### NEWS

**Adventist Pastors Stir Political Change Among Minorities in New Zealand:** Adventists through the years have rejected any involvement with political parties, but things appear to be changing rapidly in New Zealand.

**Council on Sexuality: Bible Scholar Presents a Spiritual Perspective on Sex:** An Adventist theologian has told the Council on Sexuality that the Church is poised to reclaim the "spirituality of sexuality" which other denominations deny.

**Traditional Approach to Bible Supports Ordination for Women, Says Historian:** Though many Adventists believe that women's ordination hinges on a conflict between conservatives and liberals, a Ph.D. historian says the impasse stems from a lapse of understanding of what happened in US history in the decades following the Civil War.

**Council on Sexuality: Consistency, Caring Stressed in Closing:** "Sexual change therapy" is given low marks during the final day of the Church's week-long Council on Sexuality in Cape Town.

### OPINION

**That's Wrong!** Critical, fault-finding conversation abounds in the Adventist Church, and Mark Gutman reflects on his early experience with the critical impulse.

**Motives, Gossip and Redemption:** "The damage of unconfirmed information and judgments on people who are not present to defend themselves is a shameful, fully blown culture in the Adventist Church," writes Danny Bell, who laments our tendency to stab one another in the back.

**Out of the Depths:** Debbonaire Kovacs puts herself in the position of the Apostle Paul, reflecting devotionally on Paul's terrible ordeal in light of Psalm 130.

### POETRY & THE ARTS, FEATURES

**The "Year of" Contest:** Try this multiple-choice quiz. Adventist Man this year is pretending to be (1) an ordained woman, (2) a circulation-building agent for *Adventist Today*, (3) the only married man among the 144,000, (4) an atheist in disguise to battle Darwinism from within. You'll enjoy the current adventure in the life.
of AT's mascot, from the brand new issue of Adventist Today. Available to logged-in subscribers....

The Purpose of Journalism: SM Chen reflects on Christianity as a means to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable" and sees this model as a primary exemplar of Christian journalism. Available to logged-in subscribers....

Profile of Daniel Wahlen, Producer of Winning Film, "The Hideout": Guest writer Logan Foll profiles Daniel Wahlen, producer of Sonscreen's winning film, The Hideout. Includes links to the film's Facebook page and Twitter feed. Available to logged-in subscribers....

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Adventist Pastors Stir Political Change Among Minorities in New Zealand

By AT News Team, April 2, 2014

Adventist pastors are part of a group of influential clergy in the Pacific Island ethnic minority community in New Zealand who have advocated support for the National Party and generated considerable public debate, reports the Fairfax News. Pacific Islanders have long voted for the Labour Party in New Zealand.

At a public meeting held on Sunday (March 30) at the Manurewa flea market, Pastor Teleiai E. Puni and five other clergy in the Seventh-day Adventist Church announced that they had met with National Party Member of Parliament Cam Calder. "If we are to defend our Christian values and build a brighter future for New Zealand families, we need to engage our Pacific people and vote National," Puni said.

The announcement brought a number of negative reactions. A meeting has been announced for next Sunday (April 6) under the auspices of a Samoan Catholic Church when 23 churches of various denominations will meet to discuss political parties and Christian values, the newspaper reported. The pastors "have been criticized for not consulting their parishes" on Facebook and Twitter sites where Pacific Island minorities communicate regularly.

Several comments noted that the pastors had worn blue T-shirts with the slogan, "I'm a KEY person." Blue is the color of the National Party and John Key is a Member of Parliament. Comments were critical of clergy being involved in politics. "Jesus didn't say just love a certain group of people." Another comment from a former Labour voter said he believed "both parties have let our people down many times."

South Auckland voters have long supported the Labour Party "thanks in large part to church-going Pacific Islanders." The newspaper quoted a Fundamentalist pastor Sooalo Setu Mu'a: "To change from wearing red to blue is not an easy thing for our Pacific communities who have been voting Labour over the years."

