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Dead at 96, Marjorie Bligh Was One of the Most Widely Known Adventists in Australia

By Adventist Today News Team, October 2, 2013

"An Australian icon" according to *The Advocate* and "a true Australian treasure" according to biographer Danielle Wood, Marjorie Bligh occupied a place in the national culture somewhere between those held by Ann Landers and Martha Stewart in the United States. Her funeral was held Sunday (September 29) in the Devonport Seventh-day Adventist Church where the "devout great grandmother ... attended" among "her church family," relatives and friends, as well as three elected members of the state legislature.

Pastor Mark Goldsmith presided over the hundreds of mourners, remarking that "she was full of cheek, always had an answer, she'd take the cake. What a legend." A grandson, Damien Blackwell, read a eulogy he had written as poetry.

She lived her life in Tasmania, the large island south of the Australian continent, where a frontier spirit has long flourished. Her father died when she was three years of age (in 1920) and her mother raised three children on a very limited income. She worked as a domestic and cook until she married in 1938. She was the organizer of a local chapter of the Country Women's Association and was long active in the national movement.

In the 1950s Bligh began writing for the three newspapers in Tasmania as a small-town correspondent, but later shifted to producing a regular column of "Home Hints." Her first book was published in 1965 and she produced six more.

Bligh represents "a strong and proud tradition of home handicrafts including cooking, gardening, knitting, sewing and crochet," states her listing on the Honour Roll of Women maintained online by the Tasmanian state government. She was noted for her self sufficiency and "had a strong interest in recycling and finding alternate uses for common household materials."

"She kept me in produce, fresh and preserved," her grandson said at the funeral. He also pointed out that she grew up in an era when "gender roles were more clear cut and spirited self-made women aroused suspicion." Yet, "she lived each day as if the last and made the most of every one."

Among those present at the funeral were three members of the Tasmanian House of Assembly. Jeremy Rockcliff is part of the leadership of the Liberal Party. Brenton Best is a Labor Party legislator. Paul O'Halloran is one of the first Assembly members elected by the Green Party in the state.

It is unclear when Bligh became an Adventist and a search of public media sources by Adventist Today indicates that it is likely that few Australians were aware of her faith. Some of the information she published over the years may not appear to fit with Adventist dietary practices, but her focus on living a life of careful stewardship of resources, fellowship, community service and practicality does resonate with Adventist values.

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Adventist Leaders Discuss a Global Strategy for Urban Mission

Adventist Today News Team, October 4, 2013

For five days over the past week more than 200 leaders from the Seventh-day Adventist Church around the world gathered at the denomination's General Conference (GC) offices in a suburb of Washington DC to discuss how to relate mission and strategy to the growing urban reality of the globe. The denomination has agrarian roots and despite the fact that the most influential of the founders--Ellen G. White--was pointing out the need to deal with urbanization as early as the turn of the 20th century, it has in many ways resented embracing today's urban culture. Pastor G. T. Ng, executive secretary of the GC, described White's vision for the cities in a keynote address on Friday night, September 27. Ng urged that the church needs to resolve its “love/hate” relationship with cities and with urban ministry. Many Adventists point to Ellen White statements about urban problems, but Ng reminded the leaders that White spent decades urging Adventists to move into urban areas to do ministry. He quoted White: “We are far behind in following the light God has given regarding the working of our large cities. ... It is distressing to think that they have been neglected so long. For many, many years the cities of America ... have been set before our people as places needing special attention.” The group was also told that urban mission is about more than preaching campaigns. Noting that White advocated a diversity of methods to reach urban communities, Ng smiled at the room full of preachers and said, “I have a feeling we preach too much!” While most efforts to launch city ministries have focused on large public evangelistic events, Ng urged the leaders to plan numerous other activities. A document handed to participants when they arrived stated, “We have identified five relevant urban ministries models, which principles can be applied anywhere: small groups for discipleship, missional communities, new church plants, leadership development and centers of influence.” The same introductory document said, "Any initiative to reach the large cities of the world must be a long-term initiative that includes a variety of ministries and approaches." The GC is working to "revitalize Ellen White's concept of mission to the cities and to develop a comprehensive approach." The purpose of this Urban Mission Conference was, in part, to educate denominational leaders around the world. Each division of the GC has selected one or more cities where a model project is to be launched next year and then each of the union conferences is launch a project in at least one pilot city in 2015. "It's time to move forward," stated Pastor Ted Wilson, GC president in a Sabbath morning sermon that was broadcast over the denomination's Hope Television network. "It's time to reach the millions living the great cities of this world.” When the Adventist movement in 1850 consisted of only a few hundred scattered individuals and occasional house churches, before the denomination was officially organized 150 years ago in 1863, the urban population of the world was less than five percent. By 2007 the majority of the world's people lived in cities, Dr. Michael Ryan, a GC vice president who chairs the planning committee, told the assembled leaders. By 2050 two-thirds of the world will be urbanized. A briefing on demographic and religious trends prepared by veteran Adventist researcher Monte Sahlin was presented by his daughter Stephanie Sahlin Jackson, an administrator at Radians College in the District of Columbia. “The mission given to us by Jesus requires us to go where the people are,” Sahlin Jackson said, noting the massive shifts to the cities that are continuing worldwide, as well as the present-day concentration of 828 million people globally in slum areas of the big cities. In Africa and Asia large numbers of young adults are leaving the villages in rural areas and crowding into the cities in search of education and job opportunities. It will change the nature of traditional “mission fields” forever much as has happened in Brazil, Argentina and Mexico in recent decades. Reactions to the research clearly demonstrated that the conference was stretching the minds of Adventist leaders. Dr. Delbert Baker, also a GC vice president, urged participants to develop “a theology of how we wrap our minds around the challenge” of reaching so many people and diverse people groups. Southern Africa-Indian Ocean division president Pastor Paul Ratsara said he viewed the reports with “mixed emotions,” saying his overwhelming feeling was “how are we going to do this?” Ratsara also quoted a French proverb that “a problem well stated is half-solved. We should not be discouraged.” Clearly there were a range of opinions on the topic among denominational leaders because it had earlier been stated that a consensus document would be released at the end of the conference, but the statement was withheld so that the language can be worked on. The document’s final text is being revised and is expected to be presented at the denomination's Annual Council next week. A draft noted the “reality of the cities” as well as the “urgency for a bold emphasis on urban mission.” A key goal in the draft is “that every city with a population of 1 million or more will have an influential Seventh-day Adventist presence actively engaged in a comprehensive mission, using Christ’s Method of ministry.” The phrase “Christ’s Method” comes from a book by White, The Ministry of Healing, which lays out a broad vision of healing not limited to physical health nor to individuals, but encompassing the wholistic healing of entire communities. On page 143 she describes what she saw as the paradigm for Christian mission: “Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”
According to Gary Krause, director of the Office of Adventist Mission, “Adventists have made terrific contributions to cities through such things as caring for the poor, and providing education and health services. But this summit has been a wake-up call that in many large cities we have no church members and are doing nothing, and that in every city we can do so much more by following Christ's example of wholistic mission.”

"This is a very significant step forward," Sahlin told Adventist Today from his home in Dayton, Ohio. "This is the first time since 1910 that the top leadership of the denomination has devoted a meeting at this level to the topic of urban strategy. Because of some personal tragedy that conference did not produce the results that Ellen White and others wanted, much to her regret. Here we are a century later, finally ready to take the innovative steps that she advocated." The focus here is larger than just expanding evangelism, Sahlin stated. "It is about how the Adventist movement relates its faith and life, its institutions and values, to one of the most important social context factors in the contemporary world. Urbanization is not just a quantitative difference, it is a qualitative difference from the world in which Adventist thinking began."

Much of the information in this story was provided by Adventist News Network (ANN), the official news services of the denomination, in bulletins written Mark Kellner, news editor of the Adventist Review.

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Loma Linda Sabbath School Class Has Global Participation and Impact

By T Joe Willey, October 3, 2013

The first Sunday schools were created to provide education (i.e., reading and writing) to working children on their day off from work. These first schools were organized in churches beginning around the 1780s. The schools were for poor children. In this setting it was natural to teach reading from the Bible. By the middle of the 19th century, Sunday school attendance was nearly a universal aspect of childhood. Parents who themselves did not regularly attend church insisted that their children go to Sunday school.

