We really believe that slavery and all injustice is a spiritual battle, first and foremost. We can make the most progress against injustice in the place of prayer. And from that place we can do things that manifest in the physical realm.

Prayer is a big part of our intervention and restoration work as well because we feel very strongly that you can take a girl out of slavery physically but she's still a slave until she is spiritually and emotionally set free by Jesus Christ. “Who the Son sets free is free indeed.” The saddest thing of all is that without that encounter with Jesus Christ and the real freedom that comes spiritually and emotionally through that, a woman can be physically taken out of a situation of bondage, but still remain in slavery. So prayer is really the foundation of all the work we do including intervention and restoration.

As part of our prevention work we raise awareness through screening the documentary. It's a trilogy really. At this point we have Nefarious I, and that's been toured all over the world—in universities and churches, governments, public venues and theaters.

Legislative reform is another area of prevention, and that's where I've put most of my energy. We are working toward promoting what is called the ‘Nordic model’ of legislation that was presented in the film. In the Nordic countries progressive legislation has been adopted that makes the purchase of sex a crime, protects trafficked and prostituted women and harshly penalizes traffickers and pimps. This has been extremely successful in combating prostitution and sex trafficking. We are promoting the idea that as long as you have legal prostitution, you can never effectively combat sex trafficking, ever. They are inextricably linked together. You cannot separate prostitution from sex trafficking.

Then we have intervention work, where we actually encounter girls in the place of exploitation and help get them out of those situations. That is the work of going into the brothels, going out on the street, even encountering girls who are being sexually exploited online. The Internet is one of the primary avenues for the advertisement and sale of exploited women and girls. We are doing outreaches to girls who are being sold on Backpage.com, and going into the places where the girls are. Sometimes we can help get
them out; sometimes we just give them love; sometimes we just give them support until they're ready.

And we do that in the United States in Kansas City, but also in different places around the world. We currently have a focus on Brazil for the next four years, where we're consistently sending our intervention teams because it's such a massive problem in Brazil. The upcoming World Cup and the Olympics will bring in hundreds of thousands, if not millions of tourists and the chances for increases in trafficking are high, so we are working towards prevention in Brazil also. Many people don't know, but even in historical slavery, the largest amount of slaves during the trans-Atlantic slave trade were transported to Brazil. That has perpetuated into modern times in the situation of child sexual exploitation and slavery in the nation. It is out of control.

Last but not least we have our restoration department, which is focused on the restoration of human trafficking victims. We have what we call Light Houses, centers where girls can come and get holistic restoration—spiritual, physical, emotional healing. We currently have a house in Kansas City, and we're in the process of building one in Moldova.

Jeff: How prevalent is trafficking there in Kansas City, where Exodus Cry is based?

Laila: Numbers are always very difficult to come by; however, it is estimated that each year 1650 American children are victimized and commercially exploited in the Kansas City Metropolitan area. According to the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act, if a child (under the age of 18) is sexually exploited in prostitution he/she is automatically classified as a trafficking victim. We have encountered cases of trafficking victims in our own backyard in Grandview and Kansas City. It's important to understand it's not just in Bangkok, Amsterdam or Las Vegas. In reality, it's in everybody's backyard. Of course it is not on the scale of Amsterdam or some major hubs of trafficking and prostitution, but it's definitely going on. So we feel that we need to be diligent first in our immediate sphere and then be able to expand outward. Local anti-trafficking work is important to us, just as important as international work.

We did a month-long screening tour of Europe, taking Nefarious to six European countries. Before the tour, our team read a study that found that there were actually 42,000 death camps at the time of Nazi Germany. People can only name maybe three or four, but in reality it was 42,000. They were everywhere, in everybody's backyard. Everyone was in reach of one. It's the same idea now with human trafficking. Human trafficking, isn't just in
Bangkok, Amsterdam or Las Vegas, it's everywhere.

**Jeff:** What do you do in your role as Manager of Policy and Public Affairs at Exodus Cry?

**Laila:** One of the most important things we can do to stop trafficking is to prevent it. It's one thing to take a girl out of exploitation and help restore her, but if she never got into that position in the first place, that would be the best scenario that we could imagine. Really, my heart is for prevention, and that is what I do. I work in the area of legislative reform that prevents sex trafficking.