"There may be specific issues, but the larger reality here is that this reflects the fact that there is growing middle class among the Pacific Islanders in New Zealand," a source told Adventist Today. "The working class perspective does not fit some people like it once did and this may be more true among educated, professional clergy than anyone else."
Council on Sexuality: Bible Scholar Presents a Spiritual Perspective on Sex

From Adventist News Network, March 30, 2014

No other denomination today is “better positioned” to reclaim the “spirituality of sexuality” than the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a theologian told the council in Cape Town during a series of morning devotional talks. Dr. John Nixon, professor of religion and spirituality at Southern Adventist University, said dysfunctional attitudes toward sex have come into Christian thought over the centuries as the result of “alien influences” that “undermine and distort” the teachings of Jesus.

“We’ve been lax in teaching Christian sexuality in our churches, schools and homes,” Nixon said. "This is the root of the sexual crisis we are now facing. Even the word ‘sex’ spoken from the pulpit makes us uncomfortable. ... The spectrum of teaching about sex in the church is limited to extremes—love without sex (abstinence) and sex without love (promiscuity). The Bible rejects them both," he told denominational leaders at the council.

A brief historical overview helped explain how broken attitudes about sex have gained a foothold in the church. Hellenistic thought, Nixon said, pitted the spiritual world against the material world; thus a “good” soul was trapped in an “evil” body with sinful desires. Christian writings and practices of the second and third centuries A.D. reveal an obsession with asceticism, or severe physical debasement, as a measure of spirituality. Saint Augustine (354-430 A.D.) argued that all sin was rooted in sexuality and advocated procreation only without recreation. Asceticism glorified hardships and taught that because the body was evil, all physical enjoyment should be eschewed, including sex within marriage. This notion encouraged the practice of celibacy among Christians, Nixon said.

“"The vestiges of this philosophy still exist in our church," Nixon said. "For many of us, there is still something a little suspicious about sexual pleasure, even in marriage. Engage in it, we think, but don’t have too much fun." But God does not forbid or even "just tolerate" sex, Nixon said. "He celebrates it in the context of pure, genuine love between husband and wife."

Indeed, the union of husband and wife within the "sacred institution of marriage" is a full expression of the plural image of God," he said, citing Genesis 1:26 and 27. “We are relational creatures made to complement each other. Sex is not just an act; it is part of our beings," Nixon said. “We do not teach a divided human nature—a soul trapped in a body. We teach a holistic nature. Sex, which is physical, also impacts the spirit and mind."

On Adventist college campuses, Nixon said he has observed that students are increasingly concerned about gender identity and often view sexual choices through the lens of social justice. All too often, he said, the Adventist Church has chosen silence rather than engaging in the conversation. “Our children learn about sex from the world. They grow up in a world of alternative sexuality as the ‘new normal.’ Sex [for them] is about self-gratification, about the happiness I am entitled to," Nixon said.

He told the story of Joseph recorded in Genesis to illustrate that chastity and celibacy are indeed attainable goals. Joseph, he said, demonstrated integrity and faithfulness even in the face of major temptations. “Sexual sin lends itself to secrecy where no one sees, but private moments are the ones that reveal true character,” Nixon said. Adventist parents, teachers and pastors have a responsibility to pass on a healthy view of sex, he said. “May God help us to fulfill that responsibility."
The Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. ANN’s bulletins from the council on sexuality were written in part by staff from the Adventist Review.
Adventist Today

Traditional Approach to Bible Supports Ordination for Women Says Historian

By Keisha McKenzie and Monte Sahlin, April 3, 2014

The question of whether clergy ordination should be extended to women serving as pastors in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination is caught in crossfire between liberals and conservatives, but it is not really about competing methods of interpreting the Bible. This is the history revealed by Dr. Olive Hemmings during the 34th Annual Edward Keough Lectures last weekend (March 28-29) at Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Maryland.

A historian, Hemmings traced the changing flow of arguments pro and con as the debate has developed since a union conference in Europe requested clarification in the 1960s. Her first presentation was entitled, “Higher criticism and the Resistance to Women’s Ordination: Unmasking the Issue.”

In 1971 the General Conference convened a committee of scholars on the role of women in the Adventist Church. The group included 13 men and 14 women. It studied 19 research papers and the Biblical Research Institute (BRI) proposed a path to women’s ordination which included first, ordination of women as local elders and hiring women as associate pastors; then a pilot program leading to full ordination to the gospel ministry.

