Is the New President of Egypt an Adventist?: In the United States, it's not uncommon to hear avowals that the current president is indeed a practicing Muslim. In Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood has borrowed a page from that book and is spreading word that the nation's new president is something far more serious—a living, breathing Seventh-day Adventist!

Adventist Youth Directors Meet with Independent Ministries, Agree to Joint Understandings: A perceived rift between Generation of Youth for Christ (GYC), other youth programs, and Church youth leaders has apparently been mended.....

Loma Linda University Helps Start New Medical School at the Adventist University of the Philippines: Adventist medical education is on a roll these days, with the projected opening of a sixth accredited medical school next year....

News Briefs July 12, 2013: The South Sea area continues to adjust to Adventists' day-of-rest issues; Parkview Adventist Medical Center near Portland, Maine, continues to confront financial issues; Outpost Centers International holds its annual convention, this time in Africa; Jamaica's heavily Adventist population places restrictions on auto emissions; other health-care-related, publishing, political, and international items....

One Step ahead of Personal and Spiritual Annihilation: Columnist Harry Banks has recently experienced a time of spiritual reassessment and now belongs to a Bible study group led by a man with an atheistic background. What in the world is going on in his life?....

Devil's Advocate: When "miraculous" things occur, is it wrong to examine natural explanations, or is that the devil's work? Columnist Mark Gutman urges us to play devil's advocate before claiming that coincidences, premonitions, insights, and healings come express delivery from the heavenly throne room....

Kissing Vikings: If a matted-haired Viking, armed with maces and battle axes appeared at the door of your church, would you greet him with holy kisses and invite him to potluck? In olden times, the primitive Church did just that, writes devotional blogger Debbonaire Kovacs.....
Adventist Responses to United States Supreme Court Decisions about Same-Sex Marriages Reveal a Wide Range of Opinion: Though an official pronouncement has gone out, reaffirming the Adventist Church's support for marriage as defined by "one man, one woman," some Adventists also see the ruling as a step forward in recognizing the rights and freedoms they believe should be afforded all Americans, regardless of gender and orientation (this story appeared earlier this week in a special AT Update edition)....

Netherlands Union Conference Votes to Ordain Female Pastors: In a delayed announcement reflecting a decision made last May to erase all distinctions between full-fledged male and female pastors, the Netherlands Union Executive Committee has authorized ordaining women to serve co-equaly with invested male clergy (this story appeared earlier this week in a special AT Update edition)....

Sports in Adventist Schools: Once upon a time, sports, band music, and a host of other secular sorts of entertainment were absolutely forbidden for young Adventists. But, oh, how times have changed! These same forbidden pursuits now appear to be opening doors for ministry in the community....

Victory Over the Beast, Chapter 13: Maybe it’s fitting that this is lucky Chapter 13—where Dr. Ervin Thomsen finally identifies Babylon. And it’s not what many of us expect. Follow down the column of comparisons of the "two cities." Are we living in Babylon, or Jerusalem?...
Adventist Today

Is the New President of Egypt an Adventist?

Submitted: Jul 9, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

The answer is a definite no! But the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood's official Web site quoted the allegation as a way of discrediting newly-installed President Adly Mansour does indicate something about the context within which the relatively small Adventist community in Egypt lives and works.

The statement that Mansour is "considered to be a Seventh Day Adventist, which is a Jewish sect," appeared briefly on the Muslim Brotherhood Web site as an item from "an alleged Facebook page of dubious credibility," according to The Washington Post and other major news media. Journalists immediately identified the Adventist Church as Protestant. Al-Jazerra television, the most reliable news source in the Arabic language, has confirmed that Mansour is Muslim, as is the majority of the population in Egypt.

There are less than a thousand Adventists in Egypt out of total population of 120 million. This is the same membership that was reported in 1965, although by 1974 the report was nearly 2,500 members. "Statistics for the Adventist Church in Egypt are ... unreliable and fluctuate extremely," Dr. Borge Schantz, a former missionary in the region now retired as a pastor in his native Denmark, told Adventist Today. It was first organized in 1901 and at the end of the first decade had only 18 members. Today it operates two schools, one secondary and one primary school.

Galal Doss, a former church member who heads a popular food and cosmetics company in Egypt, has for the past couple of years aggressively distributed materials among Christians featuring his approach to propagating the Adventist faith because he felt that denomination was not doing enough. This has resulted in "a lot of animosity from the [dominate] Coptic Church," Schantz reported. "The Coptic Church claims about ten percent of the population, however Muslims put that number around six to eight percent."

Adventists "have never really been on good terms with the Coptic Church," Schantz said, although the official name of the denomination in Egyptian can be translated "the Seventh-day Adventist Coptic Denomination." Over the years "there were situations where Adventists were better treated by the Muslim government than by the Coptic Church."

"The ousting of President Morsi is a great gain for all Christians in Egypt [and] the present Army rule will no doubt be a welcome benefit" for them. Schantz, who was the founding director of the Adventist center specializing in the study of Islam, explained that there are five kinds of Muslims in Egypt.

(1) "Ethnic Muslims born in a Muslim society and carries the name of the tradition, but is personally independent of the culture, religion and activities of the brand of Islam he was born into. (2) Cultural Muslims who are socialized into the Muslim cultural tradition, its attitudes and beliefs, and experiences life through these traditions. (3) Secular Muslims who favor a life separated from religion in both politics and practice, but are not necessarily hostile to Allah, Mohammed and the Koran."

The three groups above often experience tension with two other groups. (4) "Religious Muslims who profess a specific set of beliefs, participate in certain religious practices and consider personal piety to be essential to their personal lifestyle. (5) Political Muslims who view Islam primarily as a socio-political framework and have specific ideas about the role, place and function of religion in society. They tend to view Islam as a total way of life, not only for individuals, but also for society."

The Sunni Muslims, the majority of Islam worldwide, "are able to live more peacefully with people of other faiths and the secular Muslims," Schantz pointed out. The Shiite Muslims are more fundamentalist and "about four to eight percent of people in all religions, political parties and ideologies have fundamentalist genes and tendencies."

"Muslims have never in any Islamic republic, kingdom or chiefdom experienced democracy. Perhaps the main reason for the Egyptian Army to take such strong measures is that they have observed how the democratically-elected Muslim Brotherhood president slowly began to ... introduce provisions in accord with Islamic law. Over time ... he could [have] become an Islamic dictator." After all, "Hitler was also democratically elected in 1933."

Asked if the Muslim Brotherhood understands any concept of religious liberty, Schantz explained that "conversion to Islam is simple, but Muslims are forbidden to convert from Islam to another religion." Some Muslim-majority countries have restrictions on religious freedom which favor Muslim citizens over non-Muslim citizens, while other Muslim countries "tend to be more liberal" and some "are secular and do not regulate religious belief" at all. This is a turning-point for Egypt.

__________________________
Share your thoughts about this article:

Log In to Post a Comment. Log In| Register
Adventist Youth Directors Meet with Independent Ministries, Agree to Joint Understandings

Submitted: Jul 10, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

A "Global Unity Summit" convened by Pastor Gilbert Cangy, youth director of the General Conference (GC) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, brought together a number of the denomination's youth directors and representatives of independent ministries, announced a story released by the Adventist News Network (ANN) on Monday (July 8). The denomination's official news service, ANN also released an eight-point document describing the agreements that the representatives came to.

