**NEWS**

**Noted Adventist Bible Scholar, Editor is Recovering from a Heart Attack:** A major Adventist scholar suffered a heart attack during recent church services in Australia and was rushed to a hospital, where he remains until further notice....

**Famed American Literary Magazine Publishes Article on Adventists:** A major article in *The New Yorker* magazine suggests that David Koresh's Branch Davidians were woefully misread by authorities, who failed to understand how closely the group mirrored attitudes of traditional apocalyptic faiths, such as Adventism....

**Theories About Sexual Identity Fall Short of Reality Expert Tells Council:** "Reparative Therapy" is seen as falling short in its attempts to reverse the effects of homosexuality, according to a Loma Linda University professor....

**Sexuality Council: Testimony of Adventists Who Say They Have Changed:** The recent sexuality council in Cape Town brought in three witnesses who said they have given up all homosexual behavior, but attendees were told that

**FEATURES, POETRY & THE ARTS**

(Available to logged-in subscribers; to apply for a 30-day complimentary subscription, click [here](#))

**Oakwood Aeolians Will Defend World Championship in Latvia:** Oakwood University achieved First Place in the 2012 international Choir Games and in October will travel to Latvia to defend that achievement. Oakwood is now recognized as producing some of the very best choral music in the religious world.
**Chief Adventist Doctor Calls for Compassion on Sexuality Issues:** A leading Adventist physician has cautioned an Adventist congress on sexuality not to minimize the complexities associated with homosexual orientation....

**Adventist Volunteers Respond to Mudslide Tragedy in Washington State:** One of the strangest natural disasters in US history has mobilized Adventist Community Services personnel along the Washington coast, where mud-sliding so far has killed 24 people....

**Film Festival Recognizes Top Cinema Creations of Adventists:** Eight winning films drawn from 50 contending productions have been announced by SonScreen (see related Feature ⇒)....

**To Win at SonScreen—Story is the Most Powerful Key:** Powerful storylines are seen as essential for Christian filmmakers who influence the spiritual tone of a nation....

---

This message was sent to ahc@andrews.edu from Adventist Today, Post Office Box 1135, Sandy, OR 97055-1135. [Edit profile / unsubscribe] - [Forward to a friend]
Noted Adventist Bible Scholar, Editor is Recovering from a Heart Attack

By AT News Team, March 24, 2014

Dr. William Johnsson, one of the most respected Bible scholars in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination and retired editor of the Adventist Review, suffered a heart attack while on a trip to Australia. He was rushed to the emergency room on Sabbath, March 15, after preaching at a local church and spent five days in the hospital. His wife was with him on the trip.

Johnsson is not yet cleared to return home. The couple will probably return to their home in the United States in a couple of weeks, sources have told Adventist Today. They were both raised in Australia and began service as missionaries in India as Australian nationals.

The author of more than 20 books and a thousand journal articles, Johnsson was a faculty member at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University before he joined the editorial staff of the Adventist Review at the denomination's General Conference (GC) offices in the suburbs of Washington DC. He has written commentaries on the gospels of Matthew and Mark, as well as two volumes on the book of Hebrews.

In 1979 he was elected the first president of the Adventist Society of Religious Studies, the primary scholarly organization for Adventist theologians and Bible scholars. He continues to serve as one of the trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate and an assistant to the GC president for interfaith relations. Mrs. Johnsson served for a number of years as director of children's ministries for the denomination's North American Division.
Famed American Literary Magazine Publishes Article on Adventists

By AT News Team, March 26, 2014

An in-depth feature article about the tragic 1993 confrontation between an Adventist cult and Federal police in Waco, Texas, has been published this week by The New Yorker, perhaps the most famous and widely-read literary magazine in the United States. Entitled "Sacred and Profane: How not to negotiate with believers," it is the first major article in the issue dated March 31 which is being delivered by the post office this week.

The major focus of the article is the miscalculations of the Federal agents who initially attempted to serve a search warrant regarding the illegal sale of firearms by the Branch Davidian Seventh-day Adventists which devolved into a long standoff, repeated negotiations by telephone and eventually a showdown that left 73 dead, including 25 children. It was the largest loss of civilian lives in a Federal raid in more than a century.

Malcom Gladwell, a New Yorker staff writer, has clearly read the many books that have been published about the Waco tragedy, including scholarly collections and the memoirs of survivors and family members. He argues that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents in charge misunderstood the nature of the Branch Davidian cult and the relationship that its members had with their leader, David Koresh.

"The FBI ... believed the Branch Davidians were dangerously in the thrall of Koresh; it feared a catastrophic act like the mass suicide, in 1978, in Guyana, of the cult leader Jim Jones and his followers in the People's Temple," Gladwell writers. "But the Davidians weren't like the People's Temple." Based on oral history research, "religious studies scholar Catherine Wessinger ... maintains that the People's Temple was an example of the 'fragile' subset of millennial groups: defensive and unstable, and willing to initiate great violence in response to an outside threat."

"The Branch Davidians, however, were far from fragile. They engaged freely and happily with the world around them. [A group member] went to California periodically to work for an audiotape-dubbing company and make money. Other Davidians started small businesses around Waco. Wayne Martin, a prominent member of the [group], was a Harvard Law School graduate with a legal practice in town." Also they ran a small business selling guns and David Koresh would take a few of the young men into town with him on Saturday nights to play rock music in clubs and drink beer.