Based on research that's been done, we know that legal prostitution increases the market for sex, which increases the demand for sex, which then increases human trafficking. If there's a demand, there will always be a criminal willing to exploit another person to take advantage of that and make that profit. There has been significant credible research done that looks at countries with legal prostitution versus illegal prostitution, and they found this correlation between countries that have legal prostitution and increases in human trafficking. Sadly, 50% of the nations in the world have legal prostitution.

In the reverse, you see countries like Sweden, Iceland and Norway where they've criminalized the purchase of sex but not the sale of sex because they see women as a victim of this system of injustice called prostitution and sex trafficking. What they've done is criminalized demand and of course pimping and trafficking. What they found in a ten-year period in Sweden was a 50 percent reduction in prostitution, and they have the lowest the rate of trafficking in the European Union. And Norway has had the same results. When Norway implemented this same type of legislation, they saw a 50 percent reduction in prostitution and a decrease in human trafficking as well. So I have been working with legislators and governments around the world to raise awareness about this aspect of prevention and help change laws that enable sex trafficking to flourish.

We feel that it's extremely important to have righteousness and justice manifest in the laws of the nation because at the heart of it, God cares about the restoration of a person's individual heart, but he also cares about the restoration of systems of injustice, laws of government, of business, of media, all these spheres of society that need to come in line with his heart and his law. Implementing this model of legislation is not just a good idea, which it is, and it doesn't just help prevent human trafficking, which it does, but it's also manifesting God's heart and His law in the earth in these systems.
Jeff: This year both Union College and Andrews University showed Nefarious: Merchant of Souls. What is this significance of this documentary, and how do you use it in your work?

Laila: According to the latest report from the International Labor Organization, the conservative estimate is that there are a minimum of 4.5 million people in sexual slavery at this time, 98% of who are women and girls. Nefarious focuses on the different manifestations of sex trafficking and sexual slavery in various parts of the world, and also why it's happening. One of the things that distinguishes Nefarious from other films about sex trafficking is that it really makes the connection between prostitution and human trafficking. Often people have this separation in their minds between human trafficking and prostitution, and the film breaks down that barrier, and helps people understand the real exploitative nature of prostitution and how women and girls end up in those situations.

It also goes into what we can do about sex trafficking, and goes into what happened in Sweden and different practical measures that can be made addressing legislation. But I feel the most important part of Nefarious is really the hope at the end of the film, pointing out that the real solution to the injustice of sex trafficking and exploitation is Jesus. There's not any amount of money that's going to solve the problem, or any amount of education, but really through prayer, through bringing God into these situations, that's how we're going to make steps forward and get breakthrough in the fight against injustice. And the testimonies at the end I feel are so hopeful and such a testament to the power of God to restore that which has been broken. Many other filmmakers and organizations who have presented this tragedy don’t come from a Christian perspective and don’t understand that there is the ability to have full restoration for victims and for traffickers. That hope at the end of the film, I think, is really such a key part of presenting this tragic injustice and what ultimately sets it apart.

Jeff: And how do you use this film in your work?

Laila: We use it to raise public awareness. We screen the film at a variety of venues. It's such a powerful tool, because you can talk about something as much as you want, you can write about it, but there is something very powerful about the medium of film. When watching a film, people actually have an experience; they enter into the reality. I've heard people say many times, “I've heard about that, and people have told me about exploitation, but I never really got it until I watched the film.” Using the film as an entry point for discussion to go deeper into the underlying facts and research is really powerful. I try to do that as much as possible. And we've had various screenings at different parliaments around the world to
educate legislators. It is much more powerful than just presenting a research paper.

**Jeff:** How many countries have you shown it in?

**Laila:** I don't know the exact number, but we just did a European tour where we went to Denmark, Switzerland, Netherlands, Spain, Italy, then a UK tour where we traveled all over England, Scotland and Wales, we did a tour of South Korea, Hong Kong, and a parliamentary tour of Australia where we showed the film in every state parliament in Australia, then Brazil, South Africa, Bermuda, Canada and of course all over the United States.