A key group involved in the "summit" was Generation of Youth for Christ (GYC), started with the involvement of Dr. Samuel K. Pipim when he was director of campus ministries for the Michigan Conference. Pipim later admitted to sexual misconduct with young women, resigned from denominational employment and was dropped from church membership. The Michigan Conference has rescinded his ministerial credentials and refused his rebaptism, as Adventist Today has reported.

GYC is generally viewed as more conservative than the official youth activities of the Adventist Church. "Within the church, there is a wide spectrum of theological understandings," Cangy is quoted in the ANN bulletin. "From the sinless perfections who want to see individuals be sinless before Jesus comes ... to the rabidly liberal who see no need for obedience or accountability. The perception was that even the centered [supporting ministries] were professing a performance-driven Christian lifestyle that would earn them salvation. We discovered through our meetings that this was not the view that was embraced."

Another issue discussed was about communication between independent ministries and the denomination's appointed youth directors in local and union conferences. "GYC has always strived to be in regular and consistent communication with [local] church leadership," Amy Sheppard, a vice president of the organization who participated in the meeting. "But the perception that this communication does not happen unfortunately persists."

The eight "resolutions" that came out of the meeting include commitments "to work together in mutual affirmation and support, ... an ongoing process of open communication," and to keep "our calling to serve young people as a priority over personal ambition, politics and self-interest." It also includes a "mutual commitment to keep Jesus at the center of our faith," a theme that sounds very much like that of The One Project, although the ANN bulletin said nothing about that coalition of pastors and youth workers being part of the meeting.

Cangy admitted in the ANN story that there "is the perception that some supporting ministries are fringe movements touting dubious theology." A retired church administrator told Adventist Today "when a group feels the need to start an organization that parallels an established department like youth ministries, there is always an implied criticism of the leadership in that department. Otherwise, why is the new organization needed?"

Cangy was elected youth director at the 2010 GC Session when Dr. Baraka Muganda was not returned to office, much to the professed surprise of many youth directors around the world. "Upon his 2010 appointment ... Cangy pledged to increase dialogue between church youth leadership and supporting [independent] ministries," the ANN bulletin stated. Muganda was hired as vice president for ministries at Washington Adventist University.

The resolutions "provide an excellent foundation for the future," a former youth director told Adventist Today. "The question is will GYC and similar groups actually collaborate with the denomination's youth workers or continue to do their own thing. There is a spirit of independence among some sectors of the Adventist community that never seems to go away."

Share your thoughts about this article:

Log In to Post a Comment. Log In | Register
Loma Linda University Helps Start New Medical School at the Adventist University of the Philippines

Submitted: Jul 9, 2013

By PR Web News Release

Loma Linda University (LLU) will help establish a new medical school in the Philippines. The Adventist University of the Philippines was recently granted permission by the Philippines Commission of Higher Education to open a medical school. It will be the sixth accredited medical school operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Dr. Richard Hart, president of LLU, is looking forward to this international partnership. “Since its founding, Loma Linda University has sent thousands of physicians, dentists and nurses to provide health care internationally. As the Adventist Church develops international universities, we can expand capacity by assisting with education for health professionals around the world.”

The team from LLU will be working with the first dean of the new medical school, Dr. Doris A. Mendoza, who garnered the experience necessary to take on her new position while serving as a medical school faculty member at West Visayas State University in the Philippines. She has outlined an up-to-date curriculum that will meet more stringent Filipino accreditation criteria.

The new department of medical education in the LLU School of Medicine has formed a working group to collaborate with Dr. Mendoza and her team. It includes Dr. Tammi Thomas, Dr. Lawrence Loo, and Dr. Daniel Giang. They will focus their efforts on developing the curriculum, building a strong faculty, upgrading the facilities and admitting the first class of students. AUP intends to accept its first class of 20 medical students in June 2014 and will use the Adventist Medical Center in Manila as its primary clinical teaching site. In addition, the new faculty at AUP will be enrolled in the online Master of Science degree program in Health Professions Education, an inter-professional graduate program at Loma Linda University designed to prepare clinicians to teach in the classroom.

Dr. Giang has congratulated AUP achieving accreditation for its medical school and anticipates collaborating with the new sister school. “Adventist health education provides distinctive added values to students as well as a first-rate education in various health sciences disciplines. We strive to help students synthesize their commitment to faith and science while viewing each patient as a ‘whole person’ rather than as cases of a disease. We see health care as part of an overall mission of representing God in the world is what we strive for.”

The department of education at the denomination's General Conference has provided additional resources to LLU to help with this project. Lenoa Edwards, assistant dean for admissions at the LLU School of Medicine, visited AUP to discuss admissions issues in April. “We anticipate a busy year for both AUP and LLU,” she said.

LLU assisted the Filipino university in developing its public health school about 30 years ago and worked with AUP to develop its dental school in 2005. Dr. Ronald Dailey, dean of the LLU School of Dentistry, was part of the collaboration eight years ago and believes LLU’s partnership with AUP is special. “This is a unique opportunity,” he said, “to build a medical school in a country that is striving to advance the quality of medical education in their country. It took visionary leadership to make LLU what it is today, and I am confident that same vision and skill will translate in this partnership with Adventist University of the Philippines.”

AUP is a highly regarded institution with successful schools of education, nursing, business, theology and health sciences. LLU provides resources for developing medical schools through its Global Health Institute and tailors its collaboration to meet the needs of each school. It will host the first international conference of Adventist medical educators in May 2014.

______________________________
Share your thoughts about this article:

Log In to Post a Comment. Log In| Register
Adventist Today

News Briefs July 12, 2013

Submitted: Jul 11, 2013

By AT News Team

Adventist Today regularly provides a summary of stories that we have decided do not require in-depth reporting, but our readers may want to be aware of.

Independence Day has been moved because it falls on the Sabbath this year in a province of the Solomon Islands where 45 percent of the population consists of Adventists. Provincial premier Lence Tango announced that the annual celebration on Rennell and Bellona islands has been moved to Monday, July 22, according to the Solomon Star-News, "to allow members of the ... Church to be part of the celebration." The two islands have a total population of about 2,400 and the Adventist community is concentrated in the western end of Rennell Island.

Parkview Adventist Medical Center near Portland, Maine, is laying off 16 full-time staff in an attempt to cut operating costs, reports the Press-Herald. The hospital is owed funds by the state's Medicaid program, MaineCare, and has had both an influx of low-income patients and fewer patients overall in recent years. Adventist Today has reported that the last Adventist hospital in the Atlantic Union Conference has agreed to be taken over by a regional nonprofit, Central Maine Healthcare. Approval of the merger by the state health department is currently in suspension, “pending a feasibility study,” the newspaper said.

The Jamaica government has been urged to match a new law against smoking in public places with restrictions on auto emissions by the Adventist Church in that country. Auto emissions "are equally harmful and detrimental to human health and the environment," said a statement from the Jamaica Union Conference health ministries director, Dr. Milton Gregory, reported the Jamaica Gleaner. Development has increased the number of cars and trucks on the Caribbean island and is overwhelming the infrastructure and damaging the ecology. The head of state in Jamaica, the Governor General representing Queen Elizabeth 2, is an Adventist clergyman and former union conference president.