During the 1980s, a shift occurred, Hemmings reported. In 1973 Dr. Gerhard Hasel had written a paper on “Man and Woman in Genesis 1-3” which emphasized gender mutuality. By 1989 the same author had published a paper entitled, “Biblical Authority and Feminist Interpretation.” The second paper focused on a “feminist threat” that concerned many church leaders starting in the 1980s. The “feminist agenda” and Bible study methods related to it, “higher criticism” or the historical-critical method, were invoked as a threat at the 1985 General Conference (GC) session in Utrecht, and the request of the denomination’s North American Division (NAD) to be allowed to ordain women in its territory was rejected.

Hemmings suggests that the idea of women clergy became a scapegoat for a perceived identity threat. Opponents began to argue that the church and the authority of the Bible were under attack by “liberal feminism” and new approaches to interpreting the Bible. However, the early papers from the BRI in the 1970s, especially Hasel’s had shown that no new interpretative methods were needed to support the theology or policy of women’s ordination.

Hemmings classifies Adventist faith as rooted in the Biblical inerrancy tradition. Where sacramental denominations like the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches limit the sacraments to a male priesthood, those who believe in Biblical inerrancy teach that Jesus consummated the sacraments in His death on the cross and that priests today do not represent Christ on Earth in a sacramental sense, so a woman can mediate the Word of God to the church. Thus, early Adventists accepted the role of Ellen White as a divinely-inspired messenger from God.

Inerrancy sees the Bible as the authoritative source of truth and that the Bible contains no internal contradictions. The historical-grammatical method of Bible study is rooted in these two premises and evolved from the Protestant Reformers’ concern for understanding the Bible authors’ intent and fixing the meaning of the Biblical text.

Hemmings argued that verbal inspiration and proof-texting, “matching text with text without regard for context," pervert the Reformation’s historical-grammatical method. Fundamentalism based on verbal inspiration and proof-texting often results in claiming “no internal contradictions" in the Bible and universalizing selective ancient cultural practices, such as slavery.
In the 1980s some Adventist leaders wanted to align the denomination with the fundamentalist movement against the "modern, liberal" branch of Christianity. Women’s ordination became a symbol of the Adventist-fundamentalist alliance against liberalism, Hemmings stated despite the fact that opposition to women’s ordination is not consistent with the historical Adventist approach to Bible interpretation.

Hemmings argued that women’s ordination has been a casualty of a cultural attack and not a logical or Bible-based one. Women’s ordination came to symbolize something different to the church as mainstream feminism began to critique patriarchy. As fundamentalists began to lump together liberals, patriarchal critiques and higher criticism, and as liberal feminists began to use higher criticism tools and push for women’s ordination, women’s ordination was caught in the "cultural-ideological war [and] the Bible serves as a weapon rather than a means of instruction."

Within the Adventist denomination, several challenges to traditional belief arose during the 1980s. The sanctuary doctrine, the role of Ellen White, charges of plagiarism, and a six-day creation were questioned as groups like Adventist Forums "closely scrutinized" Adventist doctrines. As the denomination recovered from this period, it moved to resist further challenges.

The cultural conflicts have confused the debate over methods of Bible study. The BRI books on biblical hermeneutics and interpretation stated that the Reformation principle of sola scriptura was under attack and the denomination needed to agree to use methods of Bible study other than higher criticism. But in defense of Ellen White’s authority, it uses higher criticism, including source criticism and genre criticism. Hemmings asked, "Is the church concerned with interpretation? Or with the meaning that results from interpretation?"

In closing, Hemmings noted a deep anxiety about the survival of the denomination that is manifested in opposition to women’s ordination and has made that opposition a symbol of loyalty to some. The BRI has changed its position while insisting on a single hermeneutic to protect the church against the “mortal threat” of liberalism. Interpretations of the Bible are not the real issue, Hemmings concluded.

