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Debbonnair Kovacs again looks at the ancient prayer known as the Sh’ma, and asks what we can learn from a river about loving God with the strength of our bodies....

Eight-year-old Preacher says, “God Has My Back”:
As in the early days of the Advent Movement, child preachers seem to be cropping up to catch the attention of an otherwise languid population. Read in-depth about young prodigy/televangelist Samuel M. Green, in the United States....
Outside of Your Tent:
Poet Eugene Pruitt writes that Christ has given us no promise of help in bearing today the burdens of tomorrow. His grace is sufficient each day, like morning manna in the wilderness....

Please note that the Devotionals have been moved to the Poetry & Arts page.

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Adventist Family in Florida: Wife, Children Missing and Husband Charged with Murder

By Adventist Today News Team, November 12, 2013

A family in the Deltona Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church has made headlines across Central Florida for the past two weeks, caught up in a story of violence and missing persons. Luis Toledo is in Volusia County Jail and has admitted to detectives that he killed his wife, Yessenia Suarez. She and her two children have not been found after 20 days of searches involving hundreds of police and volunteers, helicopters, air boats and divers.

Toledo refuses to tell investigators where the bodies are and has said that he did not kill the children, someone else did, according to Gary Davidson, spokesman for the county sheriff. The Orlando Sentinel has reported that Toledo was a member of the Latin Kings gang as a teenager and was arrested for at least three violent incidents between from 1997 to 2000. His brother, Christopher LaSanta, has been convicted of cocaine trafficking, according to the newspaper, and last year his sister-in-law asked for a restraining order against Toledo because he sent more than 50 threatening text messages and voice mails after she served his brother with divorce papers.

In 2011 the couple was married and then baptized together in the church, Pastor Heber Lopez told the Sentinel. “They were a happy family,” Lopez is quoted. “We laughed together [and] spent time together. We shared many moments with them ... and now, we can’t sleep.”

Suarez was 28 and served the church as an adult leader in the Adventurer Club in which her two children, ages eight and nine, participated. She had a job at a company in Lake Mary and was taking classes at Rollins College.

The couple had recently become involved in some marital conflicts and on October 22 they had an argument at her place of work in which Toledo slapped her. Family members told The Daytona Beach News-Journal that she went home with him that evening to talk about a divorce. She was reported missing the next morning.

Toledo told investigators that during an argument at their home, Suarez became aggressive toward him and he hit her in the throat, according to an affidavit.charing him with second-degree murder. He is being held ... with no bail allowed,” the newspaper reported. Since
that time Toledo’s public defender has been told he will also be charged with first degree murder.

Church members have been gathering for daily prayer meetings and involved in the search for Suarez and her children. Sheriff’s deputies from three neighboring counties have joined the search which has expanded out more than 12 miles from the couple’s home and included boats and divers in more than 20 lakes.

On November 3, law enforcement officials ended the intensive search and closed down the mobile command post, telling news reporters that they had covered all of the ground that had been identified as target areas. Sabbath (November 9) the Equusearch volunteer search team from Texas got involved and spent nine hours on horseback covering five square miles. Sunday the team of more than a dozen volunteers was back in the saddle, reported WJXT Channel 4, the NBC television affiliate in Jacksonville. “They plan on staying as long as it takes.”

A reporter from WESH, Channel 2, the NBC television affiliated in Orlando, attended the prayer meeting on Sunday at the church. “The crowd prayed that Luis Toledo will find it in his heart to help them find peace of mind. The crowd sang in Spanish, but the grief on their faces is universally understood,” the reporter stated.

Television pictures of the candelight vigil included shots of the flickering flames illuminating the face of Suarez’s mother, Felicita Perez, as she prayed that Toledo would have a change of heart. “Please help Luis’ mind and heart so he can let us know where we can find them soon. It’s been 19 days and it seems like 19 years,” Perez said.

Domestic violence is a problem that occurs across all ethnic groups and social classes,” a retired family ministries director told Adventist Today. “Surveys of Adventist Church members have shown that they want their local church to have regular classes and retreats for couples, to help them develop better communication skills and find better ways to deal with marital conflict. Unfortunately, this is not often a priority for church administrators and many pastors have little training or preparation to deal with these problems.”

Couples often turn to the church because of needs in their relationship or aspirations for quality family life,” the retired family life specialist continued. “This is a motivation for baptism that is often ignored. We tend to discount the extent to which motives other than doctrine are part of the picture. Marital conflict can lead to tragedy. Although it is not usually this violent, it can still result in much pain and heartache. It can leave people feeling that the things we preach about God’s grace and power are a fraud.”

[November 12, 2013]

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The International Community Responds to the Humanitarian Crisis in the Philippines [Updated]

By Adventist Today News Team, November 13, 2013 [Updated November 15, 2013]

Seventh-day Adventists are mobilizing to support communities in the Philippines devastated by Typhoon Haiyan (locally called Yolanda). On November 8 the storm's 195-mph winds left a path of destruction through the central portion of the country, the same region affected by a 7.2-magnitude earthquake in October of this year. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), the Seventh-day Adventist Church's primary international humanitarian organization, is responding in the field, while church members around the world are praying and raising funds for the estimated 11 million people affected by the typhoon.

The massive storm barreled through the Central Philippines Union Conference (CPUC), which has 1,207 Adventist congregations and a membership of 158,513 in four conferences and two missions, according to the Church's Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research. The other two Unions that cover the Philippines—the North and South Philippine Union Conferences—have 289,617 and 347,871 members, respectively.