What the FBI misunderstood about the Branch Davidians, a misperception that proved to be disastrous, was the fact that religious beliefs, no matter how out of line with conventional common sense, "were matters of principle for those within" the religion. "From the movement's beginning, the point of being a Davidian was to be different. ... No one became a Branch Davidian if he required the comfort of religious orthodoxy." The FBI failed miserably in this situation because they "dismissed the religious beliefs of the Davidians" and thought "Koresh was a sociopath and his followers were hostages."

The content and character of religious faith must be taken more seriously in confrontations between the cultural mainstream and minority religious communities, the article argues. "The Branch Davidians belonged to the religious tradition that sees Christ's return to earth and the establishment of a divine Kingdom as imminent." They emerged from the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, and "of all mainstream contemporary American churches ... the Seventh-Day Adventists have the strongest millennial tradition ... formed by followers of the early-nineteenth-century evangelist William Miller."
Koresh did not behave like a manipulative, psychotic cult leader, the writer argues. "He didn't preach. He threw out theories and ideas, inviting argument and discussion." It was the power of Bible study and the new ideas that emerged which animated the group and their refusal to surrender to the Federal agents was in part because of what they believed about end-time events and in part because of the massive show of force that the Feds assembled. A total of 899 Federal agents, Texas Rangers, U.S. Army, National Guard, sheriff's deputies and local police were involved, including two Abrams tanks, 10 Bradley tanks and four combat-engineering vehicles.

The group had spent much time studying Revelation 6 where "seven seals" are described and "the Lamb" opened the seals and revealed the future of God's people. Many were convinced that Koresh was "the Lamb" because he had been able to show them an understanding of the mystifying passage. Even his most troubling behavior, taking on "spiritual wives" from among the spouses and daughters of the group, some as young as 12 years of age, was connected in their thinking to Psalm 45 which "speaks of a great king, anointed by God, who marries many princesses and creates a mighty dynasty that will one day command the world."

"When Bible study is cut loose from the norms of rational thinking and scientific fact it can form the basis for dangerous ideology," an Adventist theologian told Adventist Today. "What happened with the Branch Davidians is a clear example of this, but the mishandling of the situation by the authorities obscures the reality and the lessons that we need to learn. That can cause sympathy for the underdog and cause honest believers to lose sight of the fact that the Word of God must be balanced with reason, as James White advocated in the early years of the Sabbath-keeping Adventists."

It is unclear how this article will be received either among Adventists are the larger world. Adventist Today will report future developments as they surface.
Theories About Sexual Identity Fall Short of Reality Expert Tells Council

From Adventist News Network, March 20, 2014

“We tend to see things in terms of black and white. The shades of gray between them provoke a lot of anxiety,” Dr. Curtis Fox, chair of the Department of Counseling and Family Sciences at Loma Linda University, warned leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination attending the council studying sexuality this week (March 17-20). He addressed theories put forward by some Christians that family dysfunction, sexual trauma and other environmental factors are triggers for homosexuality. Reality may be more nuanced than some faith communities will be comfortable acknowledging, the Adventist behavioral scientist said.

Fox’s presentation provided a perspective from social science on the challenges facing the Adventist Church on issues related to sexuality. “Reality is complex,” Fox said. “Simple explanations will not suffice, and will be seen as less than helpful by those who are dealing with this,” Fox said. So-called “reparative therapy” Fox said, assumes that sexual orientation for every individual is exclusively a matter of choice that can be reversed through the exercise of willpower in a supportive, Christian environment. While some people say they have found personal transformation through such therapy, others report no change and, in many cases, exacerbated psychological and emotional trauma, Fox said. Such outcomes have raised “serious concerns” and prompted major health organizations to “denounce” reparative therapy.

Fox also outlined the effects of “societal prejudice” against LGBT youth. Marginalized gay and lesbian young people are more likely, he said, to attempt suicide, have high levels of depression and drug abuse and are more vulnerable to HIV and STIs. He went on to counter widespread myths about members of the gay and lesbian community, among them that most pedophiles are gay; that gay relationships are transient; and that gay parents typically raise gay children.

“My role as a behavioral scientist is to get people to think, inspire dialogue and be inquisitive in the pursuit of knowledge,” Fox said, acknowledging that he brings his own “set of assumptions” to the discussion. “My biblical worldview takes into account creation by God and the fall. Hence chance, variation, anomaly and degeneration are now part of human reality,” he said. “God works with humans in their imperfections, but the church need not be apologetic for its stance on relationships.” Rather, it should become “skilful in interpreting and declaring truths as revealed in a highly defensive, politically charged and radically individualistic environment."

The church’s approach, then, Fox said, “should be characterized by humility, not bigotry, hatred and marginalization. We must adopt not just the message of Jesus, but the ministry methods of Jesus as well. It is the high calling of the church to love homosexuals as our neighbors, no less than we do our heterosexual neighbors.”

The Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. ANN has supplied Adventist Today with a series of six releases about the conference on sexuality attended March 17-20 by denominational officials from around the world. Adventist Today has published these with only light editing and made no attempt to confirm the reported information.
Sexuality Council: Testimony of Adventists Who Say They Have Changed

From Official Release by the Adventist News Network, March 19, 2014

Three Adventists who once identified themselves as gay or lesbian told their stories of journeys away from homosexual activity to the council of leaders from the Seventh-day Adventist denomination last week in Cape Town, South Africa. Addressing the gathering were Pastor Ron Woolsey, founder of The Narrow Way Ministry; Virna Santos, president of By Beholding His Love ministry; and Wayne Blakely, founder of Know His Love Ministries. "We are here tonight to listen to testimonies," said panel moderator Pastor Bill Knott, editor of the *Adventist Review*. "We’re here to listen to believers tell the stories of how God has redeemed them."