Early Adventists adopted the Sunday school format as a major backdrop for religious education. One of the first mentions of teaching “bright young little girls” in Sabbath-school was reported in the Review & Herald by Mary Howard in December 1866.[i] By 1880 a number of operations of the Sabbath-school system had sprung up, including “penny banks, missionary auxiliaries … and the thousand and one good and useful agencies which cluster around the Sabbath-school.”[ii]

Today, worship in Sabbath-school takes many styles and forms. Nearly all classes focus on a study of the standard doctrines of the church using a quarterly produced by the Sabbath School Department of the General Conference. Generally smaller group discussions using this quarterly are formed on the main floor the sanctuary. There is a trusted teacher who oversee the organization of the class. Some classes might move to the mother’s or choir room or to the balcony. After the lesson study members return to the sanctuary for the main preaching service. This is the traditional Sabbath-school orientation.

In larger churches or on the campus of an Adventist college or university it is not uncommon for members to attend classes in a nearby lecture room and spend thirty minutes or an hour discussing the quarterly, or perhaps an interesting topic such as unearthing ancient secrets from the Holy Land. Maybe the class will study the Bible chapter by chapter or religious topics of interest. There are many variations.

The most notable classes at Loma Linda University in the past were held by Drs. Jack Provonshia and Graham Maxwell. Their classes were always well attended and let out in time to attend the main preaching service. Over time these independent classes develop their own legacy or reputation.

This is a report about one long-standing alternative class called Sabbath Seminars (“Where great minds meet”). The class meets each Sabbath from 10:30 AM until 12:30. It is held in the Centennial Complex on the Loma Linda University campus. Apparently, the origin of this class began in the early 1970s in Prof. Dalton Baldwin’s home. Baldwin (now deceased) was a member of the religion faculty. Over the course of many decades other religion leaders were prominent in leading the class, including Professors Jim Walters, Richard Rice and David Larson. Currently, Dr. James Walters (Ethics Department in the School of Religion) and Dennis Hokama, a retired high school teacher from Los Angeles, have kept the class together for the past several years and maintain its structures.

Generally the seminar centers around an interesting book the class agrees to read and discuss. Going through the book, a speaker is invited each week to present a chapter or group of chapters. The facilitator is likely to be a member of the class selected by expertise or background. The speaker may also be invited from outside the class or an active or retired professor from Loma Linda or La Sierra University campus. On occasion the presenter might be the author of the book. The presentation is followed by another hour of spirited dialogue with the speaker. A handout of the presentation is expected.

Everyone is given an opportunity to ask a question or express their viewpoints following the presentation. A timekeeper imposes a three-minute limit on members in the class who speak during the second hour and one minute on a related interjection into the thread of the dialogue that was just given. Sounds too organized? The timing rules had to be imposed because some earnest individuals had a tendency to be long-winded while others wanted a chance to speak. Class members are from academic or professional backgrounds, but not all by any means. One goal is to stay on topic and remain focused on the materials presented by the speaker. Jan Hackleman is the timekeeper for the class.

The class uses a website on the Internet called “sabbathseminars.com” developed specifically for its members. The Internet resources at this website are designed to announce the next topic and integrate the activities of class and to store the presentation handouts online. In addition, the website supports several activities or events, which will be briefly mentioned below. The class centers its activities around reading and discussing significant religious and intellectual ideas from a chosen book in the hopes of creating an authentic religious
experience for the members. The website is integrated into this activity. The weekly experiences begin when the class selects an important book to read and different speakers are invited each week to lead the discussion. Often the books are discussed chapter-by-chapter (see above schedule screen). There are deviations on occasion.

Just a little more about what the class reads in preparation for each week. It is usually a book of religious interest. For example, the class is currently reading chapter-by-chapter, “The Creationists” by Ronald L. Numbers.

A book committee reviews class suggestions and recommends three possible books. After discussing the merits of each one the class votes. Members in the class also have access on the website to propose a book for future discussions to add to the list. Here is one of the screens used by the class in making reading recommendations.

The “Proposed Books for Future Selection” encourages class member to “pitch a useful book” one they would like to see the class adopt. They can summarize what the book is about. And at the bottom of the screen is a place where other members can vote (clicking on the stars) and a tally is kept of class responses. Other members who are also enthusiastic or not in favor about adopting the book can add their own comments in the “Add New Comment.”

After each presentation is completed the handout is downloaded and stored for later retrieval in the online archives of the website. Consequently, if an individual misses the class they can return to this section of the website and retrieve the handout from the archives. A portion of the archives screen for a previous book “The Religion of the Earliest Churches” along with date, chapter pages covered and title and who gave the presentation is shown. Members can also print out the handout.

In addition, the website has facilities to create class announcements, a section devoted to continuing conversations or interchanges through a blog, or store interesting media recordings (podcasts), etc. Currently, there are more than two hundred listed members who have access to the activities of the class. This project started almost four years ago, so there is some history of past presentations stored on the website. A few members live in other countries or areas of the United States who also follow the activities of this class using this website.

The class also uses the website to announce upcoming potlucks. The time and place is listed, there is a map to the location over Google Maps which can be obtained with the click of the mouse. Instructions on what to bring can also be included.

Finally, just to mention one more useful feature, members can search the data base for key words or phrases. This allows the member to locate various papers that were handed out in class. It is presumed at this point that you have a general idea on how the Internet is being used to administer the Reflections Class and broaden the experiences of its members.

The software platform that supports this website is the same software that is widely used for such purposes on the Internet. The software is Drupal which is an open source content management platform. This software literally powers millions of websites and applications. It’s built, used, and supported by an active and diverse community of people around the world. In our own case, we designed the website, then hired a website developer familiar with Drupal to obtain and merge the different functions that are discussed here. If you want more details, or even to explore the website on your own you may apply by following the instructions on the first screen found at www.sabbathseminars.com. Several individuals outside the area participate on the website, including members from Canada and England. Apply for an account and you can be made an active member of the website to following along with the discussions.


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From ANN, October 2, 2013

Ten years ago the Seventh-day Adventist Church launched an HIV-AIDS initiative in Africa with the appointment of a physician couple, Drs. Oscar and Eugenia Giordano. The disease was shrouded in shame, stigma and discrimination, and many Adventists in Africa shied away from talking about it. Church members who had HIV were dying because they strongly resisted testing.

When the Giordanos held their first meeting with denominational leaders only four people showed up. They recently convened the tenth annual advisory council for the Adventist Aids International Ministry (AAIM) in Africa with 70 leaders in attendance. Over the last 10 years, the Adventist denomination has seen big progress in raising awareness of HIV-AIDS among its clergy and members in Africa, including a drop in the fear and stigma associated with the disease.

“We didn’t have anything. There was no network,” the Giordanos recall. “The church wasn’t sensitized to this issue. We felt even the people at [the church’s world headquarters] who established our office didn’t even fully understand what was going to be involved.” A decade later, AAIM is coordinating hundreds of church-based HIV-AIDS support groups for those living with the disease in sub-Saharan Africa.

The increased attendance at this meeting symbolizes the church’s acceptance of a role in fighting the pandemic, church officials say, and gives members and leaders resources to offer care and support to those with HIV or AIDS. Over the last decade, the Adventist Church has established more than 3,000 programs to help those affected by HIV-AIDS in 26 African countries. One type of program is providing job training for people who are HIV positive, many of whom in Africa lose their jobs because of other people's fear and the stigma associated with the disease.

“As long as we remain faithful in responding compassionately to those in need, God will continue to provide resources needed in addressing great needs arising from the effects of this pandemic,” said Pastor Geoffrey Mbwana, a general vice president of the denomination. “We have seen God do just that in the last 10 years of this ministry.”

Several local Adventist HIV-AIDS ministries had already started in Africa by the year 2000, but the denomination's coordinated effort through AAIM has reduced the stigma associated with these ministries, which can often be the largest challenge in this type of ministry. “Stigma remains the single most important barrier to public action,” United Nations secretary general Ban Ki-moon said in 2008, and Oscar Giordano told ANN that Ban’s point is still valid. The Adventist Church has made great strides, he said, but much work still remains. “The stigma of HIV/AIDS is still very prevalent in our churches in West Africa, while in East and Southern Africa, where AAIM has worked for many years, it is much less marked.”