A class action lawsuit against Adventist Health System has been dismissed by Federal Judge Roy B. Dalton, Jr., because it belongs in a state court, Health IT Security news service reported Monday (July 8). The litigation filed by Richard Faircloth accused the hospital system of violating the privacy of 740,000 patients under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) when employees reportedly sold the data to outside individuals. The Florida-based nonprofit, one of the largest faith-based health care organizations in America, is involved in a number of other legal actions, some of which have been reported in Adventist Today.

George Fearing, a member of the Riverview Adventist Church in Pasco, Washington, was sworn in last week as a Court of Appeals judge in the state. He has served as an attorney for more than three decades. His father, Pastor Richard Fearing, held the Bible as the judge took the oath of office. The senior Fearing was president of the North Pacific Union Conference from 1980 to 1986.

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) has launched a campaign against child brides, because around the world every three seconds a girl as young as 10 years of age is sold or forced into marriage, a news release from the agency stated. The child's education usually ends at the point of the marriage and physical and emotional damage result from the practice.

The Adventist Church in Romania has joined with the Greek-Catholic Church in protesting "the article in the constitution on the role of the ... Romanian Orthodox Church," according to Nine O'Clock, a Web-based newspaper in the country. The constitution is being revised. "We expect the new constitution to equally address all Romanians, without discrimination and [be based on] current religious, political, economic, social, ethnic and institutional conditions," the statement from the Adventist denomination was quoted by the news publication.

The new editor of Insight, the magazine for teens published by the Adventist denomination, is a family counselor for the first time. Omar Miranda has been writing an advice column for the periodical the last three years. He has worked as a mental health professional in schools, community centers and juvenile detention facilities for the last two decades and is a specialist in the treatment of sexual abuse and sex addiction, counseling adolescents and forensic interviewing. The magazine is handed out weekly in youth Sabbath Schools across North America. Families can also purchase a subscription.

Outpost Centers International, an independent Adventist ministry with 37 projects in 20 nations, held its annual leadership retreat at Riverside Farm Institute in Zambia the first week of June. A total of 154 individuals attended the gathering, according to the Adventist-Laymen's Services and Industries (ASI) newsletter dated June 24. ASI is an association of independent ministries that maintain working relations with the denomination.

Two nurses in Adventist hospitals are among the 2013 class of Fellows of the American Academy of Nursing, as reported by local newspapers. Sharon Pappas is chief nursing officer at Porter Adventist Hospital in Denver and Margaret McNeil is a registered nurse at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital in the suburbs of Washington DC. The two are among 172 nurses who will be honored at the professional organization's annual meeting in October.

A chef at White Memorial Medical Center is among four winners of the Culinary Cup this year, which honor's healthy cooking. Raymond Cash won the award with...
his recipe for seared polenta cakes served with caramelized onions, goat cheese and rose honey. The hospital is operated by Adventist Health and named after Ellen G. White, cofounder of the Adventist denomination. The other three winners were from hospitals in St. Louis, Miami and at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.

Log In to Post a Comment. Log In| Register
Adventist Responses to United States Supreme Court Decisions about Same-Sex Marriages Reveal a Wide Range of Opinion

Submitted: Jul 4, 2013

By Adventist Today News Team

After the United States Supreme Court last week announced ground-breaking decisions on two cases related to same-sex marriages, a number of statements representing the views of Seventh-day Adventists were released. The statements ranged from negative to positive reactions, while others attempted to take middle ground.

"We reaffirm, without hesitation, our long-standing position ... following the biblical principles and patterns ... for marriage between one man and one woman," said the official statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America. Pastor Dan Jackson, president of the denomination's North American Division, expressed concern with "growing attacks on the biblical institution of marriage," but also said, "all people, no matter of their sexual orientation, are children of God. We do not condone singling out any group for scorn and derision, let alone abuse."

Advent Truth Ministries, an independent Fundamentalist group, stated that "one man/one woman marriage is creating a deep divide even among Christians [and] many see what God has ordained as an affront to their personal feelings and choices." The statement placed the issue in an apocalyptic frame, claiming that "the Bible has predicted the conflict over one man/one woman marriage," citing Romans 1:26-27 and 2 Timothy 3:1-3. It also connected the issue to "the debate over God's Sabbath, the other institution established by God at creation" and ended with an advertisement for a book entitled God's Sabbath Truth which the organization has been distributing for some time.

Adventists Against Proposition 8, a coalition in California that opposed the initiative four years ago which was ruled unconstitutional last week by the Supreme Court, welcomed the decision. The statement cautioned that it expressed the views of a few of the organizers and not necessarily all 1,300 Adventists who signed the petition against Proposition 8 in the fall of 2008. Among the signers are Adventists who oppose the practice of same-sex marriage and also think it is wrong for believers to use the law to enforce a religious belief in much the same way that Adventists have always opposed Sunday laws.

The statement by Adventists Against Proposition 8 applauded both Supreme Court decisions on the basis of "our distinctly Adventist commitment to cherish the dignity of each human being as a child of God and safeguarding the liberty and conscience of all people." It also pushed for change in the denomination's official position. "Our church continues to promote an attitude and a theology that views gays and lesbians as second-class members of God's family. We must stop promoting a 'shut door' theology of ignorance and prejudice."

Matthew Staver, an Adventist who is dean of the law school at Liberty University in Virginia, joined with Catholic Deacon Keith Fournier in drafting a statement that was signed by a long list of right-wing Christian leaders. "We are united in our common faith in Jesus Christ," the statement said, and in efforts to uphold the Biblical definition of marriage as "a bond between one man and one woman, intended for life and open to the gift of children."

The statement declared that "the Supreme Court has no authority over marriage" which is defined by moral and spiritual principles, although "the future of a free and healthy society [depends] on marriage and the family." Staver was a pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination before he went to law school. He has made a career of advocacy for conservative political positions, including arguing before the Supreme Court on several occasions. He once opposed a law that requires that anti-abortion activists stay at least 36 feet away from patients and staff entering a clinic.

In the future, another issue that could become a problem for Adventist schools has to do with how the topic is addressed in classes, Miller stated. Public schools will teach restrictions of this kind are likely to increase.

No one will be required to perform same-sex weddings as a result of the Supreme Court decisions, Nicholas Miller told Adventist Today. Miller is a specialist on religious liberty and a church historian on the faculty of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. He has a law degree from Columbia University and a PhD from Notre Dame University. He is coeditor of Homosexuality, Marriage and the Church published by the AU Press.

As the two decisions last week pose any immediate problems for the Adventist Church, Miller stated that churches and pastors do not have to perform a ritual that would be against their religion. The "problems will be around counseling and employment."

California last year enacted a law forbidding the involvement of children in counseling intended to modify their sexual orientation. Churches "can preach what they believe, but can't actually provide assistance to parishioners under 18 who are struggling with these issues and wanting to live what they believe is a biblical lifestyle," Miller said. Restrictions of this kind are likely to increase.