Emanuel da Costa, ADRA International's director for emergency management, told Adventist Today that ADRA is still attempting to contact Adventist institutions in the affected regions, both to assess the level of damage they suffered and to determine if they are able to collaborate with relief efforts. While this comprehensive assessment is on-going, Adventist Today has learned that most of the major institutions in the central region of the country appear not to have suffered significant damage. Carl Sobremisana, an associate director at the Center for Metropolitan Ministry at Washington Adventist University who lives in the Philippines three months per year, reports that the major college in the area, Central Philippine Adventist College (enrollment 1,030), was unharmed.

The headquarters of ADRA Philippines and the Southern Asia-Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SSD) are located in Silang, north of the storm's greatest force. Both the Adventist University of the Philippines—the largest Adventist university in the Philippines with more than 3,500 students—and the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS), an educational institution offering graduate programs with an enrollment of 435 students, are also in Silang and appear to have been largely unaffected.

Closer to the storm's path, Cebu City is also a major center of Adventist ministry. The Central Philippine Union Conference and the Central Visayan Conference are both headquartered in the city, which also hosts the H. W. Miller Memorial Sanitarium and Hospital and East Visayan Adventist Academy. Jennifer Jones Rickard, a graduate of Andrews University who is now studying medicine in Cebu City, told Adventist Today that the effects of Typhoon Haiyan were negligible in the area. Rickard reported, “Cebu City was spared the destruction that is being blazed world-wide. The majority of the damage in the city amounted to toppled trees and some roofs getting blown off. Adventists, and everyone in general, are rallying to provide aid and assistance to those in hard-hit areas.”

The North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (NAD) has a significant population of members with ties to the Philippines. Fifty-two congregations or companies with a total membership of 10,458 are designated in the Adventist Directory as Filipino-
American or Filipino-Canadian. In addition to the membership of these churches, thousands more Adventists with Filipino roots worship in other congregations.

As members of the North American Filipino community struggle to contact family members in the Philippines, efforts are already underway to raise funds for those who have lost everything in the storm. For example, the Loma Linda Filipino Church of Seventh-day Adventists, a congregation with more than 1,000 members, will be sending donations to the Philippines National Red Cross as well as to ADRA, according to the San Gabriel Valley Tribune. Similarly, the Los Angeles Daily News reports that the Waterman Visayan Filipino Seventh-Day Adventist Church in San Bernardino, CA, is asking for donations from the congregation.

In Canada, Filipino congregations are also getting involved with prayer and fundraising efforts. In British Columbia, the Vancouver Filipino Seventh-day Adventist church held a prayer meeting for the victims on Friday evening, reports the Vancouver Sun. On Tuesday the Windsor Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ontario hosted a prayer meeting and fundraiser, according to the Windsor Star.

ADRA president, Jonathan Duffy, emphasized to Adventist Today the importance of these fundraising campaigns. “Countries offices are collecting money—Canada, Australia, New Zealand, European countries—and those funds come to a common pool to fund the response in the Philippines.” Because church members naturally want to get involved in relief efforts, fundraising activities are one of the best ways to participate. Duffy shared, “It's money that makes the biggest difference in the emergency because it enables us to buy goods, buy shelters, ship decontamination units for water and many other items.”

Duffy recommends for people who wish to get involved in disaster relief to receive training and participate in the planning process before disasters strike so all participants know their roles and are properly trained to carry them out. Once a disaster occurs, however, there is much greater need for fundraising than for actual intervention or for collecting gifts-in-kind. Duffy discussed unintended consequences of gifts-in-kind that can potentially have negative local effects. “Everyone in a disaster is affected, including the local merchants. When we ship goods in, nobody needs to buy anything for the next 12 months because we've met their needs, so the local shopkeepers go out of business. Whenever possible, by using a voucher system for food or clothing, people are encouraged to invest in the local economy, which helps the local community recover more rapidly. There are points when we need gifts-in-kind, and points when you don't, where it is better to work on a cash basis that rebuilds the local economy. Knowing when to make those calls is not simple; it's complex.”

Funds donated by church members around the world support ADRA's immediate and longer-term efforts. Currently, ADRA is performing an initial assessment, which will take two to three more days, reports da Costa. “The Rapid Needs Assessment will help us determine the places of highest need and the families that are the most vulnerable. Unless we have an outpouring of support, we won't be able to reach everyone, so we need to target those who are most vulnerable” explained da Costa. He shared that some of the hardest hit communities have lost 80-97% of their homes and buildings.

As a means of providing immediate relief while conducting the assessment, ADRA is distributing food packs that include rice, noodles, canned fish, dried/canned fruits, oil, salt, sugar, beans, and peanut butter. ADRA is also positioning water purification systems where they are most needed. In addition to food stuffs, da Costa points out some of the storm victims' other needs: “One problem with this typhoon is that it wiped out the people's houses. People have lost everything, so they will need items to restart their lives. They not only need shelter but also kitchen sets such as plates and spoons so they can cook. They will need bedding. They will need places to store the clean water ADRA provides, to keep water from becoming contaminated.”

Despite the great needs in the Philippines following the recent earthquake and typhoon, Duffy encourages church members to also think about ways to get involved in their own neighborhoods. “Work to make a difference in the community where you live. Yes, we need your
money for these relief efforts, but your local community also needs you to make a difference, to reach out to touch people around you.”