Woolsey said he grew up in a “good Adventist home,” but was molested as a child by a family friend. From then, he found himself increasingly focused on same-sex relationships. While attending an Adventist college, he began dating, and ultimately married, thinking marriage was a solution to his identity and relationships. When his young wife soon discovered his ongoing relationships with men, however, the marriage dissolved.

After more than 15 years in multiple gay relationships, Woolsey returned to his childhood faith and a relationship with Christ through reading a well-known book by Ellen G. White, a co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. “I began reading *Steps to Christ* with a cigarette in my hand and a martini beside me,” he noted wryly. “By chapter 5, I had put the cigarette out.” He was re-baptized, and soon began telling his story of recovery to church groups in the United States. Now married for 21 years, he is the father of five children, and an ordained pastor in the Arkansas-Louisiana Conference.

For Wayne Blakely, early childhood rejection by his mother—who had wished for a daughter—soon drove him to seek male relationships. Placed in several families, he was raised by a succession of relatives who, based on his challenging behavior, sent him to psychologists and pastors for counseling. At age 18 he began a gay relationship with a college friend and found an acceptance he had not previously known. “That’s when I gave up on God,” he said. More than 30 years of multiple sexual partners and drug use followed, as Blakely watched 40 gay friends die during the first years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

A series of divine providences brought him back to faith, Blakely said, including the prayers of friends who had not given up on him. In his youth, Blakely said he prayed the prayer, “God, make me straight.” Retrospectively, he now realizes that a change of orientation was not the goal: getting to know Christ as His Savior was actually the goal.

Santos believes that her journey to lesbianism was rooted in a painful and dysfunctional family situation. A victim of childhood sexual abuse, “No one told me [the abuse] wasn’t my fault,” she said. Her family joined the Adventist Church in her late teens and she struggled with same-sex attraction throughout college, secretly involved in a lesbian relationship. She moved to San Francisco, became a gay rights activist, and was reportedly the first to adopt a child under a new law in California which allowed same-sex couples to adopt each other’s children. The disappointment that accompanied the passage of an initiative (Proposition 8) which disallowed same-sex marriage in California, proved to be a crisis for Santos.

A reawakened interest in the Adventist faith was accompanied by a series of profound personal spiritual experiences that highlighted for Santos the importance of the Adventist teaching about the meaning and relevance of the heavenly sanctuary. Understanding for the first time that Jesus was her advocate, she said that she began to reassess the life
she had been leading. A Sabbath morning communion service became the pivot point for Santos, who recalls her surprise that the pastor’s wife washed the feet of a lesbian.

Knott asked a question about whether the panelists’ stories should be thought of as typical. “In recent weeks, there have been a number of voices raised to question the authenticity of this event because the organizers chose to hear primarily from those who are no longer practicing homosexuals. How would you respond to those comments?” Adventist Today understands this question to be a reference to a letter sent to the denomination's General Conference officers by Kinship, the largest organization representing Adventists who are LGBTI, and described in an opinion article published by Adventist Today prior to the event.

Woolsey responded, “We’ve all been there. We’ve been where they are. We gave those same arguments all our lives. We have come out of that. We’ve learned to put God first, not self.” Santos said she shared with her lesbian friends the story of her conversion, saying, “I’ve had an experience with Jesus Christ and I’m no longer a lesbian. But I’m no better than you.” She remembers a friend’s partner saying, “I’m happy for you. I can see it all over your face. You’ve found the love of your life.”

Santos reminded the delegates, “We’re no better than them.” She said that she is a friend of many LG who wrote to express concerns about the summit. “God is about having a relationship. He pursued me.... I have faith that even my friends will be knocking on our door soon.”

Written questions from the delegates asked whether the panelists still consider themselves as gay or lesbian; how the church should treat LGBTI individuals; and the nature of the ministries in which each panelist now works. Interrupted frequently by audience applause, the three continued to describe the transforming power of Christ as the cause of their new lives. “We have seen and heard courage here tonight,” Knott concluded.

Additional from AT News Team: The reason why the decision on the part of the planners of this event to exclude testimony from any Adventist who continues to identify themselves as LGBTI is because authentic, documented cases of lasting change are so rare. The vast majority of LGBTI who have tried change therapy or recovery ministries report that the change only lasts for a period of time and then ends. There are many examples of people who claimed conversion or change and then were discovered to be secretly involved in same-sex relationships and/or sexual activities. Recently the largest conservative Christian recovery ministry, Exodus International, closed down and the leaders admitted that many reports of success over the years later proved to be false. Sources involved with the meeting have told Adventist Today that they believe that the council could have benefitted from hearing other testimonies from individuals with different experiences.
Chief Adventist Doctor Calls for Compassion on Sexuality Issues

From Adventist News Network, March 21, 2014

The physician who leads health ministries for the Seventh-day Adventist denomination told the council studying sexuality this week that there is no clear model to understand why some individuals are homosexual, saying it is a “complex interplay of genetic and environmental factors.” Dr. Peter Landless, health ministries director for the denomination's General Conference, illustrated with both words and images the complexity of procreation and the genetic variances involved.