It will become more difficult for education and health care institutions affiliated with the denomination to require certain standards of sexual behavior for employees and students, Miller told Adventist Today. Current standards state that sex outside of marriage is not appropriate for employees or students, and same-sex marriage complicates this guideline. If the institutions are more specific about the type of marriage, there could be legal problems.

In the future, another issue that could become a problem for Adventist schools has to do with how the topic is addressed in classes, Miller stated. Public schools will teach
the acceptability of same-sex marriage and over time attempts will be made to get private schools to do the same. "At the college level, I think we're going to have trouble getting programs certified [in] social work and psychology if we don't teach the moral acceptability of homosexual behavior." He noted that this is already happening in Canada and other nations.

Miller was asked how the Adventist Church can maintain its theological position on homosexuality and avoid getting involved in anti-gay politics. "With difficulty," he said. "No one wants to be involved in anti-gay politics, but the church may need to be involved in pro-family politics." There are arguments to be made that having both a mother and a father is important to children and should be viewed as a favored arrangement in public policy, "even while we're tolerant and allow others to make other moral choices for their sexual behavior." Any defense of traditional marriage could be considered anti-gay bigotry, but Miller does not think it necessarily is. He pointed out that in recent protests in France, some in the gay community were not in favor of same-sex marriage.

Where is the line between the denomination's position and the use of laws to enforce that position on non-members? Miller recalled that Adventists had to deal with this question early in their history when temperance reform and laws about alcohol were being debated and changed in America. "They engaged in public policy campaigns to change laws that impact non-church members. Where appropriate we can advocate for public policy, not on spiritual grounds, but on grounds that is good for society."

There are risks in this area. "We have to help the overseas church see that we should not be advocating for criminal laws against homosexuality," Miller stated. "We should not be supporting discrimination and harassment in the workplace." Gay and lesbian people "need to be protected as all citizens are."

The Supreme Court decisions have opened the door to a new line of discussion among Adventists. "Much as it might like to, the church can no longer evade questions about homosexuality and same-sex marriage, for society is, with increasing stridency, forcing Christians to confront them," he wrote in the preface of the book he co-edited.

Share your thoughts about this article:

Log In to Post a Comment. Log In| Register
Netherlands Union Conference Votes to Ordain Female Pastors

Submitted: Jul 6, 2013

By AT News Team

Last year at a constituency meeting, the Netherlands Union Conference was one of the first in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination to vote an end to gender discrimination in ordination of clergy. On May 30 (2013) the executive committee decided to implement the decision of the constituency delegates and ordain female pastors, recognizing them as equal to their male colleagues. The delegates from the churches had charged the church leadership with the task of implementing the principle of equality as soon as possible. After much discussion, and after weighing many options, the executive committee decided that the best way to implement equality is through extending ordination of men and women.

The 2012 constituency session voted this action: “Considering the biblical principle of the equality of men and women, the delegates in session indicate that they reject the current situation of inequality in the church on principle. For this reason, and considering the context of Dutch society, they charge the executive [committee] to vigorously promote this perspective in the worldwide church. As quickly as possible, and no later than six months after the next session of the General Conference (2015), equality between men and women will be implemented at all organizational levels of the church in the Netherlands. The equal ordination of female pastors also falls into this category.”

“As [the] Dutch church we wish to stand firmly behind the principle that all human beings are fundamentally equal, regardless of gender, race, or background,” stated a news release received by Adventist Today. “This equality informs an integral part of our fundamental beliefs. The decision not to distinguish between pastors based on their gender falls under this principle. Through this decision the Netherlands Union Conference will be at variance with the policies of the world church. We wholeheartedly wish to follow these policies, and recognize that there must be unity in the church of Jesus Christ. This made implementing the [vote of the constituency session last year] and making this decision particularly complicated. In the end, this decision was the result of weighing the principle of unity against the principle of equality. Other possibilities were also discussed, including the option of not ordaining any pastors until the world church recognizes equality, and the option of waiting until the upcoming session of the General Conference of the world church to reach a decision. Ultimately it was decided that from June 1, 2013, all ordained and commissioned pastors, regardless of gender, will be considered ordained in the Netherlands. In practice this means that Pastor Elise Happé-Heikoop (pastor of Arnhem, Nijmegen and Doetinchem) is now considered ordained, and that on September 21, Giusèle Berkel-Larmonie will be ordained together with her (male) colleague Enrico Karg.”

An English translation of the item in the executive committee minutes, supplied by the Netherlands Union Conference, reads: “Considering the decision of the 2012 Union Session regarding the equality of men and women (#153), and taking our ethical objections to unequal treatment into account, the Netherlands Union Conference will no longer differentiate between male and female pastors as of June 1, 2013. All pastors, irrespective of their gender, will be ‘ingezegend’ pastors. When reporting to the world church, the Netherlands Union Conference will list all pastors as being ‘ordained.’”

Because of the potentially delicate nature of this topic, it was decided that the communication of this decision would be delayed until July 5, 2013. This gave the leadership enough time to properly and correctly inform the Trans-European Division of the General Conference.

The Netherlands Union Conference has 5,276 members in 71 congregations (55 organized churches and 16 church plants). Last year the 26 pastors in the Netherlands baptized more than 150 new members. In recent years the church has grown steadily, averaging an increase of 3.5 percent per year. While some of this growth can be attributed to immigration, the church-planting movement has been particularly successful in reaching the native-born Dutch population in one of the most secular countries in the world.
One Step ahead of Personal and Spiritual Annihilation

By Harry Banks

I was the only guy in the women's studies University of Alaska—Anchorage student showcase group. A friend at work had written a paper on the women clerical worker's 1984 strike at Yale University. Unable to personally make her presentation, she had asked me to read her paper for the student showcase event.

A young black poet was on the schedule just ahead of my presentation. As she described her personal journey and motivation for her poetry, she said, "I just try to stay one step ahead of personal and spiritual Annihilation." I don't remember her name. I don't remember her poem. But I have never forgot those words. Powerful visions of domestic violence, failures of spiritual leaders, church condemnation, and shunning flooded through my mind. Yet here she was calm and poised, ready to lay out a poetic piece of her life for all to share.

Recently I have had a period where it felt that I have been trying to stay one step ahead of personal and spiritual annihilation. As an attempt at spiritual survival I stepped away from my local congregation and started meeting with some spiritual friends who were sharing some of my journey. From time to time there is a strong temptation to finger-point and blame, and I have yet to figure out how I will ultimately relate to my formal organization, but I would like to share some of what seems to be unfolding.

At my local college, I am the only full time Instructor of Information Technology. My program prepares students to fill the needs of organizations which need technical computer networking and server administrative skills.

In the middle of this spiritually disorienting time, one of my adjunct instructors plopped herself down in my office and announced that one of her programmer coworkers at the Information Technology (IT) shop (where I used to work and where she currently is working) was starting a Saturday, 11 O'clock bible study at the local telephone company education center.

It always surprises me when conversations like this pop up in the context of a department dedicated to industry certifications and topics of complex technology!

What? Saturday church? At the phone company? With an IT geek for a leader? Oh, and who also happened to have previously been an atheist, and we are not done yet...

The group is purposefully nondenominational to attract persons who feel alienated from religion or formalized religion for whatever reason.

Hmm...