The denomination’s health ministries director, Dr. Peter Landless, said no Adventist leader did more to urge the church to establish AAIM than his predecessor, Dr. Allan Handysides. “His insight from 15 years as a missionary in Africa, his experience as a practicing clinician, and his Christ-centered, grace-filled approach to health ministry helped church leaders see the need to confront the fear and stigma associated with HIV-AIDS,” Landless said.
At this year’s advisory, leaders of regional Adventist HIV-AIDS ministries met at the denomination’s East-Central Africa Division headquarters in Nairobi to network and trade ideas for developing and implementing projects. These projects range from public awareness campaigns and income-generating economic opportunities for those infected with the virus to family support and individual counseling.

First diagnosed in 1981, AIDS – acquired immunodeficiency syndrome – is a disease that weakens the immune system, slowly destroying the body’s ability to fight infections and certain cancers. It is caused by HIV – human immunodeficiency virus. The virus doesn’t make as many news headlines as in years past, but still kills nearly 5,000 people globally each day, according to the World Health Organization. HIV is most commonly transmitted through sexual contact, infected needles and mothers breast-feeding children.

The stigma in the Adventist Church – which teaches sexual abstinence before marriage and monogamous heterosexual unions as the biblical standard – is that members with the disease were having an affair. Often, though, they contracted the virus through an unfaithful spouse. Regardless of how the virus was contracted, church leaders want to minister to the suffering and raise awareness about how to show compassion and care. But at first, even talking about the disease was awkward.

“Ten years ago, our churches in Africa were in almost complete denial on issues about HIV/AIDS,” the Giordanos said. “We now emphasize compassion and Christ’s love. Many people in Africa who contract HIV-AIDS lose their relationships, family and job.” The two doctors work out of a small office in Johannesburg. Instead of establishing one big center, they have built a network of partners throughout Africa.

Adventist Church member Euginia Keebine said she found out 16 years ago that she was HIV positive. She started an informal HIV-AIDS support group and was the only Adventist she knew in her city to disclose an HIV positive status. Since 2010, she has served as the AAIM coordinator for the Adventist Church’s Trans-Orange Conference based in Johannesburg, South Africa.

“The AAIM program is changing not only the lives of church members but also of the those in the community,” Keebine said. “I used to not be allowed to speak about HIV-AIDS or disclose my status in some churches, but today I am free to talk about AIDS-related issues. The church that used to be silent about HIV/AIDS is now vocal and church members are accepting people living with HIV-AIDS.”

The AAIM has found success through support groups, including meetings of several families, groups of patients, grandmothers, or women and children. “It is very difficult for an individual to cope with HIV and AIDS alone, therefore, support groups are instrumental,” the Giordanos said.

In Zimbabwe, each of the approximately 1,500 Adventist congregations has a director of HIV-AIDS ministry and support groups serve more than 15,000 individuals, including both church members and others, reported Innocent Gwizo, health ministries director and HIV-AIDS coordinator for the denomination’s Zimbabwe Union Conference. The government has invited Adventists to participate in HIV initiatives and given TV coverage to its programs.

“Stigma and discrimination have left our pews,” Gwizo said. “Holy communion is now served by those living with HIV, and their feet are washed by any other member of the church. All this was not there in the past.”

When people who are not HIV positive get involved, the stigma and discrimination drops dramatically, according to Gabriel Maina of the King’eero Adventist Church and AAIM Training Center in Nairobi. The ministry at the King’eero church was launched in 2002 and has since served hundreds of people infected with HIV/AIDS with the help of more than 300 caregivers. The center has also supported more than 600 AIDS orphans.

For a while, HIV-AIDS was thought to be largely an African problem, but it’s a global issue, said Mbwana. “We now have a successful response which has been tried and produced positive results,” and the Giordanos have also served as advisors to the denomination’s North America, Inter-America and South Pacific divisions. AAIM’s 10-year progress is particularly pleasing to many church leaders, including Zambia native Pastor Pardon Mwansa, another general vice president of the denomination.

Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.
Adventists Pray for U.S. Government Shutdown to End

AT News Team, October 3, 2013

Wednesday night at Capitol Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church, within blocks of the deadlocked United States Congress, Adventists and their neighbors came together to pray for an end to the government shutdown stalemate. The prayer meeting was covered by WJLA Channel 7, the ABC television outlet in the nation's capital. "Tonight, there are large numbers of employees who are home, not because they choose to be, Lord, but because they were shut out," the TV reporter heard as part of the prayers. Pastor Gene Donaldson stated that the shutdown is affecting many of his members, and he prayed for compromise among the members of congress. "We believe that a spirit of unity must prevail," the pastor said. "Lord, we pray for all of those who are looking at mortgage payments today." "You're really being told that you're not worth it, that it doesn't make any difference whether you come to work or not, ... and that's what hurts," the news report quoted Dr. Johari Rashad, a furloughed 37-year-old federal employee with the Office of Personnel Management who was part of the prayer meeting. The question on the mind of most of those at church was, How long will this last? Journalists in Washington generally agree that it is very unlikely the impasse will be resolved this week. "I think we're going to see a lot more jockeying, a bit more posturing, but actually reaching a conclusion? I have a hard time seeing that right now," the television station quoted Darren Samuelsohn of Politico. Steve Hopkins, an EPA employee at the prayer meeting, said the situation is very frustrating because he has already had unpaid days off due to budget cuts. It amounts to wage reductions for the families involved. "You cut back as much as you can cut back, and then you try to cut back a little further in case it happens next week too," he was quoted by the news report. Hopkins stated that there are some good people he knows who are leaving government employment because of how they are being treated. "When a good job opportunity comes along that pays quite a bit more than the federal government, they say, 'Why should I put up with this?'" The congregation has 604 members, many of them young adults who work in government and related nonprofit organizations, the news media, etc. The church building is packed on Sabbaths and includes large numbers of visitors, out-of-town tourists and new arrivals from across the country. It is located seven blocks due east of the Capitol building where Congress meets and the Supreme Court building. It is affiliated with the denomination's Allegheny East Conference which stretches from Newark, New Jersey, to south of Richmond, Virginia, along the Atlantic Coast and inland into the foothills of the Allegheny Mountains and includes many historically African American congregations as well as some with no ethnic majority and Hispanic, Korean, West Indian and other immigrant churches.

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Renaissance Network to Aid Three Adventist Secondary Schools in 2013-14

AT News Team, October 1, 2013

Thunderbird Adventist Academy in Arizona, Madison Academy near Nashville and Hinsdale Adventist Academy in the suburbs of Chicago have been selected as pilot schools in the Renaissance Network launched by the Alumni Awards Foundation. "Our goal is to see Adventist schools thriving, developing our future church and serving as lights in their communities," stated the foundation leadership. Specific objectives of the initiative were developed from focus group interviews conducted over the summer by foundation staff with faculty on each campus exploring four basic questions: "(1) What are the attributes of a healthy, excellent Adventist K-12 school? (2) What obstacles or barriers prevent your school from thriving? (3) What is needed to overcome the barriers you have identified? (4) Going forward, what can the Renaissance Network do for you, your colleagues and your school to make it vibrant and excellent?” In July the principals, business managers and other administrators from the three schools met at the foundation office in Chattanooga. "It was exciting to see the collaboration," a foundation spokesperson said of this planning session. The objectives were refined with this group. The Alumni Awards Foundation includes alumni leaders from Seventh-day Adventist schools across North America. Earlier this year it announced ten teachers who received top honors for 2013. It is seeking nominations for awards next year. If you want more information, a worksheet to nominate a teacher for an award or to make a donation to support these efforts, you can contact the foundation online at http://www.alumniawards.org or by phone at (423) 308-1855.

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Second Major Documentary on Adventists Broadcast on the PBS Television Network

AT News Team, September 30, 2013

The new documentary entitled "The Adventists 2" focuses on the significant role that the Adventist denomination plays in providing health care around the world. It includes a clip of a World Health Organization representative saying, "Nearly 1.2 billion people around the world have little or no access to health care" and in some developing nations up to 40 percent of the medical care is provided by faith-based organizations. Some of the most active provider organizations are elements of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The denomination has sent medical missionaries around the world for over a century. Journey Films, producer of more than 30 award-winning documentary films on religion, faith and spirituality, including Bonhoeffer and The Power of Forgiveness, announced today the release of The Adventists 2 for Public Broadcasting System (PBS) stations this fall. The film is the sequel to the award-winning The Adventists, which told the story of the Seventh-day Adventists as an American-born religion whose members are some of the healthiest people in the world and operate some of the leading hospitals in the United States. The new documentary has already become an Amazon best-seller and won the Gabriel Award for films about religion.