**UPDATE:**
On Friday, November 15, the Facebook account *Seventh-day-Adventist Church Philippines* posted this picture and caption. Tacloban was one of the hardest hit regions with a reported storm surge estimated to be between 15 and 16 feet.

Tacloban Seventh-day Adventist Church stood tall amidst the storm.

Earlier in the week, Adventist News Network reported that Adventist world church President Ted N. C. Wilson was in Manila for the church’s Southern Asia-Pacific Division Year-End Meetings when the typhoon struck. He urged Adventists worldwide to join him in “special prayer” for those in the central Philippines.

Wilson also led a prayer service for the victims during a large rally in Manila on Saturday, according to the news release. “Certainly, this is the time for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to show Christ’s compassion and power to help rebuild lives,” Wilson said in a statement from the Manila International Airport.

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SDAs to Pay Homage to the Beast in 2015?

SDAs to Pay Homage to the Beast in 2015?

By Richard Faiola, November 13, 2013

In 2015 the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is slated to take up again that which was already passed 5 years earlier for final adoption: the rewording of Fundamental Belief number six.

6. Creation:

God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made "the heaven and the earth" and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was "very good," declaring the glory of God. (Gen. 1; 2; Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Heb. 11:3.)

Proposed revision as presented to Annual Council Oct 2013 (Spectrum, 16 Oct 2013)

God is creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic and historical account of His creative activity. In a recent six-day creation, the Lord made "the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them" and rested on the seventh day. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His creative work performed and completed during six literal days that together with the Sabbath constituted a week as we experience it today. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was "very good," declaring the glory of God.

As currently written, the word "literal" does not appear; nor "historic" or "recent." "Authentic" was a masterfully chosen word with no necessary meaning (i.e. Shakespeare’s King Lear is authentic as to being realistic, true to human nature, an accurate reflection of the times the story was set in, but without the protagonist needing to exist at all). The only reference to "six days" is in quoting scripture—such that if one interprets the Scriptural “day” as symbolic or allegorical or poetic—so be it.

The new version specifies “recent…six, literal days…a week as we experience it today.” The proposed formulation does not include a "universal world-wide flood" of necessity even more “recent,” but it may be expected to be urged by some. Currently it is found under the “Great Controversy” Fundamental Belief number 8 as follows:

H

Human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the worldwide flood.
As the current church administration is strongly wedded to any position Ellen White took, they feel compelled to ensure that her 19th century understandings remain normative for 21st century Adventism. There is no doubt she accepted the then dominant protestant paradigm of 6D6KUF (Six day creation, 6000 years ago, and a universal flood).

Thus, while Scripture might be *interpreted* (as it always must be whether liberally or conservatively) to give room for a theistic evolutionary schema; OR a preceding a-theistic evolutionary chaos (directed by Satan?) followed by God’s redemptive special creation; OR some other accommodation that incorporates the manifestly unassailable insights of modern geology, cosmology, anthropology, archeology, chemistry, and biology—ELLEN WHITE cannot be construed so flexibly. Her words were in modern English and her understanding clear. For instance:

Infidel geologists claim that the world is much older than the Bible record makes it. They reject the Bible record, because of those things which are to them evidences from the earth itself, that the world has existed tens of thousands of years. And many who profess to believe the Bible record are at a loss to account for wonderful things which are found in the earth, with the view that creation week was only seven literal days, and the world is now only about six thousand years old … I have been shown that without Bible history, geology can prove nothing. (*Spiritual Gifts.* Vol 3–4, p 91-92. Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1864)

The intent to bring the world church in line with 19th century understandings was made clear by Ted Wilson, the then newly elected GC President while still at the 2010 GC Convention. As reported by Michael W. Campbell, Wilson (the Board Chair of the Geoscience Research Institute since 1999) explained to a “standing-room-only crowd” as part of the “Yes, Creation!” series, which was sponsored by GRI:

The Seventh-day Adventist Church will stand firm for the things that we have understood to be the pillars of faith. We will not flinch. We will not be deterred…. I want to tell you…that God created this world in six literal, consecutive, contiguous, 24-hour days of recent origin…. The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s position on a global flood [is] clear and forthright…. These positions are based on a literal reading of the Word of God.

I want to see that all Seventh-day Adventist teachers, whether they are theologians or science teachers, believe and accept the biblical creation as the church has voted and understood it. That is our goal, and that is what we need to move toward. (“God’s Literal, Six-Day, Recent Creation—The Church’s Position,” July 1, 2010, accessible online at http://www.adventistreview.org/issue.php?id=3627)

The earliest statements of SDA beliefs were clearly DESCRIPTIVE, not PROSCRIPTIVE.

*From the preamble* to the 1872 (unofficial) “Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists” (Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, Battle Creek, MI, 1872):
In presenting to the public this synopsis of our faith, we wish to have it distinctly understood that we have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline, having any authority with our people, nor is it designed to secure uniformity among them, as a system of faith, but is a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them.

At the General Conference of 1883, the same committee that upon appointment had created a Manual recommended that their proposed Manual be rejected, giving the following rationale:

It is the unanimous judgment of the committee that it would not be advisable to have a Church Manual…. It would seem to many like a step toward formation of a creed, or a discipline, other than the Bible, something we have always been opposed to as a denomination…. It was in taking similar steps that other bodies of Christians first began to lose their simplicity and become formal and spiritually lifeless. Why should we imitate them? (Review and Herald 60, November 20, 1883, 733).