His address focused on a call for compassion to those in gay and lesbian relationships alongside a reaffirmation of the denomination's stand on marriage as being between one man and one woman. He rebuked a remark he had overheard in a hallway at the meeting. “I've even heard it said at this conference that we’re talking about ‘those people,'” he said. “We’re talking about fellow people on the journey of life.”

Landless is a native of South Africa, an internationally known cardiologist who previously worked at Johannesburg Hospital and served on the late President Nelson Mandela's medical team. He is also an ordained minister with significant pastoral experience.

The physician began his address with a detailed overview of the procreation process and genetic variances that can occur. He gave an example of a child who was born intersexed, a condition known as Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia, and how the child’s father rejected him. “If fathers and relatives reject children born with such rare conditions, how about the church?” Landless asked the council. “Should it be different?”

Homosexual men, he said, often have anatomical differences in their brains. Post mortem studies of homosexuals and heterosexuals have shown the differences, but it’s unclear whether the variation is causal or associated, Landless said, because the populations studied have been small. The differences show that many homosexual men have a larger superchiasmatic nucleas, which is involved in determining circadian rhythm, as well as larger anterior commissure, which communicates between the brain's left and right hemispheres.

Some researchers, Landless said are convinced there is a genetic component to homosexuality, with some searching for a “gay gene,” but there is no consensus on causes for homosexuality in either the medical literature or among professional psychologists. “The jury is definitely not resolved,” he said.

Homosexuals have slightly higher rates of increased non-communicable diseases, including hypertension and a higher cardiovascular age compared to their actual age. And lesbian women, Landless said, are 3.2 times more likely to die of breast cancer than heterosexual women.

“There are very significant health needs in the LGBT group,” Landless said. “We as Adventists are ideally equipped and situated to reach out to them. We as a church need to look to ourselves and understand, ‘Who is my neighbor?’”

Following Landless’ plenary session, several delegates said they appreciated his medical overview and his call for compassion. “He contrasted the physiological picture of what healthy looks like and also the full extent of what brokenness can look like,” said Pastor Audrey Andersson, executive secretary of the denomination’s Trans-European Division. “People can choose how they respond to others' brokenness.”
Pastor Onaolapo Ajibade, executive secretary of the denomination’s West-Central Africa Division, said since there is no known cause of homosexuality, there is no “cure.” And, “In the meantime we have to adopt a Christian approach. ... Since we don't know the cause, we have to be sympathetic.”

Before coming to the council, Ajibade said he questioned whether it was worth the effort and cost. “Originally I thought this summit was not needed, but having come here and having listened to all the presentations, I'm convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that it is worth it,” he said. “The church is making a spiritual step to equip us to be able to help our brothers and sisters.”

The Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. ANN has supplied Adventist Today with a series of six releases about the conference on sexuality attended March 17-20 by denominational officials from around the world. Adventist Today has published these with only light editing and made no attempt to confirm the reported information.
Adventist Today

Adventist Volunteers Respond to Mudslide Tragedy in Washington State

By AT News Team, March 27, 2014

Massive mudslides near Oso, Washington, has resulted in more than 24 deaths, the destruction of 48 homes as well as damage to others. Disaster Response volunteers from Adventist Community Services (ACS) are responding to this tragic event, unprecedented in the United States. ACS is the domestic relief and development agency sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

At this point the services assigned to ACS by the inter-agency planning guidelines of the state and Federal emergency management agencies, the American Red Cross and National Organizations Active in Disasters (NVOAD) are not yet needed. ACS operates emergency centers and warehouses to distribute donated goods, necessities such as bottled water, baby supplies, food, etc., and it remains to be seen when this will be relevant to the situation. ACS volunteers are not trained in direct search and rescue activities.

ACS directors and volunteers in a teleconference meeting voted to accept the request of local government authorities to raise funds for the operations. This decision was taken because many Adventists in the northwest, across the United States and around the world have asked how they can best help the people in the Oso area in Western Washington that have been affected by the mudslides.

During the response to Super Storm Sandy in New Jersey last year, one church in the Upper Columbia Conference raised more than $7,000 in a free will offering. "We would like to encourage pastors to offer the opportunity for people to give to help ... in this time of disaster," Dale Johnson told Adventist Today. He is the volunteer who served as Disaster Response coordinator for ACS in that conference.

The ACS director in Upper Columbia Conference has established a special trust fund for this disaster. "No money is used for administrative or other costs so everything goes to assist those in desperate need," said Johnson. "Thank you and your church family for considering this request." The fund can be contacted at ACS Upper Columbia Conference, 3715 South Grove Road, Spokane, Washington 99224.

ACS is a tax-exempt charity recognized under section 501(c)3 of U.S. Federal tax law. It is separately incorporated and affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. It operates during disasters under formal agreements with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the American Red Cross.
Film Festival Recognizes Top Cinema Creations of Adventists

By Logan Foll and Monte Sahlin, March 23, 2014
Updated March 26

Eight winning films were announced last night (March 22) at the conclusion of the 2014 SonScreen Film Festival, the only event of its kind in the Adventist movement. More than 50 movies were submitted this year and 43 of these were the work of college and university students, demonstrating the continuing strength of a new generation of Adventist artistic expression.