The production company is not in any way affiliated with the Adventist Church and Martin Doblmeier, president of Journey Films and director of the two documentaries on Adventists is not and never has been an adherent. He is a widely known documentary producer who specializes in subjects related to religion. Doblmeier said in the news release, "Adventists are living on average seven to ten years longer than others because they take seriously the notion that the body is the 'Temple of God.' That belief has shaped their health practices ... and fostered a commitment to build hospitals and clinics in some of the world’s more remote regions where otherwise no health care would be available. It is one of the most inspiring stories we have ever encountered.”

The new documentary includes six stories filmed around the world. One story follows medical missionaries as they travel by boat up the Amazon River to offer basic care in remote villages. In Malawi, Africa, a hospital opened in 1902 to fight leprosy is today on the front lines in the battle against HIV-AIDS. In Haiti, the Adventist hospital was one of the few facilities spared in the 2010 earthquake and became an emergency medical center for much of the region. Today that hospital continues to be a leading facility for much needed orthopedic procedures. In China, a unique collaboration between the Adventist denomination and the Communist government has resulted in a first-of-its-kind hospital, Sir Run Run Shaw Hospital, now considered one of the country’s leading medical centers. And in the Dominican Republic a team of 50 doctors, nurses and medical specialists from the United States volunteer their time to perform life-changing surgeries in a rural hospital where such procedures would otherwise be unimaginable.

“The mission hospital is the pioneer of the modern medical system in multiple countries around the world,” says Dana Robert, director of the Center for Global Christianity and Mission at Boston University. She adds, “Around 1900 one third of the medical missionaries were women from the United States. The reason women got so heavily involved in medical missions is because of the oppression of women worldwide. Women medical doctors believed that if you showed the worth of a female body to people in other cultures they would start treating women better and appreciating women more.” The woman who helped found the Adventist Church, Ellen G. White, was among the advocates of medical missions and encouraged women to become physicians during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Also featured in the film is Dr. Ben Carson, the world-renowned Adventist surgeon from John Hopkins University Medical Center who now has a School of Medicine in Nigeria opened in his name. It is a presentation of SCETV and is distributed nationally to member Public Television stations by American Public Television. In addition to Doblmeier, the production team includes associate producer Deryl Davis, cinematographer Nathan DeWild and production assistant John Dillon.

Check with your local PBS station as to when it is scheduled in your area. For more information contact John Dillon at john@journeyfilms.com or visit http://www.journeyfilms.com.

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Ted Wilson’s Milestone Address to the General Conference dismayed and disturbed me. Why? In researching that question, I discovered James Patrick’s article, “Working with a Narcissistic Leader,” in the *Christianity Today*. Hence, this post.

If Wilson’s narcissism was the reason for my distress, how should I react? How should thoughtful Adventists relate to this situation? I offer James Patrick’s observations and selected quotations from Ted Wilson’s address for your consideration.

Excerpt from “Working with a Narcissistic Leader: The Delicate Dance Of Effectiveness Amid Ego”:

While narcissistic leaders are nothing new, today’s church culture may be fertile soil for narcissism. Our ‘celebrity driven’ mindset for defining leadership, and elevation of leaders who excel at casting vision, manifesting charm, and exuding enthusiasm produces pastors whose personal ‘brands’ are bigger than their church’s. Perhaps now more than ever, we need to know how to respond to narcissistic tendencies in the leaders we work with. [1]

Under the heading *Field Guide to Narcissists*, Patrick describes narcissistic church leaders as people who “interpret the world only as it pertains to them,” and they “do not see this self-referential orientation as a problem.” His description of narcissistic behavior is extensive; however, the following list of characteristics should allow the reader to understand more specifically the behaviors and thought patterns that Patrick describes.

Because Narcissistic leaders are confident that their judgment, opinions, and behavior reflect orthodox belief and right thinking, they have “the ability to articulate vision with an inspiring self-assurance.” Consequently, loyalty is a virtue. “They are passionate about leaving a legacy.” They have poor listening habits. They emphasize “indoctrination of the ‘vision’.” “They habitually dominate meetings” and have “a tendency to become an information broker, especially of sin.”

*Patrick supplies a list of do’s and don’ts for survival when working under a narcissistic spiritual leader (NSL).*

“Empathize with an NSL’s feelings, but don’t expect them to empathize with yours.”

“Offer them your ideas, but give them the credit.”
“Offer information, but not opinion.”
“Don't disagree openly... discreetly allow the seed of the idea to become their own.”
“Don't over-perform.”

Patrick also provides advice about establishing a healthy environment while working with a narcissistic leader. “Cultivate an environment of honesty, clarity, and objective assessment of ministry practice, particularly relative to the organization's stated values and goals.” Keep conversations “focused on the team's goals, and this can mitigate opportunities for any NSL to warp reality to their own ends.”

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Now dear reader, I suggest that you read or listen to, in its entirety,

TNC Wilson’s Milestone Address to General Conference Delegates July 3, 2010, titled “Go Forward.” and assist me in making up my mind. Does Wilson have narcissistic tendencies or doesn’t he? The following quotations seem to me to be problematic. I invite your input.

“I humbly ask for your prayers that the message I share today is heard clearly and that the messenger not be lifted up. To that end, if there is a particular point with which you agree, please respond with a heartfelt 'Amen' instead of applause. Thank you for your help in keeping the message, not the messenger, the center of our time together.”

“[Babylon] has corrupted God’s commandments and instituted another day of worship other than the seventh-day Sabbath which is the only true mark of God’s creatorship. The third angel announces in verses 9-12 that ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand he or she will be tormented or destroyed with fire and brimstone. If you worship the beast and his image you are rejecting THE one sign God has proclaimed as His test of allegiance the seventh-day Sabbath.’

“The Spirit of Prophecy is one of the identifying marks of God’s last-day people and is just as applicable today as ever before because it was given to us by heaven itself. As God’s faithful remnant, may we never make of none effect the precious light given us in the writings of Ellen G. White.”

“Never doubt the destiny of this mighty Advent movement. It is in God’s hands. God has given us prophetic instruction to know the culmination of the great controversy--God is the Victor!”

“Go forward, not backward! Use Christ-centered, Bible-based worship and music practices in church services…. Worship methods that lift up performance and self should be replaced with a simple and sweet reflection of a Christ-centered, Biblical approach.”

“The historic Biblical beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church will not be moved. The Biblical foundation will stand secure to the end of time. Listen to what we are told in Selected Messages, Book 1, pages 207-208.”

“If God did not create this world in six literal days and then blessed the Sabbath day, why are we worshiping Him today on this seventh-day Sabbath as SEVENTH-DAY Adventists? To misunderstand or to misinterpret this doctrine is to deny God’s Word and to deny the very
purpose of the Seventh-day Adventist movement as the remnant church of God called to proclaim the three angels’ messages with Holy Spirit power.”

“Seventh-day Adventist Church members, hold your leaders, pastors, local churches, educators, institutions, and administrative organizations accountable to the highest standards of belief based on a literal understanding of Scripture. Utilize wonderful resources such as the Biblical Research Institute’s new book on hermeneutics that helps us know the correct way to interpret the Scriptures.”

“One of the most sinister attacks against the Bible is from those who believe in the Historical-Critical method of explaining the Bible. This unbiblical approach of ’higher criticism’ is a deadly enemy of our theology and mission…. Stay away from this type of approach because it leads people to distrust God and His Word. Selected Messages, Book 1, pp 17-18 speaks directly to this issue.”

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“While the Bible is paramount in our estimation as the ultimate authority and final arbiter of truth, the Spirit of Prophecy provides clear, inspired council to aid our application of Bible truth. It is a heaven-sent guide to instruct the church in how to carry out its mission. It is a reliable theological expositor of the Scriptures. The Spirit of Prophecy is to be read, believed, applied and promoted.”

“Jesus is coming soon!! Soon we will see in the eastern sky a small, dark cloud about half the size of a man’s fist. It will get larger and larger and brighter and brighter. All of heaven will pour out for this climax of earth’s history. Everyone will see Him at the same time through a miracle of heaven. And there seated in the middle of millions of angels will be the One we have been waiting for…not the humble broken Lamb, not the High Priest, but the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ our Redeemer!”

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Join in the discussion:

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I am settled into my lovely, isolated cabin in the middle of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, where I will write a novel about a family who are devastated by the illness that killed my husband two years ago. It’s a kind of orphan disease; a rare brain disorder which leads to something that “presents like depression, but without sorrow,” then to confusion and dementia, and eventually to the failure of the brain to run the body, and death. Despite the fact that the novel is about a sorrowful subject, it will also contain joy and laughter and love, so I expect to mostly enjoy the writing.