The SDA Fundamental Beliefs are ingeniously crafted so as to include the possibility of a wide variety of mutually exclusive if not Christian heretical views. For instance, SDAs in good standing may believe, preach, and write any of the following.

Sin is a condition of estrangement or alienation from God.

vs

Sin is an action—or failure to act—the “transgression of the law.”

Jesus was born with the weaknesses of a degenerate race but unselfish (without a tendency or predisposition to sin).

vs

Jesus was born selfish and overcame that inward predilection to sin.

Christ’s perfection is credited to the Christian as if his own, but not in actual experience, as a gift of grace.

vs

Christian sinless perfection will be achieved at least by some, and available to all with God's help.

Every aspect of salvation (justification, sanctification, glorification) is by grace alone through faith alone.

vs

Justification is by grace alone through faith alone but sanctification is achieved by our God assisted effort and obedience.

The Bible is the only rule of faith and practice for the Christian.

vs

Everyone (or at least SDAs) should understand the Bible as interpreted by Ellen White and that we should do or believe everything that Ellen White ever told anyone to do or believe.

Spiritual authority is received by each believer directly from the Lord.

vs

Spiritual authority is received through ordination and direction by the leaders of the church.

The term, "the church" mean believers in the Messiah.

vs
The SDA organization is "the church" and the "remnant" spoken of in Revelation.

Each person's probation closes when they make their final decision between God's way of ruling the universe (love) and Satan's way of ruling the universe (coercion) or at death.

vs

God will arbitrarily close probation for all the living at the same time and that anyone who has not achieved moral perfection (or at least absolute loyalty) before that time will be lost.

People can come out of Babylon by adopting the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice for the Christian—with or without joining SDA denomination.

vs

The only way people can come out of Babylon is by joining SDA denomination.

Coercion is the mark of the beast and coercion in spiritual matters exerted by anyone towards any other is a demonstration of that beastly mark.

vs

Worshipping God on Sunday is the mark of the beast received when someone has been informed that the seventh-day of the week is the proper worship day but continues to worship God on Sunday.

The Godhead is made up of three separate individuals with a definitive hierarchy of God the father over His Son and the Spirit being in the service of the other Two.

vs

The Godhead is a figurative representation of 3 roles or personages of the one indivisible God.

All men and women are born in sin, guilty, and warranting only damnation by their God.

vs

Men and women are born in a neutral state, but quickly learn and display selfishness while living in a sinful environment.

Prayer is a force that actually moves God to do that which He might not otherwise have done. The prayer of many or of an especially righteous person is more effective than a less pure effort.

vs

Prayer changes the one praying to better equip and to motivate them to accomplish God's will.

The Sabbath is a divine command of God to be kept in strict accordance with his expressed instructions to offer Him maximal glory and service.

vs

The Sabbath is a gift of God to man for the welfare of man to be kept in ways that maximize its value to men (and women).

Christ died to shed perfect blood and suffer exquisitely while innocent to ransom humankind from the control of Satan and turn aside the just wrath of God the father at the violation of his 10 commandment law.

vs

Christ died to demonstrate the length the Godhead, united as one in purpose, would go to convince humankind of God's love, thus healing the alienation and countering misrepresentations of God and restoring harmony in the universe.
The Bible is the infallible word of God perfect and true in every detail where correctly preserved, translated and understood.

vs

The Bible is the product of men, inspired by God, but reflecting the at-times limited understanding of its various authors.

Women are to remain largely silent in visible church governance or leadership. Their special role is to nurture the young, the weak, and the new in faith. While cherished they are subject to their husbands.

vs

Women are fully endowed with all the gifts and rights common to all humankind by their Creator and are both free and encouraged to prepare for and accept any role within God’s kingdom, society, and the home.

AND currently, by quoting only the majestic, potentially poetic, words of Scripture, SDAs could hold a variety of positions on the timing and manor of God’s creative work on earth.

BUT on that point alone, more clarity is to be insisted upon. The leadership of the church wishes to add extra-biblical language to insure that all interpret the Scriptures the same on this point (only), thus everything must be seen as created in six, literal 24 hour days, “recently.”

Many SDAs find that narrow understanding an insurmountable challenge.

Perhaps well-read or educated SDAs will just have to learn to practice the arts so well satirized in the stage musical “The Book of Mormon”:

When you start to get confused
Because of thoughts in your head
Don't feel those feelings
Hold them in instead

Turn it off Like a light switch Just go click It's a cool little Mormon trick We do it all the time

Turn it off
Like a light switch on a cord
Turn it Turn it Turn it off

Or, from the same source:

Now I must be completely devout
I can't have even one shred of doubt...

You cannot just believe part way,
You have to believe in it all.

If you believe, the Lord will reveal it.
And you'll know it's all true. You'll just feel it.
You'll be a Mormon
And, by gosh!
A Mormon just believes!

Oh, I believe.
I believe that God lives on a planet called Kolob.
I believe that Jesus has his own planet as well.
And I believe that the Garden of Eden was in Jackson County, Missouri.

Or perhaps we need more the attitude of the Wonderland Queen:

"Alice

laughed: "There's no use trying," she said; "one can't believe impossible things."
"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

Ellen White held a fairly dim view of those who would trample the opinions of another, and a reasonable humility regarding her own authority. Other early pioneers were aghast at the thought of a creed—and were not, on occasion, all that sure about the intentions of the General Conference.

Allow no one to be brains for you, allow no one to do your thinking, your investigating, and your praying. (Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, Sept. 11, 1894, para. 1; also in Fundamentals of Christian Education, 1923, p. 307)

We must study the truth for ourselves. No man should be relied upon to think for us.