*The Hideout* was clearly the top film, winning the Best in Festival award, the Audience Choice Award, and a Sonny Award, as well as best dramatic short film, best screenplay and best cinematography. A short drama about a young girl whose life is thrown upside down when she is molested by her favorite teacher, the story line focuses on the support of her best friend who helps her find the strength to tell her mother. It was produced by Matt Disbro, filmed by Chris Stiles and written and directed by Daniel Wahlen, all three film student at Southern Adventist University (SAU).

*Extreme Servolution* won the top award for films about the church and its mission. It is a documentary about an Adventist church that revolutionized its outreach, making an exceptional impact on the community through projects in which church members use their talents to improve the homes of needy neighbors. It was produced by Pastor Michael Dauncey from the Aldergrove Church in the British Columbia Conference.

*The Back of My Life* was the best short documentary film. Pieter Damsteegt, a graduate of the film program at Andrews University, created this film to tell the story of his own health problem, a rare back condition, and the challenges he deals with day to day. It is the story of a young college student struggling to embrace the fact that he’s becoming handicapped.

*Disconnected* won the animation category. It features a robot who must choose to preserve his life by sacrificing his friend or lose everything to save her. It was produced by Jason Dull, a junior in the animated films program at SAU.

A film about preventing suicide among military veterans won the Jonathan Dulan High School Award. It was produced by Austin Greer, a secondary student.

Over its first years the SonScreen Film Festival was held at the Adventist Media Center in Southern California. Because the media center is closing down, this year the festival was moved to SAU which offers both undergraduate and grad programs in media production. Attendance was down by about a third over previous years.

Among the films shown during the festival there were entries from Pacific Union College and National University in California as well as Andrews University and SAU. At least two professional production companies also submitted movies for the festival. SonScreen is an annual event sponsored by the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

**Update:** One of the festival highlights was the world premiere of a film not in competition. *I’m Not Leaving* examines the 1994 genocide in Rwanda through the eyes of Carl Wilkins who as the ADRA director there at the time. It was produced by Kevin Ekwall and Wilkins and Ekwall participated in a panel discussion following the showing. On Sabbath the musical *The Lamb Wins* which presents the Book of Revelation entirely through the medium of music of many
genres was presented as a worship experience. The music collective traveled from Philadelphia to present the musical.

*Logan Foll is a senior communication student at Southern Adventist University on assignment for Adventist Today. Monte Sahlin is executive director of the Adventist Today Foundation.*
Truth, Your Truth, and Cliff's Truth

by Ervin Taylor

March 26, 2014

My good friend Cliff Goldstein’s “Cliff’s Edge” epistle in a recent issue of the Adventist Review (March 20, 2014) is vintage Cliff. Like a fine wine, you can really depend on him to provide a unique insight or “taste” of what dedicated, traditional Adventists are expected to think. And, if you want to keep up on what the current GC establishment wants Adventists to think, it’s required reading.

He is a very polished apologist and point person for classical Adventism.(1) As an added benefit from reading his columns, one gets exposed to a lot of new words and the names of well-known thinkers. This week, the list includes Gottfried Leibniz, David Hume, Richard Dawkins, Charles Darwin, Christopher Hitchens, and Emmanuel Kant. It seems that if Cliff Goldstein didn't exist, contemporary institutional Adventism would have to invent him or someone very much like him.(2)

While the title of his recent piece is “The Reality of God,” I suggest that someone should have edited the title to better reflect what it is really about, perhaps something along the line of “My Definition of Truth.”

Now of course, he does not quite see it that way. In several epistles written several years ago, he insisted that his understanding of Truth (notice the capital “T”), classical Adventism’s take on Truth, and Truth itself are essentially the same. But that was when he was a relatively new Adventist and perhaps reflected a convert’s tendency to talk in those terms. Perhaps upon more mature reflection, he has modified that view. I certainly hope so. Or perhaps, he will insist that I continue to mischaracterize his understanding.

Given his comments this week, however, it appears that he still believes that or something very close to it. Let me explain. In his column, he poses a very interesting question: “With so many faiths, views and religions out there, how do I know Seventh-day Adventism is the truth?" [his italics] He says that his answer is a quote from an individual who was his initial contact with Adventism when he was converted to our small Protestant denomination 34 years ago: “Well, it's certainly not unreasonable to think that with all those views out there at least one of them is true [his italics].

Cliff comments: “I so appreciated his answer then. And today, 34 years later, I still fall back on it.”

But, someone will say, that’s not an answer to the question. For purpose of discussion, let’s assume for the moment that there is “One Truth” and there is a way to know that “One Truth.” On what basis are the answers provided by Adventism that “One Truth”? Cliff’s “answer” does not address that.

Much more interesting is his next comment, which I quote verbatim: "I can hear the so-called progressives scowl and protest about how arrogant, triumphalist, and narrow is the attitude that we have the truth. Oh, let’em squawk. [his italics] I’m used to the sad fact that in my 34 years in the church, I’ve faced more opposition to my faith from so-called Adventists than from anyone else.” Readers will note the phrases “so-called progressives” and “so-called Adventists.”

He does not reflect in this column on why he faces more opposition from inside his adopted faith tradition than from outside of it. But, of course, he would have to characterize that opposition as “so-called Adventists.” If they disagree with him, they can’t be “real” Adventists. Or perhaps they could be “cultural Adventists,” a category of Adventist he particularly deplores. According to him, if he wanted to have a quality cultural experience, it would not be of the Adventist variety.
But back to the issue addressed in his recent epistle: I leave it for those who wish to comment to respond to the question: "With so many faiths, views and religions out there, how do I know Seventh-day Adventism is the truth?" Cliff's column did not provide an answer. Who would like to take a stab at answering that question? Please do not "scowl" or "squawk" while you are responding. 