The fist week, Larry, the programmer leader, opened by saying that he felt a need to reach out to the people around him and make a place to engage with them where they are. No pressure to come to a certain position or place of belief, but an exchange of personal spiritual journeys whether in a context of doubt or faith. With Larry's atheist background, the agnostic, Julian Barnes' line, "I don't believe in God, but I miss him," seems to point to a possible point of contact for us all. There is that empty spot in all of us that only God can fill. Regardless of our state of belief or unbelief there is still a place in us only God can fill.

The first few weeks have been looking at the crucifixion from the point of view of different individuals close to Jesus—Mary mother of Jesus, Judas and Peter, soldiers, Pilate and Jewish leaders, as well as the thief on the cross. We have reflected on our contemporary lives and each week asked, "What would Jesus do?"

Confronted with the divine passion of Christ to redeem humanity at all costs—to forgive to the extreme—we have an opportunity to start sketching in new lines of redemption in own lives.

One of my favorite passages from Isaiah describes His Servant with the words, "He will not quench a smoldering flax." I have never built a fire with flax. But I do have a wood stove. Some days I find faint coals left from the previous fire. Small bits of tinder or a torn piece of birch bark are placed by the coals. Gradually they begin to smolder. Sometimes I impatiently blow on them. Sometimes I fan them with a piece of bark. Sometimes I just wait for the flames to spring up.

Right now this place of openness, acceptance and honesty seems an important place to rekindle faith. Moving though my community, I have recently encounters others that both Larry and I share as friends in common. One of them said, I'm glad you started attending Larry's group; it is making me reevaluate my own faith!

So was this always meant to be?

Here in Alaska we have silt laden rivers which have "braided streams." The river flows through a broad riverbed, but several channels snake back and forth combining and separating rejoining in new combinations, constantly changing as the silt builds up and forces the water to change course. I keep wondering, is this one of those spiritual braided streams? What is God up to?

I would covet your stories about any stage of faith (or felt absence of faith): faith wished for, faith discovered, faith rekindled, faith ignited.

In anticipation or your generous comments ... Thank you for sharing.
Devil's Advocate

By Mark Gutman

Devil’s Advocate On July 5, Pope John Paul II was cleared for sainthood in an unusually quick canonization process. In the Roman Catholic world, sainthood is the last (highest) of a four-step process: servant of God, venerable, blessed, and saint. Each new step brings certain recognition and honors.

John Paul II’s speedy accomplishment was helped by two notable changes. When John Paul II became pope, becoming a saint required four “miracles” to be credited to one’s account. John Paul II reduced the four to two. (Pope Francis I is cutting the two to one, to help John XXIII.) But the other change was probably more crucial. John Paul II did away with the “devil’s advocate,” a position set up in 1587 to argue against sainthood. The devil’s advocate was to “to take a skeptical view of the candidate's character, to look for holes in the evidence, to argue that any miracles attributed to the candidate were fraudulent, and so on.” Doing away with the devil’s advocate enabled John Paul II to canonize 483 individuals in only 26½ years (18+/year), a record pace for a pope.

The number of saints has been increasing rapidly since (and probably partly because) the devil’s advocate was omitted from the canonization process. Benedict XVI canonized 44 in eight years (5.5/year). That’s down from John Paul II’s pace, but still far ahead of other popes. Sainthood and criminal courts are not related, but their processes serve as examples of direct opposites. You could say that the former employs only defense, while the latter relies on prosecution and defense. A courtroom generally allows each side the chance to poke holes in the other side’s case, while the canonizers say, “No protest allowed.”

One process weighs evidence; the other does not. Who or who is not canonized does not affect everyday life of most people. We don’t need to plead with the Roman Catholic Church to improve its process for canonizing saints. We would, however, be quite concerned if we learned that a judge allowed only the prosecution or defense (either, but not both) to present a case. But you don’t need a courtroom to have a problem with one-sided presentations.

Did you ever hear a report that made someone else sound bad? Isn’t it easy to accept it when it confirms what we already want to believe about the one reported on? Why bother to check it out? Do away with the “devil’s advocate.” Accept it as gospel truth, to be believed and passed on as such. Of course, if the bad report is about someone we favor (or about us), we consider the reporter to be biased or guilty of reporting before all the facts are in. This is a natural way to act, as “confirmation bias” saves us from taking the time to investigate every report we come across. If I don’t want to encounter something that might dent the package of politics (or theology) I have carefully put together, my strategy is simple. I will avoid listening to MSNBC (or Fox News), and avoid reading material from organizations such as Adventist Today. Of course, I will consequently be puzzled how people could see things differently from me.

John Paul II decreed that there is to be no “devil’s advocate” for blocking sainthood for someone that has been proposed for it and made it past initial steps. Madeleine Van Hecke assigns her students “to investigate a way of life, an attitude, or a set of beliefs that is poles apart from their own. . . . The primary goal of learning about the opposite pole was not to evaluate it in an analytical way, but to try to grasp how it was possible for someone else to see the world so differently.”

So whose style is probably closer to yours when it comes to investigation? John Paul II? Only one side allowed to make a presentation. Or Van Hecke? Let’s see why the other side is making such claims. At least let’s check into it before we badmouth the other side.

But what about Adventist church doctrines? Such as the Sabbath, the second coming, or baptism by immersion. Why read material on doctrines that our church studied out long ago, and that we have probably studied quite well ourselves? There may not be much point, but sometimes others have come up with newer ways to present differing positions. If we want them to look at our newer presentations, we owe them the courtesy of looking at theirs. Unless we’re doing away with the devil’s advocate. Up with John Paul II. Down with Van Hecke. That verse about “better never to have known the truth than to have known it and fallen away” still scares believers and outweighs many other Bible verses. It permits people to feel they are doing something good (safe) by not reading anything that might disagree with accepted doctrine.

What about “lesser” Adventist doctrines? Women’s ordination, the 144,000, or “ornamentation.” Is there more of a case for reading about less important material? Maybe not, unless you are going to try to get the other side to believe your way, or are going to criticize the other side.

If I’ve reached the “contented” stage where I am not expecting to find “new light” or experience a major change in my perspective, I can relax. My positions are already well-researched. Why bother to read something challenging? Or is “threatening” the more appropriate word? If I already have so much invested in my point of view, why risk losing my investment? Many lose a sense of wanting to grow by age 20 or 30. Others are still scaling new heights at age 80.

If I am going to quit investigating (and letting both sides weigh in), then in fairness I should also quit asking others to investigate. Don’t ask others to go to evangelistic meetings, unless it’s for entertainment. Why ask others to look at both sides of an issue when I don’t do that anymore?

John Paul II meant well when he abolished the devil’s advocate. Except to the extent that his action leads others to quit looking at challenging evidence on important matters, who cares? But as people who are interested in progress and advance, we can’t afford the risks of his method. We need to be more like the judge who allows the prosecution to present the evidence against the accused, while also ensuring that the defense gets a chance to show why that evidence is flawed.

In my never-ending efforts to learn more, I do not have time to study every differing position. But until I have tried to let a devil’s advocate defend the position I’m disagreeing with, I will be slow to trumpet how wrong someone else’s position is. I may never be canonized, but I am less likely to trump on truth or to hurt others.