No matter who he is, or in what position he may be placed, we are not to look upon any man as a criterion for us.

We are to counsel together, and to be subject one to another; but at the same time we are to exercise the ability God has given us, in order to learn what is truth. (Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, 1923, p. 109)

There is no more conclusive evidence that we possess the spirit of Satan than the disposition to hurt...those who act contrary to our ideas. (The Desire of Ages, p. 487)

We differ so widely in disposition, habits, education, that our ways of looking at things vary. We judge differently. Our understanding of truth, our ideas in regard to the conduct of life, are not in all respects the same.... So frail, so ignorant, so liable to misconception is human nature, that each should be careful in the estimate he places upon another. (Ministry of Healing, p. 483)

One of the landmarks under this message was the temple of God, seen by His truth-loving people in heaven, and the ark containing the law
of God. The light of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment flashed its strong rays in the pathway of the transgressors of God's law. The non-immortality of the wicked is an old landmark. I can call to mind nothing more that can come under the head of the old landmarks. All this cry about changing the old landmarks is all imaginary. (Manuscript 13, 1889-1890)

(To Elder Edwin R. Jones)

You will take passages in the Testimonies that speak of the close of probation, of the shaking among God's people, and you will talk of a coming out from this people of a purer, holier people that will arise. Now all this pleases the enemy. **We should not needlessly take a course that will make differences or create dissension.** We should not give the impression that if our particular ideas are not followed, it is because the ministers are lacking in comprehension and in faith and are walking in darkness. (Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 179)

**God has not set any kingly power in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to control the whole body or to control any branch of the work.**

He has not provided that the burden of leadership shall rest upon a few men. Responsibilities are distributed among a large number of competent men. (Testimonies, vol. 8, p. 236)

I do not expect to be at your General Conference. I would rather run the other way. (Ellen White to O. A. Olsen, May 8, 1890, O46-1890)

It has been a necessity to organize union conferences, that **the General Conference shall not exercise dictation over all the separate conferences.** (Manuscript 26, April 3, 1903)

Many from among our own people are writing to me, asking with earnest determination the privilege of using my writings to give force to certain subjects that they wish to present to the people in such a way as to leave a deep impression upon them. It is true that there is a reason why some of their matters should be presented; but **I would not venture to give my approval in using the Testimonies in this way, or to sanction the placing of matter, which is good in itself in the way which they propose.** (EGW to Brother Littlejohn, Aug. 3, 1894)

Don’t you quote Sister White. I don’t want you ever to quote Sister White until you get your vantage ground where you know where you are. Quote the Bible. Talk the Bible. It is full of meat, full of fatness. Carry it right out in your life and you will know more Bible than you know now. (Spaulding-Magan Collection, p. 174).

The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God’s people, should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. There is a reason to fear that they may not be clearly discriminating between truth and error. When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves, to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition, and worship they know not what. (Counsels to Writers and Editors, p. 39)

How does heaven look upon such things? With what amazement do angels hear men judging and condemning their brethren, causing them most cruel suffering of body and mind, and claiming that they do it under the sanction of God? Instead of being under the leadership of Christ, they are following the leadership of Satan. Paul at one time pursued this course, actually believing that he was doing God service; but Jesus spoke to him, and told him that in persecuting his saints he was persecuting him. All persecution, **all force employed to compel conscience, is after Satan’s own order;** and those who carry out these designs are his agents to execute his hellish purpose. In following Satan’s cruel proposals, in becoming his agents, men become the enemies of God and his church, and will be judged in that great day by that man whom God hath ordained; for he hath committed all judgment into the hands of his Son. (“Let Both Grow Together,” Review
J.N. Loughborough expressed the fear common to the church founders in stating:

The first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is, to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And fifth, to commence persecution against such. (*Doings of the Battle Creek Conference*, Oct. 5 & 6, 1861. *Review and Herald* 18 (19): 148. 1861-10-08)

James White had fears regarding the misuse of the writing of his wife:

Every Christian is therefore duty bound to take the Bible as a perfect rule of faith and duty…. He is not at liberty to turn from them to learn his duty through any of the gifts. We say the very moment he does, he places the gifts in a wrong place, and takes an extremely dangerous position. (*Review & Herald*, October 3, 1854)

There is a class of persons who are determined to have it that the Review and its conductors make the view of Mrs. White a Test of doctrine and Christian fellowship. What has the Review to do with Mrs. White’s views? The sentiments published in its columns are all drawn from the Holy Scriptures. No writer of the Review has ever referred to them as authority on any point. The Review for five years has not published one of them. Its motto has been, The Bible and the Bible alone, the only rule of faith and duty. (*Review and Herald*, Oct. 16 1855)

They (SDA's) believe in the perpetuity of spiritual gifts. They believe that the spirit of prophecy has rested upon Mrs. White, and that she is called to do a special work at this time, among this people. They do not, however, make belief in this work a test of fellowship. (*Review and Herald*, June 13, 1871)

Neal C. Wilson had a view of our Fundamental Statements more “nuanced” than his son, Ted. In introducing the fully revised draft to the assembled delegates of the General Conference in Dallas (April 1980), the then GC president included the following observations.

There are others who think they know why this is being done. They believe it is being prepared as a club to batter someone over the head, to try to get people into a narrow concept of theology, not leaving any opportunity for individual interpretation of prophecy, or any individual views with respect to theology or certain areas of doctrine. This also is unfortunate, because this never has been, and is not the intention, of any study that has been given to the Statement on Fundamental Beliefs.