**Jeff:** You talked about a trilogy of films. What can you share about the next two films?

**Laila:** Nefarious II is going to examine the demand side of the sex trafficking equation, and the way that pornography plays into that. Pornography is really underneath the whole sex industry, fueling it. I think it's going to be very powerful, because when you're looking at human trafficking, it's easy for a lot of audiences to stand at a distance and feel troubled about the situation, but it's not something that is affecting them personally, or that they feel they are personally involved in. But when you bring pornography into the mix that changes everything. Even in the church there are statistics that are saying that 50 percent of men in the church are struggling with pornography and as many as 30% of women. So when you bring that into it, that pornography is what is behind human trafficking, it's going to really touch people on a very personal level. The goal of the second film is ultimately to bring freedom to people struggling with pornography addiction, and to show the connection between pornography and human trafficking.

The third film is still off in the distance, and we haven't fully researched and know how it's going to develop. But it's basically going to look at the spiritual underpinnings that are fueling trafficking—from Buddhism, Islam, to even Judaism. One interesting example of the connections between religion and sex trafficking is the situation in Israel. Most people don't know that in Israel prostitution is legal, and a lot of the people who are most supportive of the sex industry are the Rabbis who are justifying the purchase of foreign women (not Jewish women) with Scripture and religious teaching. It is startling and many women are being trafficked into Israel for forced prostitution.

**Jeff:** If people want to support or get involved with Exodus Cry, what can they do?

**Laila:** First, they can go to the website—exoduscry.com. We are encouraging people to
begin by purchasing the DVD, doing home screenings, doing community screenings, raising awareness. Then to begin praying regularly for the ending of human trafficking and also participating in law reform if they're called to do that. We have a Resources page on our website that has helpful information in how to get involved further.

Like I said before, the core of Exodus is a prayer movement to end slavery. We want to see prayer being raised up all over the world for the ending of human trafficking, so we have a regular prayer watch. Every Monday night from 8:00 to 10:00pm (Central Time) we have a worldwide prayer meeting. For the whole month we focus on one city. We have people joining in prayer from all over the world, and we all pray together for breakthroughs in this one city. And we've seen breakthrough after breakthrough, where God actually intervenes when we pray. You can view the prayer meeting live on the Internet at www.ihopkc.org on the prayer stream and it is archived as well. Then of course, people can give financially to the work that we're doing.

Part 2 will be published next week. It will focus on Laila Mickelwait's nonprofit, New Reality International, including her work in Haiti.
Chimney Hotel is for the Birds

Submitted: May 22, 2013
By Debonnaire Kovacs

It all started with some tiny birds: Vaux’s Swifts, only 4” (11 cm) long and weighing less than one ounce (<28 gms), the smallest of the four Swift species found in North America. These little creatures can fly at speeds exceeding 90 miles an hour—a good thing, since they must migrate hundreds of miles each year, from as far north as Alaska to as far south as eastern Panama and northern Venezuela.

Vaux’s Swifts been doing this for millennia, (long before they were named for 19th century scientist, William Sansom Vaux.) But one day in 1989, a small group of swifts made a discovery. In Sonoma County, California, north of San Francisco, right at a convenient stopping point in their southern migration in the fall, there was a tall chimney. The chimney had been there for a long time, but usually, hot steam was issuing out of it. This particular fall, there was no steam. A small flock of swifts circled down into the chimney to roost for the night, clustering together on the walls as bats do. (In fact, when they are flying, they are sometimes mistaken for bats—they have the rapid, erratic flight pattern of bats and other insect eaters.)

The swifts could not know they were about to become a celebrated tradition at Rio Lindo Adventist Academy, Healdsburg, CA. Nor could they know this was the first year the boiler was not being used to heat all the water on campus, because natural gas prices were going down and now water was heated with gas. They just knew they’d found a great hotel.

The biology teacher at Rio Lindo noticed the vortex of birds entering the chimney and called someone he knew in the Audubon Society, who sent someone that identified the migrating birds. In about 1991 or 1992, with the flocks growing larger each year, Audubon Society personnel video-taped them, then slowed the tape so they could count. They counted for five minutes and determined that approximately 360 birds enter the chimney each minute.

Using this number, the academy has kept count ever since, timing the main portion of the “vortex” and multiplying minutes by 360. According to information sent to Adventist Today by Brad Benson, Alumni/Development Director, “Typically the peak will have 6,000 to 10,000 birds in an evening.
In 2008 there were two evenings with between 18,000 and 20,000 birds entering the chimney. The lowest numbers were in 2005 when the highest count was 300.”

Benson says the chimney is 32 feet tall, though it doesn’t look it, as part of it is underground. He estimates that 30,000 birds could fit in the chimney. “On a night when we had 20,000 birds, I looked down into it, and there were no birds at all in the top eight to ten feet.”