Every day, three times a day, I take a break from the computer by walking, sometimes through the endless wild apple orchards (planted by birds, tended by God, and delicious!!), but most often along the bank of the Baddeck River, which runs through my front yard. During these three months I will be sharing what the river teaches me. (Maybe the apples, too; we’ll see how forthcoming they turn out to be!)
Side Waters

My first Sabbath morning at the cabin, which has some unpronounceable and even more unspellable Gaelic name, I was sitting on the tip of a little point, or bar, that stuck into the river.

On my left, the river rushed by, always in a hurry, racing over stones and past logs—taking pasture with it every year until the landowners dumped boulders all along the bank to save their front yard! It reminded me of the way my life has run for some years, dragging me along willy-nilly, bashing me against stones, holding me under. I thought sometimes I wouldn’t survive.

On my right, on the other side of the pebbly little bar, there was what I’ll call a little side water—a quieter patch, a little eddy. The water was still connected with the river, still traveling along, but much more slowly. It was taking a quiet break. That’s how I feel now. I’m not disconnected from life. I’m still going somewhere, still getting some things done, but I’m taking a much-needed, dreamed-of break from the rush.

I can’t possibly express how grateful I am to God and to my friends for making this break possible. My prayer for you is that you may have a little break, a little side water, and sit by the river and listen to what it has to say for a while.

_______________________Share your thoughts about this article:

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I Hope So

By Preston Foster, October 2, 2013

“I hope so” sounds like minimalist optimism. It is the sighing mantra of a pessimist struggling to be optimistic. Rarely, if ever, does the phrase inspire the confidence of the hearer. “I hope so” sounds like a politician (or a parent, for that matter) trying not to make a commitment, while leaving room to manage disappointment. Interpreted this way, hope depends as much on luck as on faith. This form of hope usually accompanies nearly-exhausted faith.

My personal flavor of self-righteousness led me into this nagging problem with the notion of “hope.” My judgmental reflexes caused me to (wrongly) interpret “hope” as a weaker, less-developed form of faith. If my faith were sufficient, I thought, I would have climbed past hope to the more demanding levels of confidence and expectation. I conceived hope as the embryonic stage of faith. Why are we encouraged to be hopeful if hope is so underdeveloped?

My dad has an answer for such conundrums. “Just keep on living,” he says, implying that the answer will reveal itself (to the discerning) in time.

It has.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11, NLT).

I simply had it backward. Hope doesn’t precede faith. Hope is a product of faith (Titus 3:7). Hope is faith with direction and intentionality. It is a directed optimism, based on a specific belief.

For believers, faith enables patience, which builds character and produces hope (Romans 5:2-5). Hope allows believers to live—happily—in the midst of what is, at times, a present and despairing reality. Our faith is in Christ. This gives us hope.

Just what does that mean? Just how far does that hope extend?

For many of us, hope is put to the test at funerals. Our beliefs or doubts are revealed when we, in real time, contemplate what is next for our lost loved one—and, eventually, for ourselves. Do we believe in resurrection as it is outlined in the Bible (1 Thessalonians 4, John 11:25, Acts 26:8, 1 Corinthians 9:1, Revelation 20:4-6)? How confident are we that we will one day see our loved ones and live eternally with God? Do we (Christian believers) believe the Bible literally on this issue, or is there a postmodern construct that dilutes this hope (1 Corinthians 15:17)?

I believe that the Bible is true. Ultimately. I believe that, if I die, I will be resurrected and live eternally with God.

I certainly hope so.

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Victory Over the Beast, Chapter 25 The Justification of Sinners

by Dr. Ervin Thomsen
Submitted Oct. 2, 2013

The Third Angel’s Message “in verity”

What is the primary focus of the third angel’s message? Looking at the surface of the text might cause you to reply that this is a warning about the historical beast power of Revelation 13, its latter-day resurgence, and the outpouring of the God’s wrath on those who worship the beast. Is it possible that there is a whole lot more to the third angel’s message than this? Ellen White, in the aftermath of the 1888 General Conference session in Minneapolis in 1888, wrote with conviction that “justification by faith…is the third angel’s message in verity.” [1] Would it surprise you to discover that she was right? Though you will not find the terms “justify” and “justification” in the exact wording of this Revelation 14:6-12, yet these concepts are nevertheless solidly embedded everywhere, beneath the surface, in the three angels’ messages.

Precious gems usually do not lie on the surface; you have dig for them. How? Seek to decode the symbolic language of Revelation by letting the Bible be its own interpreter. Thus you will discover that the hidden gem of justification by faith is just one facet of a many-faceted gemstone, where the concepts of justice, judgment, justification, and God’s unfathomable love shine with an ever-increasing brilliance when you see them in the light shining from Calvary’s cross. In these seven verses, you will find, in condensed form, critical information about God’s offer of salvation, the everlasting gospel, to enable you to overcome and escape the wrath of God’s judgments on both Babylon and the beast.

As you study Revelation’s inspired cartoons about Babylon and the beast, you will learn about the hidden strategies of the enemy – they are all about self-justification, which is the justification of sin or the justification of our man-made strategies for overcoming sin. I invite you to take a quick journey with me through these three messages to discover some intensely practical applications for your own life now.

The Everlasting Gospel

The everlasting gospel is the good news about Jesus’ death for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:1-3) and how God justly declares us righteous on the basis of our faith in Christ’s substitutionary atonement (Romans 3:23-26). At Calvary’s cross God carried out four judgments, each one indispensable to secure for us a perfect salvation.

1. At the cross God judged sin as alien, intolerable, and utterly unacceptable to His rule of love and justice. Wherever sin is found, whether in the human heart or in the universe, it cannot co-exist with God’s holiness. In taking upon Himself the penalty of sin that we deserved, God in Christ judged sin as totally non-justifiable and inexcusable. Do you agree with God’s assessment, His judgment, on sin as shown at the cross of Calvary?
2. At the cross God judged Satan (John 16:11; 12:31). There He unmasked his true character. “...having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15). So successful is Christ’s victory that we can even now join with heavenly beings in declaring “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren...is cast down” (Revelation 12:10). From now and until the 2nd coming, we join with Christ in His warfare against the works of the Satan. “And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly” (Romans 16:20) as we through the gospel seek to extend the triumphs of the cross.

3. At the cross God judged us. As Christ on the cross took our place and bore the judgment of sin and its penalty, death, that we rightfully deserved, God was able to declare us justified, and to treat us as though we had never sinned. (Romans 3:25). At the cross, He justly changed our legal status from “condemned” to a verdict of “acquitted.” This is not some kind of legal fiction, or make-believe, designed to change our negative feelings about God into positive feelings, as if our changed feelings about the Judge would solve the sin problem. So secure is God’s verdict of salvation that the four living creatures, and the 24 elders, joined by innumerable angels, declare that “worthy is the Lamb who was slain...” (Revelation 5:12). Question: Do you believe they are telling the truth about God, and about us? Through this saving judgment, God has opened wide the gates of heaven for every repentant sinner who abandons all attempts at self-justification and places His faith in the spilt blood of the Lamb of God. The everlasting gospel is about how God through His judgments on Calvary’s cross securely and justly justified us before the onlooking universe, without justifying sin.