Some academicians, theologians and others, have expressed the fear that this statement was being developed so that the church could confront them with a checklist, to determine whether they should be disqualified from teaching in one of our institutions of higher education. It is very, very tragic when these kinds of rumors begin to develop…. Perhaps I should go one step further and say that the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have a creed as such. Nothing set in concrete in terms of human words. The time never comes when any human document cannot be improved upon.

That reassurance was consistent with the wise historical understanding of the editors of the *Review and Herald* expressed a few years earlier.

There are several reasons for the centuries-old misunderstanding regarding the role of the church, a misunderstanding that has brought on
either the indifference or disgust of the onlooking world.…

The second reason follows the first [theological error] although historically it may seem to have been primary: many church members lost sight of the church as a fellowship and looked upon themselves as an organization. The vocabulary and spirit of big business and military operations were unconsciously borrowed and some very tragic consequences followed.

A good and regular member of the church (understood primarily as organization) thus looked upon his standing in terms of his faithfulness to the church's prescribed rules and interpretation of doctrine. Faith was measured out in creedal points; to believe all those points fulfilled the expectations of the church organization. Whatever would lie beyond the expressed statements of belief became relatively insignificant. The member's sense of security thus rested on his knowledge that he believed what the church organization defined as correct doctrine…

Something further happened. Someone has to guarantee the correctness of doctrine, and so the need for 'holy' men who are set apart from the rest of the church members. Thus we see in the development of the Christian church what came to be called sacerdotalism—the rise of the priesthood system with all its hierarchical elaborations. (*Review and Herald*, From the Editors, 19 June 1975, “Organizational Concepts Overshadow Fellowship”)

Officially, the SDA church does not base doctrine on nor require acceptance of the authority of Ellen White for its members. Practice and opinion, however, have been inconsistent.

1871, James White: “[Seventh-day Adventists] do not, however, make a belief in this work a test of Christian fellowship” (*Review and Herald*, June 13, 1871).

1874, Baptismal Vows, Number 14: “Do you recognize that the remnant church has the Spirit of Prophecy, and that this has been manifested in this church through the writings of Ellen G. White? (Revelation 12:17; 19:10)” [emphasis added].

1957, *Questions on Doctrine*, the SDA church publicly declared: “We accept the Bible and the Bible only as our rule of faith” and again, “We test the writings of Ellen G. White by the Bible, but in no sense do we test the Bible by her writings” (p. 9 and 90).

1975, Robert H. Pierson (former General Conference President): “The Bible is God’s unerring guidebook of Christian faith, but sometimes it needs an authoritative source to interpret portions and thus to avoid division among us” [emphasis supplied]…. Hundreds of churches and religious sects claim that they believe in the Bible and the Bible only. Has this…brought unity of doctrine among the churches in Christendom? Not at all” [i.e. they lack an authoritative interpreter] *We Still Believe* (Washington, D.C.: *Review and Herald*, 1975, p. 165).

**Questions**

1. IF the world church insists on ADDING to scripture definitive constructs to impose absolute fealty to an extra-biblical author, will it not, in so doing, demonstrate itself to be outside of the *sola scriptura* heritage it has always claimed, and thus become by standard definitions a nonbiblically-based cult?

2. Worse, if the church uses a revised statement as a creed to *compel* the conscience of its members or its academic employees to
confirm to that cultic understanding will it not also have become “beast” like?

3. Is it a good thing to rework the Fundamentals in such a way to write out of the church thousands of its best informed members and employed academics who cannot in good conscience accept a literal 6D6KUF?

What will (or should) those people do when they find that by deliberate effort their church has used a political process to rewrite a creed that historically has been merely DESCRIPTIVE "of what is widely believed among us" to one that is deliberately newly designed as PROSCRIPTIVE in a way to exclude them?

4. What is the obligation of supporting members of the church if they recognize an injustice to their fellows or a new misrepresentation to the world of their own position if their church takes steps to tell them they are no longer a SDA? Do they have an ethical obligation to withdraw their support and/or their person from such an organization? Should they continue to support financially a school system that will henceforth operate contrary to the highest ideals their principal founder promulgated in ceasing “to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thought” (Education, p. 17).

5. Should individuals work from within the church to, as Henry David Thoreau suggested, “Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine,” or to the contrary, are the actions of such “fifth columnists” duplicitous; the more honest action being (also à la Thoreau and consistent with the recommendations and wishes of Ted Wilson, Cliff Goldstein, and the majority of the world-wide SDA membership) to withdraw? (On the Duty of Civil Disobedience, 1849)

These are not simply idle musings of a technical or theoretical concern. The gauntlet was thrown in 2003:

For those among us who have already decided—despite the Bible and Ellen White—on evolution, there are plenty of other churches for you. Ours isn’t one. And to those teaching in our schools who…honestly reject a literal six-day creation…go elsewhere…. I speak, I believe, for millions of Seventh-day Adventists when I declare that whatever the age of the earth itself, we will never make room for anything other than a literal six-day creation for life here—never. And for those who want more, you'll have to fight us for every extra minute—much less your millions of mythological years beyond—of which the Word of God knows nothing and with its first verses utterly denies.” (Clifford Goldstein, Adventist Review, 24 July 2003; published while the NAD was holding its Faith and Science Conference at Glacier View).