1 "Classical Adventism" is here defined as the dominant American Adventism of the 1920s-1950s as represented by what was preached by American Adventist evangelists. It includes standard sectarian Adventist understandings of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation with special focus on the highly inventive 2300 days/Investigative Judgment doctrine, the "Mark of the Beast," the "Spirit of Prophecy"(i.e. EGW), and the "Remnant Church" concept. An optional characteristic would be a concern as to who the "King of the North" is. Classical Adventism would also include the traditional written and unwritten Adventist subcultural vocabulary (i.e., "in the Truth"), customs and values associated with Sabbath observance, diet, dress, and, my personal favorite, "adornment."

2 My apologies to Voltaire: "Si Dieu'n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer." ("If God did not exist, it would be necessary for us to invent him.")
Blind No More

by Debbonaire Kovacs
submitted March 27, 2014

You've read/heard/considered this story lots and lots of times. Have you ever considered it from this point of view? It's taken from John 9:1-41.

I will never forget the day everything changed; the day I realized the truth—that I was not the good mother I thought myself to be. I was young—so young, and proud in the birth of my first child, a son! The dream of every mother, a man child to justify my existence. Possibly, as we were taught to pray (though I was always mighty wary of the idea) just possibly…the Messiah Himself...

I spent hours holding him and looking at him, letting him grip my finger, trying to catch his wandering eyes. He was only a few weeks old when I began to fear, with a mother's intuition, but it was a few months before we knew for sure. You couldn't catch his wandering eyes. They were never going to stop wandering. They would never look up into my face, as my friend's son, only a month old, did already, and smile as if I were the sun and moon in his little sky.

My boy was blind.

I cried for days. I beat my breasts in anguish, took extra sacrifices to the temple. What had I done to deserve this? How had I sinned? I admit it; sometimes my tear-swollen eyes turned to my husband. Was it his fault? Had he displeased God? But I always came back to one unanswerable question: How could the Holy One, Blessed be He, cause an innocent child to suffer, no matter how sinful his parents?

My faith faltered. I went dutifully to synagogue and sat among the other women behind the screen, but secretly, I rebelled. God didn't listen to me; why should I (only a female, in any case) listen to Him?

I wish, oh how I wish, I had been with my son that Sabbath when everything changed again. I've heard about it. I've asked for the details over and over again. I can't get enough of them. Yeshua, that new rabbi everyone's been arguing over, did you hear what he said? His disciples saw my son and asked the question everyone asks: Who sinned, this man or his parents? (He certainly wasn't the one who sinned, that I can tell you!) And this Yeshua said, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Neither this man nor his parents! I still can hardly believe it. If I'd been there then, I'd have thought he was just plain wrong. But then—then!! They say he made mud with dirt and spit and put it on my son's eyes. (Not as bad, believe me, as some of the things we used to try, before we gave up in despair.) He sent my boy to wash at Siloam, and he did, and he could see...

He ran home to tell me, to show me. In complete shock, I followed him like a fool, while he proceeded to set the neighborhood on fire. It was ridiculous—you should have seen them. They were arguing that it wasn't really the same man. Let me tell you, a mother knows her son. My boy can see me! I don't think my heart's beat normally since. My son just kept telling the story, over and over. He could hardly believe it, either. My husband walked around with his
mouth open, too. We looked pretty silly.

So the neighbors took him to the Pharisees. What an inquisition! I really made things dangerous for myself when I laughed out loud at one point, but if you could have heard them! They were having a big, learned, rabbinical debate on whether a sinner could heal blind eyes or not. “We know for sure he’s a sinner—look how he breaks the Sabbath!”

They called us up on the carpet. We were frightened. They have all the power in this town; they could kick us out of synagogue. “Is this your son? Was he really born blind?”

Now, really; I ask you! What kind of question is that? Of course he’s our son, and his blindness has been the curse of the whole family!

“Then how does he see?” peering at us like we’re going to tell them some secret, some occult spell or something! I would have spoken up. Well, I think I would have. Easy to say, when I’m a woman and not allowed to speak. I can’t blame my poor husband, who wouldn’t say anything except, “He’s of age; ask him.”

So our boy told the story all over again, and the Pharisees argued it all again.

My son put it best. “I don’t know all that theological stuff. I know I was blind. Now I see.”

Amen! You can’t argue with that. Well, they could! Oh, it was a mess. Our son ended up losing his patience and speaking sharply, which I admit he shouldn’t have, but I don’t blame him. Except…they drove him out.

I went home, not knowing what to think. Here I was, bubbling over with joy and excitement (and the fear that I’d wake up any minute), and also frightened of the consequences. We would lose our whole standing in town, such as it was, if we were driven out of synagogue.

But my boy can see!!

If only this rabbi, this Yeshua, would show up! Where was he?

Well, he actually came and sought out my son. I was there this time. (I’ve still been following him, as if he’ll disappear if I let him out of my sight. If this is temporary, I don’t want to miss a second of it.)

Yeshua asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"
My boy pretty much said he’d believe in anyone Yeshua told him to, and Yeshua said, “I’m the one.”