4. At the cross God declared His own justice. When He gave us His judicial verdict of “justified” He did it in such a legally incontrovertible way that “He might be just and the Justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26). So complete is our salvation through the atoning blood of the Lamb that all of Satan’s accusations toward us and toward God are now exposed before the onlooking universe as groundless and unwarranted. Likewise, Satan’s accusations toward us, experienced in thoughts of self-condemnation and personal worthlessness, are now baseless (1 John 3:20, 21). No verdict of acquittal in an earthly courtroom would carry any weight if it was not based on the integrity of the judge. Likewise, there could be no valid cosmic justification of sinners, if God could not also at the same time declare Himself just as a righteous Judge. The verdict of justification opens up to the believer all the other benefits of Christ’s atonement. These benefits start flowing into our lives when we by faith receive Christ. Our responses to the everlasting gospel are: (1) to fear God, (2) to give glory to Him, (3) to worship Him, for this is how justified sinners magnify the character of the Judge. Not in the sense that we by our responses add anything meritorious to the full atonement of Jesus Christ, but only in the sense that by our lifestyles we declare our full agreement with God’s own satisfaction of the redeeming work of His Son. “…the Father demonstrates His infinite love for Christ by receiving and welcoming Christ's friends as His friends. He is satisfied with the atonement made. He is glorified by the incarnation, the life, death, and mediation, of His Son.”[2]

Our Responses to the Everlasting Gospel
“Fear God.” To fear God is to agree with God that without a Savior and an Advocate “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:30, 31). When we fear God, we readily confess the justice of God that the just wages of sin are death (Romans 6:23). Yet the healthy “fear of God” securely anchors us in His love so that there is no need for us to fear the judgment (1 John 4:17, 18) because we have an Advocate with God in heavenly places (John 2:1, 2). When we “fear God” we will fear nothing else. When we do not fear God we will fear everything else. The healthy “fear of God” in the life of the believer takes away all fear of punishment, fear of condemnation, fear of the judgment, and fear of failure and rejection. This fear of God is not to be feared. The fear of man will cause us to fear the wrath of man. The healthy fear of God will save us from the wine of the wrath of God. By taking our place, Jesus saves us from the wrath of God. “Jesus, by the law of sympathetic love, bore our sins, took our punishment, and drank the cup of the wrath of God apportioned to the transgressor. He bore the cross of self-denial and self-sacrifice for us, that we might have life, eternal life. Will we bear the cross for Jesus?” [3]

“Give glory to Him for the hour of His judgment has come.” There is no better way of giving Him glory than to engage the services of His Son, Jesus Christ, to serve as our personal Advocate in the end-time judgment. “Now is fulfilled the Saviour's prayer for His disciples, ‘I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am.’ ‘Faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,’ Christ presents to the Father the purchase of His blood, declaring, "Here am I, and the children whom Thou hast given Me." [4] If we do not believe in the verity of His legal verdict “Acquitted!” for ourselves, we dishonor God by our lack of faith. Accept justification by faith alone as God’s verdict for yourself, for there is no better way to glorify God than to take Him at His word. “We cannot dishonor him more than to distrust him.” [5] The justification [just-as-if-we-had-never-sinned] of sinners is only for those who abandon all their own alibis of self-justification. Through self-justification we slander God’s name and declare the sacrifice of Christ for sin as inconsequential and of little value. God is most glorified, when we are most satisfied with His perfect gift of salvation.

“Worship Him” When we as believers here on earth assemble in corporate worship, we are at the same time joining with the witnesses in heaven’s courtroom in their worship of the Lamb as they declare, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain” (Revelation 5:11). Judgment and worship go together. If we do not respond to the everlasting gospel with joyful assurance, are we then not guilty of giving false testimonies about God? To worship is to serve God with our praises and to trust Him to supply all our needs according to His sufficiency. In worship we come to receive the covenant blessings, the benefits of Christ’s last will and testament, as they flow to us from Calvary’s cross. “He that spared not His only Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things” (Romans 8:31). The joy and enthusiasm with which we worship is about how we rate our wonderful God. What rating do we give Him for having
given us an advance rating of “justified” (a perfect 7) in the final judgment? To worship is to joyfully declare the sufficiency of Jesus for everything in our lives. “Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it!...His child and forever I am.” Don’t sing as if you mean it, but sing it because you mean it.

The problem of self-justification and self-sufficiency

In heaven’s inspired cartoons of Babylon and the beast, God depicts one of the core features of our sins as that of self-sufficiency and self-justification. The enemy’s lies of self-justification suggest that you can do a better job of saving yourself than Jesus has done. As you take a closer look at these inspired caricatures of evil, look in them for all possible experiential applications to your own life [and not just for applications to religious movements in history].

- “Babylon is fallen” is God’s judicial sentence on the lifestyle of Babylon – spiritual harlotry, looking for love in all the wrong places rather than accepting the covenant love of Jesus Christ made available in His glorious atonement (Romans 5:1-11). An angel, in a mocking pun, calls Babylon a city when in reality she is an adulterous and foolhardy woman riding a dangerous beast (Revelation 17:1-6). Her appearance is all make-believe, designed to impress us with her appearance of glamour and success. She seeks to seduce people everywhere away from the security of God’s covenant love to drink from cups that will never satisfy. Instead of accepting God’s judgment on her as “fallen,” Babylon in rebellion continues her self-justifying lifestyle -- “I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow” (Revelation 18:7). The self-justifying traits of Babylon are pride, self-sufficiency, unbelief, self-exaltation, rebellion and unfaithfulness to God. The core sin of Babylon is really that of self-justification – do-it-yourself religion that does not accept the value of the price paid for our redemption by Christ’s precious blood, and consequently also devalues the worth of human beings created in God’s image. The “bodies and soul of men” (Revelation 18:13) are regarded by Babylon as nothing more than merchandise to be bought and sold for one’s own sake. All self-justification will lead to a contemptuous disregard for human values. Babylon uses people, abuses people, confuses people, and then discards them when they are no longer useful for her self-justifying purposes.

- “If anyone worships the beast” is God’s warning about His judgments, which will fall on all who worship substitute and make-believe saviors – antichrists. All such false christs come under God’s judgment, and so will all who worship them. The beast cartoon is one of God’s inspired portrayals of the dangers of self-justification. Just look at the multiple heads, horns, crowns, et cetera of the beast. They are all about the self-justification exhibited in self-sufficiency. “I can handle any situation – just look at me and be awed at my appearance. I am equipped to make things work, and get results! Be impressed at my power, and don’t stand in my way, or you will pay the price.” The beast not only
proclaims a gospel of self-salvation, but it also engages in the abuse of power toward anyone who resists its programs.

As we have unwrapped this most crucial statement on “justification by faith in verity” by Ellen G. White, ask yourself these questions for personal reflection.

- Have you ever worked for God like the devil? The antichrist and the false prophet will often appear as angels of light, but eventually they will speak as a dragon. Their self-justifying alibi is “but we were only trying to help God out.”

- Have you ever used the methods of the beast to do the work of the Lamb?
- Have you ever looked with disdain on those who believe differently, or sin differently, than you do, somehow believing that you are spiritually superior to such people? Do you have a longer list of good behaviors than they do? This is salvation by comparison, another form of self-justification.

The message of justification by faith in Christ alone is the message that will change the world because it has first changed us. It will not be a message or exposing where others are doctrinally wrong by exalting where we are doctrinally correct. This always tends toward self-justification. “God wants you to testify to the world that you have a special message for them, by presenting it in the Spirit of Christ. They will then see the difference between those who teach it and those who oppose. But if you have exalted views of your own ability, your spirit will rise in self-justification at the least provocation.” [7]

To worship the beast is to base one’s life on the shaky foundation of self-justification through one’s own good works. Heaven’s estimate of such self-righteousness compares it to filthy rags and stinking garbage (Isaiah 64:6; Philippians 3:8). To partake of the spirit of Babylon, evidenced by beastlike behaviors, is to tell lies about God, lies about Christ’s saving work as insufficient, and lies about yourself rooted in denial of your true condition.

Our Greatest Privilege: Living to Glorify God

- To exercise the patience of the saints” is to justify God by trusting in His supremacy, sufficiency and sovereignty when facing personal trials. It is to cling to Jesus regardless of adverse and painful circumstances. To take matters into our own hands is the self-justification of our personal courses of action rather than trusting in the wisdom of God’s sovereignty.
To keep “the commandments of God” in loving and willing obedience is our declaration that His commandments are not difficult, burdensome, and grievous. Throughout the Scriptures the “commandments of God” are often spoken of as “the judgments of God” (Deuteronomy 5:31; 6:1). When we keep the commandments, we thereby glorify God by agreeing with His assessment, His judgment, on the seriousness and deadliness of sin. To keep His commandments is, in a sense, to justify God by giving Him our total allegiance and love. To delight in the keeping of His commandments is to magnify both His love and His justice.

“The faith of Jesus” (as used in this passage) is not about the quality of our faith, nor is it about the purity of the doctrinal content of our beliefs, but it is about basing our lives on the covenant faithfulness of Christ. There is nothing in faith that makes it our savior. Faith cannot remove our guilt – only Jesus can. Christ is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. The justification of the sinner comes only through the merits of Jesus Christ. He has paid the price for the sinner's redemption. Yet it is only through faith in His blood that Jesus can justify the believer. When we trust Him and His saving work, we receive His verdict of justification as a gift. Unbelief is the refusal to let go of our strategies of self-justification by trusting in our own good works for salvation. Through unbelief we slander His name and work as untrustworthy, and thus we imperil not only our own salvation, but the very security of God’s cosmic government.