Twenty years ago, the 1993/94 poll of SDA North American College Science faculty (Adventist Today, 121 respondents of 200 polled) found they believed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God created live organisms during 6 days less than 10,000 years ago.</td>
<td>(only) 43.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God created live organisms during 6 days less than 100,000 years ago.</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God created first life millions of years ago and guided its development.</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
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</tbody>
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The Bible flood took place only in the near East. 21.5%

It is unlikely in the face of ever mounting evidence to the contrary that those numbers have shifted towards the position now being promulgated so aggressively by SDA leadership. More concerning should be the recognition that two-thirds of Adventist college students are in non-SDA schools.

If the SDA church formally announces that it is no longer “home” to these individuals, what are they to do? Where are they to go?

It also forced all people……. Rev 13:16

9.27.2013

Addendum

There is substantial contradiction in the movement of the church, glacially slow that it might be, away from the literal application of clearly articulated social norms of the 1st century AD in granting increasing visibility and responsibility to women in the church, while moving towards greater literalism in adhering to 14th century BCE understandings of nature, thus taking more seriously “thought crimes” than “behavioral crimes” against literalism.

To its credit, the NPUC Gleaner recently permitted me to express just that observation, and they did so within hours of its submission. There are those in Israel who have not yet bent their knee to overreaching power, but will they stand after 2015? (printed in the Sept 2013 issue)

The July 2013 Gleaner was grand with unintended irony.

Under the heading “Images of Creation” is a picture from Palouse Falls State Park, clearly portraying geologic features understood as the product of multiple massive lava flows (millions of years) later carved by massive and repeated flooding (more than 12,000 years ago). Leaf imprints, petrified wood, vertebrate bones and insects are found at some of the deepest levels. The correlation of multiple dating methods makes these observations a challenge to the most literal interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis.

The 2015 General Conference has been tasked with replacing the simple words of Scripture in fundamental belief #6 with more precise formulations in English. The intent (at minimum) is to reduce some of the speculative interpretations currently available to SDAs who struggle to accommodate their knowledge of geology, biology, paleo-anthropology (or just what they see with their own eyes) with their faith in God’s Word.

The same issue reports the NPUC in harmony with the NAD is expanding opportunities for women in ministerial leadership. These welcome actions accommodate a culture that has elevated the role of women in ways unknown to the writers of Scripture.
I suspect God must be amused (the response among educated potential converts will likely be less gracious) as we willingly reinterpret the writings of those of a distant past to enable progress in a *subjective cultural* sphere while at the same time anchor ourselves to ancient understandings in *objective scientific* matters. Neither were their major concern.

Richard Faiola, MD

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Sh'ma 2, Love God with All Your Strength
by Debbonaire Kovacs Submitted Nov. 13, 2013

Beside the River: Loving God with One’s Body

As I walked the riverbank, I was thinking about the water versus the stones. Stones look a lot stronger than water. Water is so changeable, shimmering and glimmering around all over the place. A baby can shove it aside. A bug can walk on it. Fish even breathe it. Water is weak, right?

Stone, on the other hand, seems eternal. There it stands, holding firm, immovable. Big boulders and earth form the banks and boundaries of the water. Layer upon layer of smaller stones make up its bed, hold it on its way, keep it from sinking back down under the strata. Stone is strong.

The problem, of course, is time. The river, like all water, “seeks the path of least resistance,” but while it merrily chuckles on its way, it patiently and oh so constantly wears away at its banks, polishes the stones, grinds small ones smaller, and smallest ones into sand. Once, people maintained this river. Among other things, they kept a channel dug, so salmon could get through easily. Now, the Crown doesn’t allow any modifications at all. So the river was taking out large chunks of pasture every year. The owners of the cabin got special permission to dump 90 square metres of big stone along the bank on the curve. So that’s how the big stones that hold the bank got here in the first place. Otherwise, the river would have changed its course again, as it has so many times. Water is stronger than stone, after all.

Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy. . . strength. . . and thy neighbor as thyself.

In my analogy du jour, the water represents my mind. We’ll talk more of that next week. The earth and stone represent my body. And so it is, that the mind can wear away the body, if you let it. If you don’t maintain the body.

It seems to me that the first piece of loving God with one’s body—first in order, not in importance—is loving the body itself—taking care of it, nourishing it, feeding it, keeping a clear channel within it that leads to the ocean of God’s love. (Which of course means that love from and to God came first, after all. Can’t love this body unless I recognize that it’s God’s treasure, made by, and yes, loved by the Creator of all.)

Lately, rather to my own surprise, I’ve realized that morning grooming, and breakfast, and so on, are a real part of morning worship. I am loving God with my body when I take care of it. Or, more properly put perhaps, I am making my body strong and healthy, ready for use in loving.

The next piece is loving others as we love ourselves, which can’t mean in the same exact ways (unless the other in question is a baby or child or ill person whom we do actually feed, groom, and dress) but means loving others as much as we love ourselves. It’s been a hard lesson for me and many others to learn that the limit to our ability to love others lies, in part, in the limits we set on loving ourselves. Those limits can be set at either end of the spectrum, of course—true love is neither neglect nor overindulging.

I can use my body to love others by hugging them, listening to them, helping them, cooking for them, making things for them, and many other ways. May I have eyes to see the opportunities.

First, last, and always, comes love of God. In the ways in which we choose to show love to ourselves, we are loving God. In the ways in which we choose to show love to others, we are loving God. But we must also express our love direct to God, not through others. Do we use our bodies enough, to do that?