1 The office, or canon lawyer, was actually the “Promoter of the Faith,” but more popularly known as the “Devil’s advocate”
2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devil's_advocate
I realize that these are not regarded as “lesser” by some, but I am distinguishing them from the doctrines listed on the baptismal certificate.
Chapter 17 of *The Monastery of the Heart* is on this rule of hospitality. Perhaps we can gain some ideas from it, in the context of visitors to our own homes and churches. Perhaps, we could even gain some insights about growing our church membership.

Chittister says:

*It is possible, of course,*
*to make community,*
*out of “our kind of people,”*
*out of people who look like us*
*and think like us*
*and have the same backgrounds as we do.*

*But that is not*
*the kind of community*
*the ancient Rule*
*has in mind.*

In Adventism, it’s not that we expect people to have the same backgrounds (though we like it); it’s that we think that, given time and prayer and instruction, they’ll *become* just like us in looks, word, and deed.

*When Benedict of Nursia began*
*his new way of living*
*in wild, licentious, sixth-century Rome,*
*he turned that world upside down.*

*He took into his monastic community*
*the rich and the poor,*
*the slave and the free,*
*the young and the old,*
*artists and craftsmen,*
*peasants and noblemen.*
*It was a motley crew.*

I wonder if he’d read Galatians 3:28?

*And then, as if that weren’t enough,*
*he opened the doors*
*of the monastery*
*to anyone who came,*
*at any time,*
*to anyone who knocked,*
*no matter who they were*
*or where they had been in life*
*along the way.*

Hmmm. I wonder if he’d also read Hebrews 13:2?

Benedictine monasteries are perhaps best known for their hospitality. They take seriously the injunction to “welcome strangers, for in so doing, you may entertain angels unaware.” Wherever you are in the world, if you are in need of shelter, you can go to a Benedictine monastery and they will take you in. (Speaking for myself, I’ve found
that to be true of Adventists, too, in general, even though we don’t have a specific rule about it.) In the 9th century, when Vikings were raiding the British Isles, the story is that at Martyrs Bay, Iona, the reason so many monks, along with their abbot, were slaughtered is that they were still trying to keep Benedict’s Rule that the entire community must welcome any and all guests “as Christ,” with prayer and a kiss of peace. They well knew the Vikings had not come in peace, or with any idea of being Christ-like. But they wanted to be Christ-like.

So do I. I’m not sure I’d be that brave about it . . .

When was the last time you greeted a Viking raider with a kiss of welcome and peace? Metaphorically speaking. Or not . . .

_______________________ Share your thoughts about this article:

Log In to Post a Comment. Log In | Register
In the fall of 2012, the Redlands, CA, newspaper, “The Patch,” ran a story about a flag football tournament at Loma Linda Academy. Twelve boys’ teams and ten girls’ teams from “across California’s Seventh-day Adventist schools” competed, and the article made specific mention of the fact that games would finish before sundown Friday and resume Sunday morning.

Around that same time, the Walla Walla, WA, Union-Bulletin published a quite extensive story about the Walla Walla Valley Academy Knights basketball team. The Knights had won the Southeast 2B regular season at 9-1 and, according to their coach, Scott Schafer, they were pretty excited about their league championship. He called it “the big jewel in the crown,” which sounds, at least to Adventist ears, like a fairly biblical reference. The team went on to the Pioneer Invitational held at Pacific Union College and won three out of four games but, according to the Union-Bulletin, “the Pioneer Invite will be their only postseason due to games in the district and state tournaments conflicting with their observance of the Sabbath.”

The team was still hoping to win when they went up against the team they’d lost to, El Dorado Adventist School, but I haven’t been able to find out who did win. At http://watersjournalismassignment.blogspot.com/2012/10/this-weekend-eas-lady-eagles-volleyball.html, you can read a girl’s blog entry about the El Dorado Girls’ Volleyball Team, the Lady Eagles, winning their part of what seems to be the same tournament.

Once upon a time, it was generally believed among Adventists, at least the more conservative ones, that sports in school were, at best, questionable. During the past decades, this has been changing. First we had only intramural sports, those played “within the walls” (the literal meaning) between two different teams in one school. This was somehow seen as safer than extramural (often mistakenly called “intermural”) sports, between the teams of different schools. The point, mostly, was to discourage the sort of obsessive fandom too often seen in public schools—mostly, it seems, among parents, more than students. Fans have done everything from calling rival fans names to doing violence, either against the rivals or against the stadium. Some fans have even destroyed their own stadia, in their excess of glee over a victory.

In recent years, Adventist schools have begun to come out on the side of extramural sports, at least among other Adventist schools. It is much easier to compete with other institutions who also don’t play on Sabbath. The rationale behind the athletics programs in these Adventist schools may be exemplified by a combing of their websites. Here are two specific examples:

Skagit (Alaska) Academy: “It is the goal of the athletic department as well as the school that each student who participates in athletics will develop a strong Christian character, good sportsmanship, and an overall positive attitude.”
“Walla Walla Valley Academy operates an instructional competitive program for students where the effort to win is emphasized, but the eventual outcome is not. The goal of this program is to help students succeed in all that they do, as they develop into confident and mature Christian young men and women.”

Other academy websites post stories such as the one at http://www.gnyacademy.org/news/2005-09-30-01.php, in which Greater New York Academy writer A. Vergel says, “While winning or losing were motivators at the different competitions, students seem to have been more focused on having fun and developing friendships through team work” and proceeds to give several examples.

In this magazine, we have published stories of inspirational results of Christian coaching and athleticism. In late summer, 2012, we ran “Eleven-year-old plans to be first Black Female Seventh-day Adventist Olympic Gymnast,” about young Zerahiah Joseph. And in January of this year, we posted “Basketball as Mission: A Discussion with Tony McGinnis,” Oakwood basketball coach who is also the Executive Director of the Harris Home for Children in Huntsville, AL, and believes that his coaching experience is a huge asset to his ministry for children and youth.

Loma Linda University has gone further than simply providing an athletics program for its students. According to a press release from the media department, https://us.vocuspr.com/Newsroom/Query.aspx?SiteName=LLUNewsroom&Entity=PRAsset&SF_PRAsset_PRAssetID_EQ=80354&XSL=PressRelease&Cache=True, “For the fifth straight season, Loma Linda University Drayson Center will host the Los Angeles Clippers Youth Hoops Program and The National Basketball Academy (TNBA) for a five-day basketball camp.” The camp is happening this week and is for boys and girls from 6 to 17 years old. LLU sees this as an opportunity to reach out to kids and their families, offering not only training and games, but discussions on health, nutrition, and other ways to live a whole life.

Once upon a time, Adventists simply forbade—movies, cards, dance, sports. Today, more Adventists prefer to educate themselves and their youth on making wise choices in all those areas and more, and doing all to the glory of God.
Where is Your Citizenship?

The second angel’s message has on its surface an ominous sense of doom and gloom – “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she had made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.” (Revelation 14:8). Since we believe it is part of the job description of our church to give this message to the world, how should we do it? Would we be able to positively attract, win and influence people to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ by using the exact words of this Scripture passage? To whom would we apply the Bible symbol of Babylon? Obviously, we would have to decode the Biblical symbols, but how do we do that without diluting the message? In the past, you have perhaps been able to focus on the specific identity of Babylon on the prophetic/historical level. Now is the time to also discern where the principles of Babylon may occur in your own life. You will then from personal experience be able to give the 2nd angel’s message with an unassailable integrity.