Two scholars responded to Hemmings presentation: Dr. Richard Rice, a theologian at Loma Linda University, and Mitchell Tyner, a retired staff member at the GC. “We need historical context to understand historical developments," Rice stated. He summarized Hemmings’ argument that the reversal in church policy on women’s ordination is "guilt by association." Some reasoned that higher criticism was a tool of religious liberalism and feminism a feature of social liberalism. If the target was liberalism, women’s ordination was collateral damage. He gave other examples in church history, in the 4th and 5th century and again in the 11th century of "unintended consequences" due to reacting to developments without a clear Biblical understanding. Reaction can lead the church into apostasy. Some now perceive the church as "out of touch" because of its exclusion of women from full participation in ordained ministry.

For Rice, the slippery slope fear, the fear that if women are included, dangers will follow, is a deductive fallacy that doesn’t justify fearful resistance. Rice also challenges the belief that the Bible contains “clear” guidelines that will satisfy the entire world and validate “all church life and thought.” He notes that policy does not always precede practice, as demonstrated in the status and circumcision of Gentiles during the early Church. “The Spirit works in the community,” he said. That is, experience teaches what policy has not yet caught up with, and the church is defined by the Holy Spirit, not merely by shared policy.

Tyner reviewed the historical context for changes in the Adventist church over the years. In 1863, when the GC was started, Reconstruction was initiating the progressive era in the U.S. In 1919, the Adventist church had an historic conference on Bible interpretation, and as a reaction against progressive views expressed by the GC president, there was a change at the 1922 GC session. In the 1920s the Adventist church moved toward fundamentalism during the same time that American society closed immigration and there was conflict over women’s rights. The 19th Amendment passed in 1919-1920 and the Equal Rights Amendment was introduced in 1923.
In 1968, Richard Nixon used "the southern strategy to" get political support and, Tyner stated, that marked the beginning of the "Southernization of the United States." Among Adventists, the largest union conference in the NAD is now the Southern Union and Southern Adventist University is the center of Adventist conservatism.

During the 1970s, Republican political activisit Phyliss Schlafly promoted “traditional roles” to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment. Among Adventists, Mohaven began the 1970s but in 1979, Jerry Falwell, a Southern Baptist preacher, launched the Moral Majority, an activist conservative movement based on “preservation of traditional values.” By 1980, the Reagan counterrevolution was in full swing, and Adventist religious liberty work shifted from “liberty for all” toward “special interest protections.”

In 1990 and 1995, the GC refused to move forward with women’s ordination despite the recommendations of the early 1970s. In 2005, some Adventists argued that “equality is not a biblical virtue.” There are those who want “to take the church back half a century.” Tyner stated that America is uncomfortable with demographic change today. The church has similarly failed to live up to the implications for equality in the gospel. The church must pay attention to “real problems, real people, real time; That’s what it’ll take. And then we’ll see real progress,” Tyner concluded.

In the question-and-answer time, the question was asked, Is the policy opposition to women’s ordination about cultural differences? Tyner said no. U.S. missionaries exported U.S. culture along with the gospel for most of the 20th century and the rhetorical principle they used to do this was “the unity of the church.” Cultural variance was essential for the health of the church but variance didn’t fit that rhetoric, and so the U.S.-based GC allowed U.S. cultural conservatism to overrule culture in other parts of the world church, as if U.S. values were Christian values. The inverse is happening now that the voting center of the church is outside the U.S. and in the name of “the unity of the church,” non-American values are restraining American church members. If the denomination uses culture to interpret the Bible, readers are forced to ask, “Whose culture should we use?”

Keisha McKenzie is a board member for Adventist Today who attended the Keough lectures and took notes. Monte Sahlin is executive director for the Adventist Today Foundation and edited this article. The other two presentations will be reported in the next few days.
Council on Sexuality: Consistency, Caring Stressed in Closing

From the Adventist News Network, March 31, 2015

The two presenters that brought closing summaries to the council on sexuality in Cape Town were women who are "firsts" in denominational leadership. Dr. Ella Simmons, the first woman to serve as a vice president of the General Conference (GC) of Seventh-day Adventists, used an address entitled "Final Word" to urge a consistent view and caring implementation of the denomination’s teachings on the topic of human sexuality. Dr. Lisa Beardsley-Hardy, the first woman to serve as director of the denomination’s global school system, asked the assembled leaders to participate in an exercise in which they wrote summaries of what they had learned during the council.