The swifts begin arriving in small groups in mid-August each year, increasing night by night until the peak, between September 10 and 20. They stay in the Rio Lindo area for several weeks, fattening up (? All the way to an ounce, maybe?) for the next leg of their arduous journey south.
They come out of the chimney in the morning when the air warms enough that the insects they eat are active. Some think that on colder mornings they may fly to the Sacramento Valley to eat, then return to their chimney hotel in the evening.

Benson believes that Rio Lindo is one of the four or five largest sites on the coastal migratory route where the birds congregate. “There is a group in Washington trying to identify all the sites on the Pacific coast. I have people call me from states as far away as Florida calling me to ask when the dates will be, so they can come and watch.”

A local newspaper, the Santa Rosa Press Democrat, published an article about the academy’s famous swifts, along with several pictures. (You will find the website below.)

The academy has a special biology class event for credit, one evening during the migration, and Audubon has special kids’ nights as well as weekend nights for members. Rio Lindo also allows visitors to come and watch, so long as they “remember this is a boarding high school campus with students present 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Remember that means no smoking or alcohol is allowed on the campus. Also, please stay in the area of the chimney and do not roam the campus.” (From the academy website.) On a typical evening, Benson says, there are 30-60 people watching the swifts, and sometimes as many as 250, especially on peak nights in mid-September, when the numbers reach above 10,000 per night.

Part of the excitement is watching (or worrying) when raptors such as merlins or sharp-shinned hawks attack the flocks. Benson says some people cheer for the hunter catching its supper, while others are upset and try to chase the predators away.

To learn more about the Rio Lindo Vaux’s Swifts, visit one of these sites below:

You can see a video at http://www.californiareport.org/archive/R201110071630/e The clip is 2 minutes, 13 seconds long, so using the 360-birds-per-minute estimate, you will see about 798 birds enter the chimney, though it appears as though many more are circling overhead. Be aware, at the very end of the clip, a predator attacks.
Victory Over the Beast, Chapter Seven, Singing in the Courtroom

Submitted: May 22, 2013
By Ervin Thomsen

Chapter 7

Singing in the Courtroom
The Hour of His Judgment

“...the hour of His judgment has come” Revelation 14:7.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church literally had its birth in this phrase from Revelation 14: “the hour of His judgment has come.” As the pioneers gradually started to see a connection between Daniel 8:14 and Revelation 14:7, this understanding became to them a tremendous help in overcoming their prior disappointment of October 22, 1844. Though Jesus had not returned when they had expected Him, God had not failed them. The second coming of Jesus was still their certain hope. But preparatory to His coming, there must first be a work of judgment in the heavenly courtroom. To describe this judgment, they coined the phrase “the investigative judgment.” Believing that God had commissioned them to tell the world that we are now living in the hour of His judgment, they started teaching that the everlasting gospel would be the key to passing this judgment in preparation to welcoming Christ with joy at His second coming.

Our God is a God of Justice

God’s judgment flows from His character as a God of justice. His justice is His personal commitment, rooted in His holy character, to actively seek to correct all injustice. Because we are created in God’s image, there is also within all of us a keen sense of justice. Just notice how many times we use the expression, “it isn’t fair!” We instantaneously recoil when we are treated unjustly. And yet, when we are caught in personal sin, we will plead for compassion for our wrongdoing, often calling our transgression just a “mistake.” But when others offend us and treat us unjustly, we may often wish for the swift administration of justice on their miserable souls.

Many Christian thinkers have written incisively about the combination of both justice and love in the character of God.

• “God and love are synonymous. Love is not an attribute of God, it is God. Whatever God is, love is. If your conception of love does not agree with justice and judgment, purity and holiness, then your idea of love is wrong.” [1]
• “Not only is it right for God to display anger against sin, I find it impossible to understand how he could do otherwise...God’s compassion flows out of His goodness, and goodness
without justice is not goodness. God spares us because He is good, but He could not be good if He were not just.” [2]

“God’s holiness is that attribute of His character by which He maintains the integrity of His being. If we spoke less about God’s love and more about His holiness, more about His judgment, we should say much more when we did speak about his love.” [3]

The three angels’ messages are God’s summons to the inhabitants of earth for the final session of His judgment in heaven’s open courtroom. Instead of trembling about the outcome of your personal case, you can actually join the singing already in progress in heavenly places.