In Revelation, you will find lots of inspired material where you can employ the principles of contrasts and comparisons to decode its messages. Often the meaning of an obscure symbol may become quite clear when you compare it with its counterpart. In Revelation God uses two cities, Babylon and Jerusalem, to describe His principles and His people and to contrast them with Satan’s principles and his followers. Babylon and Jerusalem is God’s inspired description of two communities that have existed since the beginning of time. Let these inspired contrasts speak for themselves as you seek to discern truth from error. You may call this comparison a ‘tale of two cities.’

**Babylon**

Shown to John by one of the 7 angels, who had the seven last plagues. (17:1)
In the wilderness
A whore – harlot
Seated on many waters
Seated on and supported by the worshipers of the beast, the 2nd member of the pseudo-trinity
Has many lovers – the kings of the earth
Adorned for her lovers with gold precious stones pearls

**Jerusalem**

Shown to John by one of the 7 angels, who had the seven last plagues. (21:9)
On a high mountain
A bride
River of life flows out of her
Supported by the worshipers of the Lamb, the 2nd member of the Trinity
Has one lover, the bridegroom, Jesus Christ
Adorned for her husband with streets and walls of gold, yet like clear glass,
Carries a cup of abominations
All nations have drunk of
the wine of her fornication.
Kings of the earth have
committed fornication with her
No candle shall shine there
No voice of bridegroom
and bride is heard
Covenant blessing of the introducing angel:
“Blessed are they who are called to
the marriage supper of the Lamb.”
Faces judgment of the 7 last plagues.

foundations and gates
of precious stones, gates of pearl
Supplies the water of life
The river in the city nurtures the tree of life,
whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.
Kings bring their glory
and honor into the city.
The city has no need of candle,
for the Lord is its light
The voice of the bridegroom is heard:
“Behold, I come quickly…I am alpha and omega.”

Covenant blessing of the introducing angel:
“The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!”
Covenant blessing of the introducing angel:
“Blessed are they that have washed their robes...”

Escapes the judgment of the 7 last plagues.

_Babylon-living_ is to build your life on making a name for yourself by rejecting the identity and the love God gives you through the saving work of Jesus Christ. In contrast, _Jerusalem-living_ is to build your life on your joyful of acceptance of your new identity in Christ – being called by His name, and knowing that you are loved and cherished by Him. To whom do you belong? The evidences for this will be found in your lifestyle. Are you a citizen of Jerusalem or of Babylon?

**Why all this emphasis on living in a city?** What must it have been like for Bedouin dwellers in Old Testament times to hear about the fantastic future God had in store for them by telling them about life in a city prepared by God Himself? Imagine the excitement of Abraham, who according to God’s promise started traveling “for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). Tents offered little or no protection against their enemies or the elements of the weather, but God had something solid and stable in store for them. “They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way; they found no city to dwell in...He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city for a dwelling place” (Psalm 107:4, 5, 7).

Several hundred years later the Israelites finally settled in a city, Jerusalem, and what a city it became! There were strong fortifications, walls, towers, a fortress – a place where they could live securely. Living in the city of Jerusalem became a synonym for salvation. “There is a river
whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells” (Psalm 46:4) “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is in her palaces; He is known as her refuge” (Psalm 48:1-3).”In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: ‘We have a strong city; God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks’” (Isaiah 26:1). As many of the Israelites traveled up to Jerusalem several times a year, their experience became a foretaste of the joys of salvation that God wanted them to know now.

If you had lived in Bible times, which city would you choose to live in? If you could choose any city in the United States to live in, which city would it be? What would you look for in such a city? Good climate, air quality, safe neighborhoods, excellent schools, lots of neighborhood parks, appealing cultural activities? While living in Phoenix, Arizona, about 30 years ago, I noticed that during the winter months many retirees, often nicknamed “snowbirds,” had come there to soak up the sunshine, and to play golf and tennis to their hearts’ content. Often they remarked to each other, “It doesn’t get any better than this.” Still, many of them would experience intense moments of loneliness, because they discovered that they did not have it all – the key relationships were missing, for friends and relatives they had known for years were not there. Relationships made all the difference.

The purpose of Bible symbolism

Does God give us a description of the New Jerusalem to provide us with a super-accurate, literal description of the New Jerusalem? Are these descriptions intended as advertising for reserved tours of the Holy City? Or, does He use these symbols to point to a reality far greater than that portrayed by words taken literally at their face value? Why should we care about the number of gates, or the foundations, or the walls, even if made out of gold and other precious substances? What would happen if we got there and discovered that the streets were not made of gold, but they just looked like gold, or that the gates were not made of pearl? Would we say to your guardian angel, “I think I am in the wrong place; quickly, please show me the exit out of here!”? Does the city have to have streets of gold and gates of pearl to make it attractive so we would want to go and stay there? What will make the New Jerusalem attractive? Will it be its streets, walls, mansions, and foundations? or, is it going to be relationships, the prime relationship being with Jesus our Savior? Jesus Himself said, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself: that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3). Jesus wants us to be there with Himself.

The lessons of Babylon and Jerusalem

As you have looked at the various contrasts and comparisons of Babylon with Jerusalem, what conclusions would you draw? Here are a few for your consideration. No doubt you will be able to discover more than these.

1. There is no security in Babylon, but there is security in Jerusalem. Babylon is called a city, but that is all. All Babylon has is a name. When you look at the cartoon imagery of Babylon what do you see? A foolhardy woman riding a dangerous beast. She has no protection
whatsoever. She is not even a city. A case very much like the fairy tale, “The Emperor’s New Clothes. All show and talk, but no walk. But look at Jerusalem - what a city! It has walls and fortifications. There is protection in that city. If in your life today you are experiencing insecurity, could it be because your life is based on your own accomplishments to become good? To be in Babylon is to trust ourselves for ourselves. Through Bible symbols, God is saying, “get off that beast you are riding, the beast, or antichrist, of do-it-yourself salvation.” The symbolism here is really about relationships. To live in Babylon is to live independently of God. To live in Jerusalem is to find security in what God has done and will do for us through the death, resurrection, and ascension and intercession of Jesus. There is an implied appeal here: switch your citizenship now from Babylon to Jerusalem.

2. **Babylon, a harlot, has many lovers; Jerusalem, a bride, has one husband, Jesus Christ.** When we break the covenant relationship initiated by our God, we enter a Babylon-like experience. The inhabitants of Babylon are really saying that they do not accept what the bridegroom has provided for them. They feel justified in their search for other lovers, many lovers, sometimes any lovers, to fill their personal love-cups. Spiritual adultery, harlotry, which is idolatry, can thus be present even among professed Christians, because Jesus Christ is just one source among many in the pursuit of personal significance and self-worth. To have more than one spouse is a distinct conflict of interests. God’s message to us today is – dismiss the harem of idols, god-substitutes, and let Jesus Christ be your one and only!