Simmons called for LGBT church members to be seen as “brothers and sisters” also in need of God’s “saving grace” while upholding the denomination’s stand against sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage. “As long as we protect, cover-up, [and] yes, condone adultery, dishonesty, and other sins that were forbidden by God in the church and particularly in high places, we will not be able to reach members with our words of truth for the transformation of their lives—in any way,” Simmons told some the 350 participants.

The council was called to study how the denomination should respond to a worldwide cultural shift that is increasingly supportive of gay and lesbian relationships. It addressed the fact that these issues are affecting church employment practices and the operation of its educational and healthcare institutions in a growing number of nations around the world.

A psychologist presented his view of the issues on the evening prior to the last day of the council. Dr. Peter Swanson, an associate professor of pastoral care in the seminary at Andrews University and a licensed psychologist, began by reading the denomination’s official statements on same-sex relationships, emphasizing its stand against intolerance, hate crimes and discrimination.

Swanson told the gathering that reduction in same-sex attraction and same-sex behaviors due to change therapy was “rare,” and that some Christian gays and lesbians perceive they have been harmed by change therapy. “I strongly support the call of my church to support and protect human rights,” Swanson said. LGBT people “need your sympathy, patience, and love. Speak words of encouragement to them.”

The final 24 hours of the council also featured a presentation by Dr. Miroslav Kis, professor of ethics at in the seminary at Andrews University. Kis challenged delegates to both think clearly about the Biblical teachings on human sexuality and to act compassionately toward those not aligned with the norms.

Beardsley-Hardy closed the council with a reflective experience following Kis’ address. She asked the participants to summarize the meeting by answering a series of questions. An educational psychologist, she said participants would better learn and remember the summit’s key points by summarizing them in their own words. She asked the delegates to write 60-second essays on a number of topics touched on throughout the meeting, including the biblical perspective on sexuality, legal issues related to employment and communication, and church membership.

Adventist Today has not yet been told if the papers presented at this council will be published or released in some form. A number of sources have told Adventist Today "this is an historic event," evidently the first time that denominational administrators have addressed many of the issues on the agenda. "The Adventist denomination has
been so conservative over the years that it has generally refrained from discussing sex," one retired administrator said.

Adventist Today will publish a news overview of the council and its impact on the denomination. The editors are in the process of collecting input from a number of sources, including key groups of Adventists who were not invited to the event. "What is the larger meaning of this council into the future?" sources are being asked.

Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news service of the denomination and it supplied regular bulletins to Adventist Today throughout the event. The staff of the Adventist Review participated in the writing of these bulletins. Adventist Today published them with minimal editing and additions. This is the last in a series of eight bulletins.
Near the end of a sermon I heard recently, the preacher read a story that contained a grammatical error. I couldn’t help but notice because it confused me. For a couple sentences it caused me to misunderstand who the culprit was in one incident. I turned to my wife to whisper, “That grammar was wrong!” when I caught myself.

Most of my life I have taken great pride in catching grammatical errors. My dad was an English teacher, and (in my opinion) I have a better-than-average knowledge of grammar. I demonstrate it all the time by pointing out errors, to the speaker or writer or anyone I can. But last Sabbath it hit me that nobody learns better grammar because of me. What others learn, and remember, is that I’m a critic. A faultfinder, if you will.

Why was I pointing out the mistake? Ostensibly to keep society’s language from falling apart, to encourage correct communication. Remember, the defective grammar led me to misunderstand the incident in the story. A deteriorating language results in more miscommunication, which has resulted in all kinds of unfortunate misunderstandings over the years. So you see, by criticizing mistakes in grammar, I’ve been helping to preserve civilization!

Preserve civilization? Not really. Don’t get me wrong. Society does benefit from critics. Music teachers or athletic coaches who won’t point out what students or players are doing the wrong way are letting the students or players down. Correction in the early stages can save much grief or struggle later. If you hold that type of position (or if you’re a parent or teacher), please correct! So, if my wife or the speaker had asked me to point out mistakes in grammar, mentioning one might make some sense. But nobody asked me, and nobody learns. The idea of improving society doesn’t hold water.