I can use my body to show love to God by singing, using different positions in prayer, even dancing. I remember a story—you’ve probably heard it—about a child dancing and twirling around her back yard. Her mother asked what she was doing, and she replied happily, “I’m dancing with God!”
When was the last time you danced with God?

What are some of the ways you use your body to love God, others, and yourself?

What are some of the ways you maintain your body in good shape for that work of loving?

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Eight-year-old Preacher Says, “God Has My Back”

by Debbonaire Kovacs
Submitted Nov 13, 2013

“One of my favorite people in the Bible who put faith and trust in God was Daniel. . . . Dan 6:1-28 . . . is a wonderful testimony of how being faithful and true to God puts you in his favor. Now, Daniel was placed in an unusual position. He had to decide if he was going to be faithful to the king, or God. Although the position he was in may have been unusual, it was not a hard choice for Daniel to make.”

This is a quote from a sermon. It doesn’t sound that unusual; you’ve probably heard words like these many times. What makes this sermon unusual is that it was preached by a six-year-old boy, Samuel M. Green, in Birmingham, AL, in 2011. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbiAYtidF-0

Samuel, now eight, has become well-known in his region. He has spoken on 3ABN, at a women’s ministries prayer teleconference, and in February, 2013, he was invited to preach at New Faith Baptist Church, Lake Charles, LA. His mother, Joann Green, says that this invitation was what really made it clear to her that her child had a gift.

Samuel’s giftedness has made itself known in many ways. He is a member of Berean Seventh-day Adventist church in Jackson, MI, and of his local AJY Adventurers club. He sings solos at his church, is a member of the New Heights SDA Children’s Choir, and has given the children’s story on occasion. He has been featured in local newspapers and was even interviewed, along with his mother and his mentor, Beverly Coleman, on the Today show, with Kathy Lee Gifford and Hoda Kotb. Coleman, who works with preschool children, said she usually doesn’t begin coaching or mentoring kids until they are two, but that Samuel was brought to her at 13 months, and she soon knew he was academically gifted.

In some cases, Samuel sings before and/or after his sermons. You can hear one of his songs here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpkCmLjxLLo

As for Samuel himself, he loves playing with his brother Cedric, and also says he’s grateful to Cedric not only for spending time with him, but for keeping him updated on youtube, Facebook, and Samuel’s website at www.samuelmgreen.com. He says that when he grows up he wants to be both a preacher and “a doctor who takes care of children.”

Ellen White and others of her day were moved and amazed by the child preachers during the Early Advent Movement. Speaking of the wave of child preachers in Sweden in particular, White said,

In many places where the preachers of the Lord’s soon coming were thus silenced, God was pleased to send the message, in a miraculous manner, through little children. As they were under age, the law of the state could not restrain them, and they were permitted to speak unmolested. The movement was chiefly among the lower class, and it was in the humble
dwellings of the laborers that the people assembled to hear the warning. The child-preachers themselves were mostly poor cottagers. Some of them were not more than six or eight years of age; and while their lives testified that they loved the Saviour, and were trying to live in obedience to God’s holy requirements, they ordinarily manifested only the intelligence and ability usually seen in children of that age. When standing before the people, however, it was evident that they were moved by an influence beyond their own natural gifts. Tone and manner changed, and with solemn power they gave the warning . . . Great Controversy, pp. 366-7

These days, at least in the Western world, legality is usually not an issue. One cannot help but wonder whether the novelty, instead, might draw some people to hear truths they might not otherwise hear. In general, at least so far, Samuel Green’s sermons are simple retellings of Bible stories, with little to detract from what, on his new television show, he calls, The Simple Truth.

“I am excited about sharing God’s word with you today. But I always get excited to share God’s word. Some of my classmates ask me, ‘Do you get scared when you go up to preach, or when you just speak to people? Do you get nervous?’ Well, to tell you, I don’t feel like shaking with fear, because I know God has my back.” Taken from his sermon at New Faith Baptist Church, Feb, 2013. http://www.samuelmgreen.com/Sermons.html

http://thegrio.com/2013/08/07/meet-samuel-green-an-8-year-old-preacher-god-has-my-back/#52694609 interview w Gifford, Kotb

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lm5ISedNfrQ

http://www.today.com/video/today/52694609#52694609
Outside of Your Tent

By Eugene Prewitt
Submitted Nov 13, 2013

Outside of Your Tent

The food is now ready
Outside of your tent
Are you hungry, my dear one?
The manna is sent

The angels have brought
Their own fare to the ground
If you will but search

It soon will be found

The manna is waiting
Outside of your tent
Are you hungry, my dear one?

The food has been sent

Wait not ‘til the sun
Will rise bright and warm
And bring to your life
A business-like storm

And you go on famished
‘til your strength is spent
Up now! my dear one
Quick, out of your tent!

For the morning’s first rays
Will rob you of your bread
Are you hungry, my dear one?
The table is spread
The food is now ready
   Outside of your tent
Are you hungry, my dear one?
   The manna is sent

Copyright Feb. 21, 2003
Eugene Prewitt

Christ has given us no promise of help in bearing today the burdens of tomorrow. He has said, "My grace is sufficient for thee"; but, like the manna given in the wilderness, His grace is bestowed daily, for the day's need. Like the hosts of Israel in their pilgrim life, we may find morning by morning the bread of heaven for the day's supply. SD 119

The provision for the day must be gathered in the morning; for all that remained upon the ground was melted by the sun. PP 295