The Hour of His Judgment: Heaven’s Court Probates the Will—the Covenant

If you had been summoned to court, which kind of court case would you rather attend? A traffic court where you were named as a defendant because of reckless driving, or a case in probate court because you had been named as the heir of a will?

For purposes of illustration I have chosen to use the model of the probating of a last will and testament, to illustrate something about Revelation chapters 4 and 5. Have you ever been named as the beneficiary of a will? When would you actually receive the benefits of that will? When it was signed? Or when you received a copy of the will in the mail? Would you show up at the home of the testator/donor and demand that you receive the inheritance now, prior to the death of the testator? “For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it was no power at all while the testator lives.” (Hebrews 9:16, 17).

Even after the death of the testator/s, there is one legal procedure required before the beneficiaries can start receiving their benefits of inheritance. This procedure, called ‘probate,’ allows anyone who believes he has a legal claim against the beneficiaries, or the testators, to challenge the validity of the will. Was the testator qualified? Was he/she of sound mind when they signed the document? Were they mentally competent? Did they freely write the will without duress or undue influence?

As the accuser, Satan has continually challenged God’s government, as he has focused His attacks on God’s covenant, sometimes better understood as His last will and testament. These challenges against God’s covenant all occur in open court. Would you, in a probate court, ever challenge a will in which you were named as an inheritor? Would you not rather be on tip-toe with excitement, overflowing with gratitude to the Person who, as the testator, had named you as a beneficiary? If up to this point you have never shown much enthusiasm about the judgment, would a look through heaven’s open doors into the very throne room of heaven change your mind? You can look at the words, “Fear God and give glory to Him for the hour of His judgment is come,” and think of the judgment in terms of this jingle, “What are you going to do when they come for you?” (the refrain from the COPS television series). Or, you can read about the proceedings in heaven’s courtroom as found in Revelation chapters 4 and 5, and literally walk into the courtroom with a song in your heart.
To settle the issues, which are all of cosmic significance, in the great controversy between Christ and Satan, God brings witnesses into His courtroom. There are both witnesses from heaven, the four living creatures, as well as witnesses from earth, the 24 elders. How fair would the proceedings be if only witnesses from heaven appeared? Would Satan not then be able to claim, “this isn’t fair—the whole thing is rigged in favor of God”? This is why God also brings in witnesses from earth, the twenty-four elders.

**Question:** Who are the twenty-four elders? There is evidence to suggest these are witnesses from earth, the resurrected saints who ascended with Christ as the “first fruits.” (See Ephesians 4:8; Matthew 27:53). When Christ was crucified there was a great earthquake, and certain people were resurrected and went as the first witnesses into the city of Jerusalem. As their testimony to Jesus, they shared the obvious fact of their own resurrection and then, three days later, the resurrection of Jesus. Later they ascended with Christ (as His “first fruits”) to continue to serve as witnesses in heaven’s courtroom above.

When the Judge, the Creator God of the universe, appears in heaven’s open court, the proceedings open with this declaration coming from the four living creatures, witnesses from heaven.

“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come” (Revelation 4:8).

Then more witnesses are called—the twenty-four elders, witnesses from earth. In an act of worship, they cast their crowns before the throne, declaring,

“**You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created**” (Revelation 4:11).

The first item to be settled in heaven’s courtroom is whether or not the Judge is qualified to hear the case at hand. The issue before the universe, ever since Satan’s expulsion from heaven, concerns the character of God - Is He worthy of worship? The enemy, Satan, has staunchly maintained that God is not worthy of worship. But here in open court, both witnesses from both heaven and earth declare without hesitation, “You are worthy, O Lord!” Another issue is this: Does the judge have jurisdiction in this matter? The affirmative answer by the witnesses from earth is, “Yes, because He is the creator of heaven and earth.”

**The Executor of the Will Enters the Courtroom**

Revelation chapter 5 is a continuation of the courtroom proceedings begun in chapter 4. The Judge holds in His hand a scroll, written inside and on the back, and sealed with seven seals. An angel challenges the court with the question, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?” (Revelation 5:2).
Question: What is the scroll? I have found it most helpful to consider the scroll as a ‘last will and testament.’ For a ‘last will and testament’ to take effect, the death of the testator must first take place. For the promises of the covenant to take effect, its seals must be loosed, and only the One who has died is qualified to loose the seals. This is God’s everlasting covenant, made before the foundation of the world in a sacred pledge between Father and Son. This will is now about to be probated. Are there any valid legal challenges to the provisions of this will being carried out?