Join the Singing to Celebrate His Judgments

Notice how the victorious people of God, in their singing of the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, make no references to their own experiences, their own works, or their own accomplishments. Their focus is entirely on God’s judgments, His ways, and His works as a cause of worship, adoration, and praise. Don’t wait to sing that song until you get there – on the sea of glass. Because Jesus has redeemed, justified and loved you, you can start singing these lyrics right now.

“Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty!
Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!
Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
For You alone are holy. For all nation shall come and
worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested”
(Revelation 15:3, 4).

The Two Ways of Justification

Throughout the history of the world, there have been in existence two ways of salvation, but only one is genuine. One originated with God; the other originated with Satan. One is the way of life; the other appears to be a way of life. Because the third angel’s message is that of justification by faith in verity, its counterfeit must obviously be that of self-justification.
The following chart shows some comparisons between the two systems. It is based, in part, on an analysis of some of the symbols in the book of Revelation, as well as various events from Old Testament history, which show the contrasts between the righteous and the wicked.

<table>
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<th>GOD’S WAY</th>
<th>MAN’S WAY</th>
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<td>The sinner blames others for sin</td>
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<td>Acknowledges sin</td>
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<td>Confesses sin</td>
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<td>Comes to Christ, Believes Christ is the sinner’s best friend.</td>
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<td><strong>Justification by Jesus</strong></td>
<td><strong>Self-justification</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Because I am accepted by Jesus, I look to Christ’s work for assurance of salvation.”</td>
<td>“Since I am not sure of acceptance, I must find something good within myself to find assurance.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No need to look to others for approval.”</td>
<td>May settle for salvation by comparison – “at least I am as good as…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks to the LAW as charter of liberty in Christ.</td>
<td>Looks to his keeping of the LAW as a means of salvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The justification of the sinner</strong></td>
<td><strong>The justification of the sin.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sinner experiences love, joy, trust, freedom in Christ, a slave to Christ.</td>
<td>The sinner experiences guilt, fear, distrust - the bondage of self to self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences security because he depends on Christ’s covenant faithfulness.</td>
<td>Experiences anxiety and insecurity: Cannot be sure he has done enough because he depends on his own performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has no fear of exposure of blind spots and hidden areas.</td>
<td>Needs to be on guard lest others may discover hidden and secret areas in his life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Openness and humility:</td>
<td>Defensiveness and pride:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am not afraid to tell you who I am, because Jesus knows all about me, and in Him I am complete.”</td>
<td>“I am afraid to tell you who I am, because if you do not accept what I am, then that is all I’ve got.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loves one’s enemies</td>
<td>Is angry at one’s enemies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Holy Spirit produces in the life</td>
<td>The unholy spirit (false prophet) produces in the life an IMAGE to the BEAST – a convenient conformity to certain selected behaviors, while the heart remains unchanged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is loyal to Christ</td>
<td>Pretends loyalty to Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ABEL principle: His offering of the Lamb pleases God, and he is at peace.</td>
<td>The CAIN principle: Is angry that his good works are not accepted by God, and He persecutes and murders ABEL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands the shallowness of the enforcement of religious externals.</td>
<td>May seek enforcement of religious externals in order to “save others” and thus justify self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ELIJAH PRINCIPLE: Ahab blames Elijah, but Elijah confronts Ahab with his responsibility.</td>
<td>The AHAB PRINCIPLE: Blames others for their troubles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has God’s approval, signified by God’s fire from heaven</td>
<td>Pretends to have God’s approval because of working hard to impress God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is justified by God as righteous, but is blamed by world as one who “troubles Israel”</td>
<td>Justifies Himself as righteous, and blames the righteous for the consequences of his own wrongdoing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receives SEAL of GOD. (identity and character of Christ)</td>
<td>Receives MARK of the BEAST (identity and character of the beast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justified by Christ before God in the judgment.</td>
<td>Justifies himself before God.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So while the words *justify* and *justification* nowhere occur in the three angels’ messages, I believe that you can now see that these concepts are solidly embedded “in verity” everywhere in the language and the symbols in the entire three angels’ messages. The clear presentation and full reception of this message is what Satan fears, for it will break his power.

“The thought that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not because of any merit on our part, but as a free gift from God, is a precious thought. The enemy of God and man is not willing that this truth should be clearly presented; for he knows that if the people receive it fully, his power will be broken.” [6]

**Life Applications**
1. Because the opposite of justification is self-justification, what are some of the self-justifying strategies you may have used to establish, manufacture and defend your own righteousness?

2. Which of these strategies are you willing to give up in order that you may experience the joy of justification by faith alone through Jesus Christ? (Read Philippians 3:4-10).

3. What do you believe is the meaning of this statement, “We have no enemy without that we need to fear. Our great conflict is with unconsecrated self”? [7]

Replacing Lies with Truth

Ask the Holy Spirit to expose any lies you have believed about God, yourself, and others, and then replace any such lies with God’s truths.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lies or half-truths</th>
<th>Truths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My condition as a sinner is not all that serious, and given a little more time and better circumstances I will be able to develop the character that God requires.</td>
<td>I am not even aware of the depravity of my own condition, and the only way for me to be saved is by the gospel of God’s grace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am afraid to accept and believe God’s verdict of “acquitted” for myself, because it could lead to “cheap grace,” and besides I need to develop some credit by my own works to impress God with my sincerity.</td>
<td>I accept God’s verdict on my situation – that I cannot save myself, but Jesus can! All the fitness He requires is to feel my need of Him. Where sin abounded grace abounded more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need to be on probation for a while so I can make sure that I am really worthy of the blessings of God’s acquittal.</td>
<td>Justification by faith is the only way for God to radically treat the sin-disease in me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Endnotes -
[1] Ellen G. White, Review & Herald, April 1, 1890.
Leonard Brand, William Hayes & Stephen Dunbar -- Science Professors Discuss Creation Care

October 3, 2013

Viewpoints Interview Series #11

Science Professors Leonard Brand, William Hayes and Stephen Dunbar Interview by Jeff Boyd

Welcome to Viewpoints: Adventist Perspectives on Peace, Justice and Righteousness. Earlier this year the department of earth and biological sciences at Loma Linda University (LLU) celebrated its 50th anniversary. To mark the occasion, in April 2013 the school hosted an environmental symposium called Entrusted. Numerous scientists, theologians and organizers presented papers, many of which had been published in the book, Entrusted: Christians and Environmental Care. The October/November 2013 edition of the Journal of Adventist Education features a few of these papers. In this interview, we speak with three LLU science professors—Leonard Brand (earth and biological sciences department chair), William Hayes (coordinator of the Entrusted symposium), and Stephen Dunbar (lead editor of the book).

AToday: Leonard Brand, after 50 years, what are some of the strengths of LLU's program? What do you offer students that they may not be able to get elsewhere?

Brand: Students value our programs because this is a unique place. At many other schools offering these degrees, anyone who asked a question about religion would be laughed out, but at LLU our students can talk about anything and ask any questions. This is the only place in the world where a Christian student can get a doctorate in biology or geology and study under faculty who accept the Bible's explanation regarding origins. We're a creationist faculty. The students learn our viewpoint as well as secular viewpoints. They need to know what they’re choosing and why.* We don’t just care about the creation event. Understanding where we came from and also caring for the environment that we were given are equally important.

AToday: Stephen Dunbar, tell me a little about the book you helped edit, Entrusted. What is the significance of it, and what are your goals for the book?

Dunbar: It's a bit of a watershed work because nobody before us in the Adventist church has compiled the kinds of issues that we discuss in the book. There has been work done in other
Christian churches, but this certainly adds a different perspective coming from an Adventist viewpoint.

We're trying to have the science departments, biology departments and even upper division classes in high schools use it as a reader for some courses because I think it would be helpful to address some of the issues that we as a church have not really addressed in the past.

One of the motivations for the book is that we want to get people in the church to be more aware of and thinking about these critically important issues.

**AToday: Why should Christians care about environmental issues? Isn't it all going to burn anyway?**

**Dunbar:** As Adventists, we are very concerned about the future. We are very good at looking at prophecy and how prophecy will be fulfilled, and we are, as our name implies, waiting for the advent of Christ. But we don't focus very much on the here-and-now. That has very serious implications for us as humans, as a church, as a people who are to care for our neighbors and be witnesses for our Creator God.