All three of us exchanged looks. And when our son said, "Lord, I believe," we all fell to our knees together and worshiped him.
I will never forget the day everything changed; the day I realized the truth—that I was not the good mother I thought myself to be. I was young—so young, and proud in the birth of my first child, a son! The dream of every mother, a man child to justify my existence. Possibly, as we were taught to pray (though I was always mighty wary of the idea) just possibly…the Messiah Himself…

I spent hours holding him and looking at him, letting him grip my finger, trying to catch his wandering eyes. He was only a few weeks old when I began to fear, with a mother’s intuition, but it was a few months before we knew for sure. You couldn’t catch his wandering eyes. They were never going to stop wandering. They would never look up into my face, as my friend’s son, only a month old, did already, and smile as if I were the sun and moon in his little sky.

My boy was blind.

I cried for days. I beat my breasts in anguish, took extra sacrifices to the temple. What had I done to deserve this? How had I sinned? I admit it; sometimes my tear-swollen eyes turned to my husband. Was it his fault? Had he displeased God? But I always came back to one unanswerable question: How could the Holy One, Blessed be He, cause an innocent child to suffer, no matter how sinful his parents?

My faith faltered. I went dutifully to synagogue and sat among the other women behind the screen, but secretly, I rebelled. God didn’t listen to me; why should I (only a female, in any case) listen to Him?

I wish, oh how I wish, I had been with my son that Sabbath when everything changed again. I’ve heard about it. I’ve asked for the details over and over again. I can’t get enough of them. Yeshua, that new rabbi everyone’s been arguing over, did you hear what he said? His disciples saw my son and asked the question everyone asks: Who sinned, this man or his parents? (He certainly wasn’t the one who sinned, that I can tell you!) And this Yeshua said, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned: he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

Neither this man nor his parents! I still can hardly believe it. If I’d been there then, I’d have thought he was just plain wrong. But then—then!! They say he made mud with dirt and spit and
put it on my son’s eyes. (Not as bad, believe me, as some of the things we used to try, before we
gave up in despair.) He sent my boy to wash at Siloam, and he did, and he could see...

He ran home to tell me, to show me. In complete shock, I followed him like a fool, while he
proceeded to set the neighborhood on fire. It was ridiculous—you should have seen them. They
were arguing that it wasn’t really the same man. Let me tell you, a mother knows her son. My
boy can see me! I don’t think my heart’s beat normally since. My son just kept telling the story,
over and over. He could hardly believe it, either. My husband walked around with his mouth
open, too. We looked pretty silly.

So the neighbors took him to the Pharisees. What an inquisition! I really made things dangerous
for myself when I laughed out loud at one point, but if you could have heard them! They were
having a big, learned, rabbinical debate on whether a sinner could heal blind eyes or not. “We
know for sure he’s a sinner—look how he breaks the Sabbath!”

They called us up on the carpet. We were frightened. They have all the power in this town; they
could kick us out of synagogue. “Is this your son? Was he really born blind?”

Now, really; I ask you! What kind of question is that? Of course he’s our son, and his blindness
has been the curse of the whole family!

“Then how does he see?” peering at us like we’re going to tell them some secret, some occult
spell or something! I would have spoken up. Well, I think I would have. Easy to say, when I’m a
woman and not allowed to speak. I can’t blame my poor husband, who wouldn’t say anything
except, “He’s of age; ask him.”

So our boy told the story all over again, and the Pharisees argued it all again.

My son put it best. “I don’t know all that theological stuff. I know I was blind. Now I see.”

Amen! You can’t argue with that. Well, they could! Oh, it was a mess. Our son ended up losing
his patience and speaking sharply, which I admit he shouldn’t have, but I don’t blame him.
Except…they drove him out.

I went home, not knowing what to think. Here I was, bubbling over with joy and excitement (and
the fear that I’d wake up any minute), and also frightened of the consequences. We would lose
our whole standing in town, such as it was, if we were driven out of synagogue.

But my boy can see!!

If only this rabbi, this Yeshua, would show up! Where was he?

Well, he actually came and sought out my son. I was there this time. (I’ve still been following
him, as if he’ll disappear if I let him out of my sight. If this is temporary, I don’t want to miss a
second of it.)
Yeshua asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"
My boy pretty much said he’d believe in anyone Yeshua told him to, and Yeshua said, “I’m the one.”

All three of us exchanged looks. And when our son said, "Lord, I believe," we all fell to our knees together and worshiped him.
Oakwood Aeolians Will Defend World Championship in Latvia


by Debbonnaire Kovacs and Tim Allston
submitted March 26, 2014

In October, 2012, Adventist Today reported that Oakwood University’s Aeolians had won gold in the biennial World Choir Games. This July, they will be going to Riga, Latvia to defend their titles. Currently, the Aeolians are world-ranked #22 overall (of 1,000 competing international choirs), and world-ranked #2 in pop/jazz/gospel/spiritual category. http://www.interkultur.com/leftnavi/world-rankings/

This trip, as you might imagine, will not be inexpensive. The choir needs to raise some $70,000 (of the $220K) to go to Latvia. Therefore, they're presenting an Easter Eve benefit concert at Oakwood, featuring gospel music legend Richard Smallwood and Metropolitan Opera star/former Aeolian Angela Brown. Ms. Brown will conduct Masters classes at Oakwood on the Wednesday previous.

In order to prepare the choristers, including twenty new choir members this year, to compete in both the classical and gospel genre, director Jason Max Ferdinand is bringing in the tops in each field (Angela and Smallwood) to tune them up and push them to world-class excellence - both in terms of role modeling and stage presentation.