When John the Revelator heard the challenge of the angel, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and lose its seal?” he wept much. There must have been a reason for John’s weeping. He must have known what the scroll represented—namely, the covenant. He had personally been present in the upper room and heard the words of Jesus, “Drink you all of this, for this is the cup of the new testament in my blood” (Luke 22:20). This took place more than sixty years earlier, and as far as John was concerned, the benefits of the covenant had not yet been fulfilled. All the apostles had died, most of them not from natural causes. Though the Christian church had experienced tremendous growth, Jesus had not yet returned, as He said He would do (John 14:1-3). No wonder the beloved apostle wept much. John faced the question - Is anyone judicially qualified to carry out the provisions of the will or covenant? This was John’s great disappointment - no one was found worthy.

No doubt, John’s tears stopped when one of the witnesses from earth, an elder, said, “Do not weep, for the Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seals” (Revelation 5:5). John heard about a lion, but when he turned to look, all He saw is a Lamb, and one in the very act of slaughter—a portrayal of utter weakness. No doubt John experienced another disappointment. But then he saw this slain Lamb approach the Judge on the throne to take the scroll out of His hand. At that moment, John heard an outburst of rapturous singing in the courtroom. The twenty-four elders, the witnesses from earth, and the four living creatures fell down in worship before the Lamb, and they sang a new song, saying,

“You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals, for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God, and we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9, 10).

Notice the past tenses in this passage which speak of the accomplished work of the Lamb: “You have redeemed us” and “have made us kings and priests to our God.”

Then thousands of angels around the throne (you may consider them the jury) along with the four living creatures (witnesses from heaven) and the 24 elders (witnesses from earth) all join together as with one loud voice they declare,

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing! (Revelation 5:12).

Where are those who would challenge the provisions of this will (or covenant)? Satan is
nowhere to be found. He would not dare to enter heaven’s throne room to press a charge against God, or God’s people (the saints), when the witnesses (the twenty four elders and the four living creatures) and the jury (the angels) join in a thunderous judicial declaration, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain” (Revelation 5:12). Would not their singing remind him of his once lost position as the leader of the heavenly choirs?

It is the blood of slain Lamb that silences Satan, the accuser. Ever since Calvary, Satan has been “cast down,” (Revelation 12:9) or legally defeated. No longer can he press any valid legal claims against God, or the people of God, as the will, the covenant-last-will-and-testament, is being probated. Notice that the Lamb is serving in a dual role here as both testator and executor of the covenant. There is no conflict of interest whatsoever. The entire universe testifies that both God and His Son are worthy of the highest praise.

_Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever! (Revelation 5:13)._

The will is entirely valid. Its terms have been faithfully carried out. Its Testator has died, and in His dual role as both Testator and Executor, Jesus Christ is qualified to dispense its benefits. This is how God saves His people—through a work of judgment in defeating the accuser of the brethren, and doing it in a way that on a cosmic scale protects God’s government from any of Satan’s charges. Likewise we, as God’s children and heirs of the covenant, are protected against the accusations of Satan as long as we claim the blood of the Lamb as our only defense. Who then can challenge us? Who can press any charges against us? God cannot. Christ will not (Romans 8:31-33). In this phase of the judgment, God allows the “probate court” of the universe to handle all the legal challenges as to the validity of His covenant or will. The work of the slain Lamb on Calvary’s cross solidly defeats all such challenges.

Do we realize the far-reaching implications of this when we here on earth assemble for corporate worship? Such worship is an opportunity to register our agreement with the findings of the court of heaven as to the integrity of God’s character and His government. So when you sing, “ Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it,” don’t just sing as if you mean, but sing it because you mean it, and you know it is true because the heaven’s court has so declared.

**The Covenant Benefits of God’s “Last Will and Testament”**

To live in the judgment hour - what a privilege! Here are some of the covenant benefits that are already ours through Christ’s work as the testator/executor in the heavenly courtroom. Now the “eyes of your heart” can be opened “that you may know what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:18). Because the Testator, Jesus Christ, has died these benefits are available to us now. Here is a partial list of some of the covenant benefits He has released to every believer.