3. **Babylon lives for herself, whereas Jerusalem lives for others.** Babylon is dressed seductively for her multiple lovers. Jerusalem has one lover - Jesus Christ. Notice how the same materials used in Babylon’s adornments (gold, precious stones, and pearls) are also used in the walls, gates, foundations, and streets of Jerusalem. The saved ones are part of the structure. We will be the walls, pillars, adornment and foundations of the city, for he who overcomes will be a pillar in the temple of God (Revelation 3:12). We will be the ones to support God’s government throughout the ages with our worship and praises, because Jerusalem’s adornment is its people. Salvation is to come out of Babylon and receive a new citizenship in Jerusalem now through the gospel. Salvation is much more than just changing a few offensive behaviors. Salvation is to get self out of the center and replace it with Jesus at the center of our lives. Babylon is concerned with looking good to satisfy her own needs. Jerusalem is concerned with being good to bring glory to her husband. - Jesus Christ. I once saw a bumper sticker with these words, ‘It is not whether you win or lose that matters, but how you look while playing the game.” Babylon says, notice me and be awed by my appearance! Jerusalem says, notice Jesus!

4. **The walls are transparent, and yet we will not need to hide anything.** Notice also the kind of building materials incorporated in the walls: gold, pearls, and precious stones. We usually store valuables in vaults, hidden away inside our houses, not in the walls. We don’t embed valuables in the outside walls of our homes, visible for everyone to see. Now, if Jerusalem is inhabited by only the saved, and if the wicked have all gone to the lake of fire, what need is there for walls? There is really no need to keep intruders out. Notice that the walls are transparent (Revelation 21:8). Can you imagine what it must be like to live in a city with transparent walls? Because of our experiences with sins and wrongs in this world, we often build up certain defenses against other people. These defense systems, originally designed to protect us, can also become barriers that prevent us from knowing other people, and prevent them from knowing us.
They can become obstacles to prevent us both from giving love and from receiving love.

Why? Because we are afraid to love and be loved. So often may we erect barriers to keep people out. In his little book *Why I am Afraid to Love*, John Powell says, “I am afraid to tell you who I am, because if I tell you whom I am, and you do not like that, then that is all I got.” [1]

Can you imagine what it is like to live in a city like that? In the New Jerusalem, there will be no fear of exposure, no fear of shame, no fear of failure, no fear of punishment. Imagine what it will be like to meet someone and not first have to size them up in order to figure out what makes them tick so that you can protect yourself against possible ways in which you believe they may hurt you. Imagine what it will be like to meet people and instantly like them. Imagine what it will be like for people to meet you and instantly accept you. Imagine what it will be like to meet people for the first time, and instantly trust them. Imagine what it will be like for them to meet you and instantly trust you! In Jerusalem, we will not have to play any games to assert our personal importance, and even dominance, over others.

1. **The judgments of God protect the inhabitants of the city.** “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death…But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life” *(Revelation 21:7, 8, 27)*. This is really good news. This city will be a safe place because our God is a God of justice. Just think of what this city will be like because God’s judgments have been carried out before we get there. Rather than fearing the judgment, let us understand His justice as being for us and for the security of His entire universe. Someday you will join with a great multitude in heaven, saying “Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication” *(Revelation 19:1, 2)*. That’s one reason why God’s judgments are such good news. Thank God that the judgment separates the righteous and the wicked. A current notion in today’s society is that it is a terrible sin of intolerance to point out sin and confront wrongdoing. This encourages a conspiracy of moral indifference and eventual silence which says, “If you never tell me that anything I’m doing is wrong, I’ll never tell you that anything you’re doing is wrong.” We will all pretend that we are OK.

**The Chief Attraction of Jerusalem**

What a wonderful God, who tells us in advance about the glorious future He has in store for us! But it is not enough to build our expectations just on what is not going to be there. We need to build our lives on who is going to be there. “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” *(Revelation 22:4)*. Jesus wants us to be there, for He said “…that where I am there you may be also” *(Revelation 14:3)*. To personally know God should be the most wonderful experience of all. “To stand by the shadows of a friendly tree with the wind tugging at your
coattail and the heavens hailing your heart, to gaze and glory and to give oneself again to God, what more could a man ask? Oh, the fullness, pleasure, sheer excitement of knowing God on earth. I care not if I never raise my voice again for Him, if only I may love Him, please Him.” 

It is quite possible that we may read the last two chapters of Revelation, while focusing on the physical structures and other material characteristics of the New Jerusalem, and say to ourselves, “I read about a wonderful city God is making for us,” and then miss the points of its real attraction, the presence of Jesus. The story is told about Karl Barth, the famous Swiss theologian, who was seated on a streetcar one day in the city of Basel, where he lectured at the university. A tourist to the city boarded the streetcar and sat down next to Dr. Barth. The two men started chatting with each other. "Are you new to the city?" Barth inquired. "Yes" said the tourist. "Is there anything you would particularly like to see in this city?" asked Barth. "Yes," he said "I'd love to meet the famous theologian Karl Barth. Do you know him?" Barth replied, "Well, as a matter of fact, I do. I give him a shave every morning." The tourist got off the streetcar quite delighted. He went back to his hotel, saying to himself and telling others, "I met Karl Barth's barber today."

If all we see in the description of the New Jerusalem are walls, streets and gates of precious materials, where is Jesus in all this? Symbolically, He is the wall providing protection for us, His people. He is the gate providing access to all who would enter, so we can go in and out and find pasture, and find access to the waters from the river of life. He is the pearl of great price. We are the precious jewels, even the gold that is incorporated into the structure of the city. “I will make a man more precious than gold” (Isaiah 13:12). “The LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people. They will sparkle in his land like jewels of a crown” (Zechariah 9:16). "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, “on the day when I make up my jewels [special treasure]. I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him” (Malachi 3:17).

**Life Applications**

**Questions to Ponder:**

Where is your spiritual citizenship at this moment? in Babylon or Jerusalem?

Are you at this moment so secure in the love of Jesus Christ that you could, without fear, be totally transparent before others?

Are there currently any individuals with whom you have unsettled conflicts that you definitely would not want to meet in the New Jerusalem? What should you do about it now?
Text to Remember:

“O send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to your tabernacle. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; on the harp I will praise You, O God, my God” (Psalm 43:3,4).

Truths vs. Lies

Replace the lies or half-truths of the enemy with these truths that will set you free:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lies or half-truths of Satan:</th>
<th>God’s truths:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I already know everything there is to know about coming out of organizational Babylon.</td>
<td>It is God’s desire that I also come out of experiential Babylon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is only one application of the symbol of Babylon, and it does not apply to me.</td>
<td>There may be multiple applications of the symbol of Babylon, even to my own life, and I want to learn more about these.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are no traits of Babylon in my life today.</td>
<td>The main trait of Babylon, present in my own life today, is that of looking for love and significance in all the wrong places.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on my church membership, I know that my citizenship is not in Babylon.</td>
<td>Based on the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, I know that my citizenship is in Jerusalem, not Babylon.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Write our any lies or half-truths you have believed, and replace such with the truths of Scripture.

Endnotes


Note: If you are enjoying these chapters and wish to have Dr. Thomsen come to do a seminar at your church or organization, please visit www.streamofhealing.org.