Let me address that question by looking at scripture. We often get the idea that the Lord has given us the planet to use however we wish—even the title of the book *Entrusted* kind of implies that God has handed the planet over to us—and that's not really scriptural. *Psalms 24:1* states that the earth is the Lord's and everything that's in it. He's never revoked his ownership of the planet. He entrusted us with his planet just like in the parable in Matthew when Jesus spoke about the land owner who entrusted his grapevines out to some servants. They somehow got the idea that now they owned the facility. So when the master sent his servants to collect the harvest, they beat them up and sent them away empty-handed. They even killed the master's son. Somehow they got the crazy idea that if they killed the heir, they could have the property. But that was never the case. And that's not the case with creation. God didn't give us the planet to do with what we want; he entrusted it to us as his servants or as his care-takers.

And we find that over and over again. Another example is *Psalm 50:10-12*. This adds an interesting perspective because he says he knows every bird of the field and everything that moves. And the word “knows” is the Hebrew word *yada*. That's the same word that he uses with
humans when he talks about the sexual relationship between males and females—they know each other. Abraham “knew” his wife, and she became pregnant. It's that very intimate relationship; it's the same word, *yada*. This particular verse tells us that God knows—*yadas*—very bird of the field, so he has a real relationship with every creature. He goes on in that same section to tell us: “The world is mine. It doesn't belong to you. I've let you take care of it until I come back, but it doesn't belong to you.”

So when we get the idea that we can do what we want and not care about creation because it's all going to burn up anyway, we are not being the kinds of stewards of creation that God intended for us to be. And the result of that is that we end up doing what we're doing to the planet now, and that we end up having to live on a planet that is no longer healthy for us or for the other living organisms on the planet.

I had a student in class one time make a very astute observation. She said, “Because we destroy the planet doesn't mean the Lord is going to come back any quicker than what is in his plan. That may mean that we have to live on a planet that is very unhealthy, that is very sick for longer than we think we do.”

These are really important implications for us as Christians, especially as Adventists, to move away from this non-biblical idea that we can do whatever we want because it's all going to burn anyway. The point is we don't know when that time is coming, and we have to live here until then. And we have to live here as witnesses of the Creator and stewards of his creation until that point in time. I believe that we as Adventists should be moving very far away from that mentality and be taking a leadership role in caring for creation because it represents our Creator.

**AToday**: You mentioned the connection between the health of the environment and the health of humans.

**Dunbar**: We have been so focused on the medical mission of the church that we have forgotten the wider implications of the health mission to the planet. In other words, being from Loma Linda, we obviously have a strong emphasis here on campus about health for you and your family. We often send mission teams out to help people live more healthy lives. We send dentists, doctors, nutritionists and pastors out to help individuals and their families be more mentally, physically and spiritually healthy.
The problem is that when we don't recognize that those individuals have to live in an environment, and if that environment is not healthy, no matter what we do for the individuals, when they have to remain fishing out of a contaminated stream or eating vegetables from contaminated soil, the pills that we give them are not really helping.

The cure is first of all environmental, and then secondarily individual or family health. As a church we have not really focused on the bigger picture of environmental health for a region, where these people have to live. There are lots of links, and I give several in chapter 12 of the book, “How Do Ecosystems and Biodiversity Impact Human Health.” It's important for us as Adventists, as Christians, to be more aware of how biodiversity, how the environment, how ecosystems really do a lot to keep us healthy and safe.

As we deteriorate and impact those habitats, environments and biodiversity, we're slowly putting the knife to our own throats—not only us as humans but the other living creatures as well—by deteriorating and continually stressing those ecosystems and those habitats. We don't often think about the implications for our own health because sometimes they're two or three steps away, and that may be in time and impact.

**AToday:** From a Christian perspective, what value does the environment have beyond its utility for humans?

**Dunbar:** I mention in that same chapter that personal health does not need to be—maybe shouldn't be—the primary motivation for taking action. That's really a self-centered motivation. If I'm only worried about the planet's health because it's going to impact my health, then that still may only motivate me part-way. I think the larger motivation needs to recognize that we have a responsibility. Back to the stewardship issue. We have a responsibility to the Creator God who has assigned us to take care of this planet. By taking care of this planet we impact our own health in a positive way, but we also impact the health of other living creatures who we're responsible for. We need to recognize that this is God's planet, and that we're his stewards. We're taking care of his planet.

**AToday:** Bill Hayes, in what ways can creation care be considered a “peace and justice” issue?
Hayes: Good question! Unhealthy environments promote tension, conflict, and inequality. Sadly, the poor and impoverished usually bear the brunt of problems that arise from unhealthy environments. Wealthy nations and corporations often conduct business in ways that are exploitative and detrimental to the environment and its capacity to sustain local people. Examples abound, but I’ll mention just three. First, South American rain forests are being bulldozed to farm cattle so that wealthy nations can satisfy their palates with meat. Local people suffer from loss of alternative foods, water pollution, and property skirmishes that displace them.

Second, the Ok Tedi Mine in Papua New Guinea has harmed more than 50,000 people who live in the 120 villages downstream of the mine. Discharges of sediment and toxins into the river have killed fish, disrupted local transportation, and exacerbated flooding of nearby farmland.

Third, new clusters of shipping centers in southern California have disproportionately affected low-income people who live nearby. The soot from heavy diesel truck traffic has caused respiratory and other health problems that Loma Linda University researchers and others have documented.

As Christians, we should have the loudest voices in defending the victims of environmental injustice. And the victims include far more than just humans; the insults extend to other precious life forms that God lovingly created and expects us to care for. Sadly, we frequently let the non-Christians take the lead in environmental justice. Too often we come across as indifferent.

**AToday:** What do you hope people take away from the symposium, the collection of papers, and the essays re-printed in the Journal of Adventist Education? What do you most want people to keep in mind?

**Hayes:** I would like to see Adventists and other Christians become better informed about creation care issues and get more engaged. A number of studies provide compelling evidence that Christians are measurably less concerned about environmental issues than the public at large, which deeply embarrasses me.

I would like to think that Adventists are different. It seems unfathomable to me that a church like ours, with its strong emphasis on creation and respect for nature study—God’s Second Word—would be indifferent toward environmental issues. Yet I know many Adventists, particularly
those with affluence, who sympathize with the conservative political agenda which has many things right but has become decidedly anti-environmental. I recognize there are environmentalists who take things too far, but God has made abundantly clear in scripture that his creation is precious to him; that he views with it with utmost passion; and that He expects us to take care of it. Who do we think we are to say it doesn't matter when we casually regard or destroy the beauty of his majestic work? Our church rightly insists that our theology hinges crucially on a correct understanding of God's act in creating us and our planet. But why should our message and investment of time and money end there? Surely we should care about what is happening to God's creation today.

As Adventists and as Christians, we are missing out on tremendous witnessing opportunities when we fail to engage with non-Christians in caring for a planet that God made very special. Let's not miss out on these opportunities!

**AToday**: How can Adventists engage environmental issues in meaningful ways, whether in the field, classroom, church, home, business or nonprofit?

**Hayes**: To begin with, we need to recognize that environmental problems are not caused by society, but instead are caused by individuals. Thus, resolving environmental problems must begin with the individual. We should think globally but act locally.

Here are some useful approaches that church members can consider. First, we can participate in an existing environmental organization, form our own organization, or encourage a church institution to more effectively promote creation care. Organizations are important, as strength accrues in numbers.

Second, we can exert gentle pressure on church institutions and leaders to emphasize environmental issues during worship services, sermons, school assemblies, and in our publications. We can locate and recommend qualified speakers and writers.

Third, we can participate in community projects or organize our own. Projects involving recycling, clean-up, planting of trees, and surveys of birds or other species can elicit the help of others and focus attention on environmental issues.
Fourth, we can reduce our personal ecological footprint at home, at work, and at play. We should think in terms of energy consumption, water usage, material consumption, transportation, and waste disposal. We should commit to memory three important words: reduce, reuse, recycle. Finally, we should avoid politicizing environmental issues, which tends to become divisive, and focus instead on issues of common concern.

Personally, I wish the Adventist church had an official position or institution that promoted creation care. At present, we invest heavily in health, education, and evangelism—all of which benefit humans—but what are we doing for the rest of God's incredible creation?

*This response by Brand which I received by email was originally published in an Adventist Review article by Heather Reifsnyder and Nancy Yuen ("Loma Linda’s Earth and Biological Sciences Department Turns 50," May 23, 2013), which is available online at http://www.adventistreview.org/issue.php?id=6344.

No comments