• We have justification, acquittal in the judgment, for all our sins (Romans 3:23-26).
Access to God’s throne (Hebrews 8:1)
Complete salvation (Hebrews 10:12, 14).
Hope, boldness and confidence (Hebrews 2:16; 6:19, 20).
Advocacy for sinners, legal representation when we sin (1 John 2:1, 2).
A Sympathizing High Priest (Hebrews 4:14, 15).
A Secure Righteousness found at the right hand of the Father. (John 16:7-10).
We receive a new identity as children and heirs of God (Galatians 4:5-7).
Our fears about passing the future judgment are gone (1 John 4:17, 18).
We have peace with God through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:2; 8:31).
We receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16, 17).
We have a solid assurance based on these facts—Our Attorney, Jesus Christ, is our brother and His Father is the Judge. With an “inside” arrangement like that, how can we possibly lose in the judgment?
We receive our work assignment, deputized as kings and priests, (Revelation 5:10; 1:6), to extend Christ’s kingdom-rule through praise and intercessory prayer into all areas where He is not now ruling.

“Satan is constantly at work, but few have any idea of his activity and subtlety. The people of God must be prepared to withstand the wily foe. It is this resistance that Satan dreads. He knows better than we do the limit of his power and how easily he can be overcome if we resist and face him. Through divine strength the weakest saint is more than a match for him and all his angels, and if brought to the test he would be able to prove his superior power” [4]

“Satan cannot bear to have his powerful rival appealed to, for he fears and trembles before His strength and majesty. At the sound of fervent prayer, Satan's whole host trembles” [5]

Do not ever lose sight of the tremendous significance of what happened in 31 A.D. in the heavenly courtroom upon Christ’s ascension, as described by Ellen G. White.

“The Father gave all honour to His Son, seating Him at His right hand, far above all principalities and powers. He expressed His great joy and delight in receiving the Crucified One, and crowning Him with glory and honour. And all the favours He has shown to His Son in His acceptance of the great atonement are shown to His people. God loves them as He loves His Son. The seal of Heaven has been affixed to Christ's atonement. His sacrifice is in every way satisfactory. In Him mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. The Father embraced His Son, and in this included all who receive Him.” [6]

To learn of how the events of 31 AD interface with AD 1844, see footnote [7.]

Because of Christ’s death on Calvary’s cross, no longer do you need to think of yourself as a defendant on trial, but you can now come boldly as a legitimate heir to heaven’s courtroom to start receiving the covenant (last will and testament) benefits to which you are entitled because of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, ascension and intercession.

All of these above-mentioned benefits are based on the judicial transactions and declarations in heaven’s courtroom when Christ was enthroned there as our High Priest and King in 31 A.D.—
all described in Revelation chapters 4 and 5.

Notice Ellen White’s observations on the significance of this transaction (italics supplied)

“All power is given into His hands, that He may dispense rich gifts unto men, imparting the priceless gift of His own righteousness to the helpless human agent. This is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel's message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure. The uplifted Saviour is to appear in His efficacious work as the Lamb slain, sitting upon the throne, to dispense the priceless covenant blessings, the benefits He died to purchase for every soul who should believe on Him. John could not express that love in words; it was too deep, too broad; he calls upon the human family to behold it. Christ is pleading for the church in the heavenly courts above, pleading for those for whom He paid the redemption price of His own lifeblood. Centuries, ages, can never diminish the efficacy of this atoning sacrifice. The message of the gospel of His grace was to be given to the church in clear and distinct lines, that the world should no longer say that Seventh-day Adventists talk the law, the law, but do not teach or believe Christ” [8]

There is singing in heaven’s courtroom. Will you in your worship join in this singing, declaring your agreement with the witnesses assembled there, that the Lamb, Jesus Christ, is worthy of worship?

Your Decision About the Judgment

The good news about the judgment is that sinners do not have to approach it in fear and trembling, because God has provided the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. Believe that Jesus Christ took the judgment that you deserve, and that as a result of His bearing of your sin, you are now acquitted before God.

If up to this point in your life you have never found peace of mind because you have no solid assurance of salvation as you look at your own conduct, then ask yourself these three questions, and let your faith rest in the truthfulness of these Scriptures, for it is impossible for God to lie.