April 19 Easter Eve Benefit Concert with legends Richard Smallwood and Angela Brown to raise funds for July Latvia trip
Former Oakwood publicity director, Tim Allston, reports, “Bernard Williams, longtime director of the Miles College (Birmingham) choir, asked me recently, quite sincerely: ‘What is it about your Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle that makes y'all sing so good?’” Allston adds, “Legendary Huntsville college choir director and minister Dr. Henry Bradford once remarked offhandedly, ‘It's that lack of nicotine in y'all's lungs!’”

Allston wonders whether there is, in fact, a distinct “Oakwood sound”. If so, could it be, “as some contend, due in part to the tobacco/alcohol-free diet and lifestyle (a biblically-mandated seventh-day of rest for 24 hours), etc.?" He points out that if you ask the choristers themselves, they would say “the sound” is created in the grueling sectional rehearsals.

It is true that Oakwood was touted as “the Juilliard of the south” on the Times Square marquee during the 2013 holiday season—an epithet attributed to WAAY TV. Speaking with obvious affection for his school, Allston suggests perhaps Oakwood is “the small school with the BIG MOUTH!”

As far as we know, the Aeolians will be the Huntsville's/Alabama's/historically Black colleges and universities'/Seventh-day Adventist’s lone representative in Latvia in 2014 -- as was the case in 2012, its first-ever international competition.
To Win at SonScreen—Story is the Most Powerful Key

http://www.atoday.org/article/2400/features/articles/to-win-at-sonsreen-story-is-the-most-powerful-key

by Debbonne Kovacs
submitted March 26, 2014

This article was written from material in an interview of Dan Weber, Communications Director for the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, and Julio Nuñoz, Associate Communications Director, NAD. The interview was recorded by Logan Foll, senior communication major at Southern Adventist University, on assignment from Adventist Today.

According to Dan Weber, NAD communications director, the Sonscreen Film Festival, now in its twelfth year, is getting better every year. “It is getting more competitive, harder and harder to get a film into the festival, and that’s great,” Weber said. He also says the movies themselves are getting better and stronger. It used to be that in the panel discussions, “the first question was always, ‘What camera did you use?’ This year, there was only one camera question. The questions were about, ‘How did you find your subject?’ ‘How did you develop your story?’ I’m glad we’re at that point.”

He reported that the Thursday night keynote speaker, Dave Christiano, used the illustration of the Wizard of Oz to highlight the power of story. That movie was made in the 1930s, but nearly any person on the street can tell you what it was about. “Can you remember what your pastor preached four weeks ago?” Weber asked.

He explained that this is the reason the NAD believes so strongly in Sonscreen and continues to sponsor it. They believe this is one of the most powerful ways to reach people, now and in the future. Also, young people like it. “We want to embrace our young people and say, ‘What’s important to you is important to us.” Weber mentioned one of the films that ended up a winner—Extreme Servolution, about a church in Canada that revolutionized its ministry and outreach. “That was awesome. We need more stories like it. Lots of people live out Christianity every day, but don’t have their stories shared.”

Nuñoz weighed in on another reason he believes the festival is important. Professional filmmakers attend, too. Perhaps they’re working in Hollywood now, they’re outside their church setting, and Sonscreen is “an opportunity for them to re-center in why they do what they do, in a Christian context, whether they’re making Christian films or secular ones.” He said they can find fellowship, learn from, and inspire one another. He believes that one of the best ways to reach out to unchurched people is to put out movies with a Christian or positive message—“stories that help illustrate the love of Christ. That’s what this festival does.”

Weber also thinks networking is one of the important contributions. He has hired young people that he met at the festival to help with various projects. It represents an opportunity both for those looking to hire and for young people looking to work in the area of their passion.
How, then, does one enter the festival? Make a great film, but remember, “Shorter is better.” The limit for films is 30 minutes, but there are only about six hours of viewing slots to fill, so a full 30-minute film has to be really excellent to get that big a chunk of time. Weber recommends editing carefully. He says that sometimes a very good 30-minute film would make a truly great 15-minute one.

This year there were more student films submitted than ever before: of 50 films submitted, 43 were made by students. From these, the organizers had to choose only 20. Nuñoz and Weber gave some of the judging criteria: no extreme violence or cursing, Christian standards, and a positive and/or thought-provoking message. Nuñoz pointed out that the films are not necessarily “happy-go-lucky”; “some films may challenge your thinking—that’s the great thing about film.”

There was some discussion of technical merit, too. The festival included workshops in practical film writing, shooting, and production, and in order to make the cut and be shown at the festival, the filmmaker must pay attention to these factors. However, sometimes a film is not the technical best, but the story is so powerful it carries it along, and that film can end up a winner.

Weber also expressed pleasure about the animations. He said there were none last year, and that he was happy to see some good ones this year, no doubt due in part to the fact that Southern Adventist University is one of the few schools that includes animation in their film department curriculum. Southern was the venue for the festival this year, and Weber reported that the environment was “great for watching film,” the facilities and equipment worked well, and the reception and service by university staff was “wonderful—they were great hosts.” One of the keynote speakers, according to Weber, said that this was one of the better facilities he had been in for hearing films.

In the final analysis, Nuñoz says, “Students—go for it! Take the first step, jump in, just go for it.” He says high school students often do music videos, because that limits them. They have to be short. That’s good, says Nuñoz. It’s good practice. But “if a student has an idea, a passion, you gotta start sometime—go for it!”