- **Where is our righteousness?** It is in Christ, for God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become of the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- **Where is Christ?** He is at the right hand of the Father. “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Colossians 3:1-3).
- **Where are we?** God “made us alive together with Christ and raised us up together, and made us sit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). In Christ we are also seated at the right hand of the Father.
If you believe this, then make the following declaration as your confession of faith, because the Bible says…“that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

Knowing the power of spoken words, would you also declare the following audibly as your personal testimony?

*Because of Christ’s redemption I am a new creation of infinite worth. I am deeply loved, I am completely forgiven, I am fully pleasing, I am absolutely complete in Christ.* [9]

*I rejoice in my new identity in Him as His child, and as a legitimate heir of everything that God the Father and Jesus the Son have willed to me in the covenant, their “last will and testament.” Henceforth I will let these facts program my entire life that I may joyfully live only for His glory.*

Join the singing in the heavenly courtroom. This kind of worship is God’s appointed way of defeating Satan’s accusations. It is His way of establishing His kingdom rule in your own circumstances, and also in the circumstances of your local church.

**Life Applications**

**Questions to Ponder**

1. Are you currently living in fear and trembling about the judgment? If so, why?

2. What is the good news about the judgment? List as many covenant benefits as you can think of. Are you taking full advantage of all of those benefits?

3. Have you ever experienced disappointments that caused you to wonder, Where is God, and why is He so slow in fulfilling His promises? How can this chapter, Revelation 5, help you?

4. What difference would it make in your life now if you truly believed that the Judge is on your side?

5. Have you ever joined with the beast in his blasphemous work against the heavenly tabernacle? How did you do that? What is the meaning of blaspheming “those who dwell in heaven?” (Revelation 13:6). Who dwells in heaven now? See Colossians 3:1-3 and Ephesians 2:6. (If so, you can ask for and receive full forgiveness, one of the most important benefits of God’s covenant will and testament.)

**Texts to Remember**

“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). “But He was
wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

Truths versus Lies

“For He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with His truth” (Psalm 96:13).

As you let the truths of God replace the lies of the enemy, you will enhance your immunity against all of Satan’s deceptions. Remember, Satan will always have power over us as long as we believe His lies.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satan’s lies or half-truths</th>
<th>God’s Truths</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your righteousness is in your own accomplishments and good works.</td>
<td>Your righteousness is in Christ who is at the right hand of the Father. The Father, on account of Christ’s redemptive work, loves and accepts you, just as He loves and accepts His own Son.</td>
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<tr>
<td>This leads to insecurity, feelings of shame, condemnation, worthlessness, discouragement, and hopelessness because your own righteousness is never good enough.</td>
<td>This leads to security, joy, peace, hope, and confidence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Living with fear and insecurity is what will keep you on your toes and prevent backsliding.</td>
<td>Living with assurance based on the sufficiency of the merit of Christ is the best way to experience continual overcoming.</td>
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<td>The result is that we cover our sins (we hide them), and we live in fear of the judgment, the fear of rejection if others should discover what we are really like. If our hearts condemn us, we run and hide from God rather than coming to the heavenly sanctuary to find mercy and grace.</td>
<td>The result is that we uncover and confess our sins, and we need not be ashamed because He is not ashamed of us. “For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things” (1 John 3:20).</td>
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Endnotes Chapter 7:

Thus, both believers in the 1st century and in 1844 could read and understand the phrase the “hour of His judgment” (Revelation 14:6) because they viewed it from different perspectives. Believers in the first centuries would understand the “hour of his judgment has come” in terms of Christ’s ascension, enthronement, and meditation, which made available the “covenant benefits” of the cross and the covenant to all believers. Believers in our day, since 1844, would understand the “hour of his judgment has come” from the viewpoint of determining who among the believers had availed themselves of the covenant benefits of 31 AD.

Successful living in this “hour of His judgment” is based on our trustful reliance on the covenant benefits first made available to us as a result of Christ’s enthronement when the covenant was probated and its provisions were determined to be unassailably valid. Everything in the outworking of the final phases of the plan of salvation is based on the cross. Do not attempt to enter upon some man-made do-it-yourself projects to fulfill God’s requirement. Come boldly now to the throne of grace, and confidently rest your case, not on your own performance, but on Christ’s covenant faithfulness. The proclamation of the judgment hour message since 1844 is a message of hope in what God has already done in Christ to safely save us in His eternal kingdom.