Reflecting on my compulsion to point out grammar errors, I guess that pointing them out is mostly about me, not about English. It’s about my superiority over the speaker or writer who made a mistake. Or, rather, it shows that I think I’m superior. Focusing on the mistakes of others is easier than focusing on my own problems. For a minute or two, I get a refreshing break from thinking about my flaws while I direct the attention of others to someone else’s shortcomings.

What do people learn from hearing (or reading) my expertise? They learn to dread having me around because they know that I don’t have the graciousness to let any perceived mistake pass by unnoticed. They pick up that I enjoy
pointing out flaws. They catch on that I think I'm better than the mistake-makers. So when my acquaintances run into problems, guess who is at the bottom of their list to be asked for help. To them I'm a critic. I'll probably criticize them for getting into trouble. They know this because they've heard me treat others that way. When they hear or read 1 Corinthians 13, my name won't be the first one that pops into their heads. “Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5, NLT). Where is the patient, kind, not boastful, not irritable part in being a self-appointed committee of pointing out mistakes?

The same logic can apply to theological or scientific arguments. An earlier verse in 1 Corinthians 13 says that if I (substituting for Paul) am ever so smart yet don’t know how to be nice to people, I'm “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (verse 2). We can self-righteously feel that in standing for the cause of truth, our words (or methods) don’t matter. We feel compelled to keep others from being corrupted by the scientific or theological “garbage” that is being spewed. And it somehow follows that the more cutting our language, the harder we pound the pulpit, the more likely we are to convince (win?) that other person and onlookers (or readers).

But we teach by our methods as well as by our words. “The method is the message.” People learn more from our behavior and attitude than they learn from what we say. If my communication to you is dripping with contempt or sarcasm while I tell you that you should be more logical or reasonable, what makes the biggest impression on you? “What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say.” And even if my scientific or theological argument is impeccable, you're likely to want to distance yourself from it if only to distance yourself from me.

I'm all for polite disagreement, for disagreeing without being disagreeable, and for correcting others who want the correction. (Or maybe others will benefit, even though the one you’re directly addressing won't catch on.) And sometimes people who don't want correction need it. But while you’re disagreeing or correcting, why not stop and ask what I asked myself at the end of the sermon last Sabbath? Are you showing how smart you are? Are you feeling superior to the dummy that you're enlightening? Would this person feel that you are someone who could be sympathetic or helpful if she were struggling with a problem?

We are not remiss if we don’t criticize every mistake. (Pardon me while I preach to myself.) We’re not letting society down every time we leave a mistake unmentioned. Others who have noticed the same mistake(s) may be more kind or patient. Or they may be more interested in reinforcing the positive. You may have heard that when teachers don’t seem to say anything about good behavior, children sometimes learn that the way to get attention is to act up. How about if we shine a light on what's right instead of on what's wrong?

If we find plenty to compliment in the people we're trying to correct, we may find they're more interested in hearing what else we have to say. We catch more flies with honey than vinegar. (At least, that's what I’ve heard.) If we work at looking for the good to compliment more than the bad to complain about, we'll probably find more good and notice less bad. We’ll probably also attract people to stick around us more and learn from our example instead of our criticism, from our living instead of our talking.

The words of a Glen Campbell song make a good motto:

Let me be a little kinder Let me be a little blinder To the faults of those about me Let me praise a little more...
If you want to criticize, every day you'll have plenty of situations to exploit. But if your goal is to compliment, to reinforce, you can also find many opportunities. We'll impress people more by our warmth and our interest in them than by our reputation for never missing a chance to point out every time we think someone makes a mistake.

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1The words are thought to have come from Ralph Waldo Emerson, but they have morphed into their current form from "What you are stands over you the while, and thunders so that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary." The words were included in an essay by Emerson, "Social Arms," in 1875.
Motives, Gossip and Redemption

By Danny Bell, April 2, 2014

Have you ever heard a report that made someone else sound bad? It's easy to accept it when it confirms what we already want to believe about the one reported on. Why bother to check it out? Let's just accept it as gospel truth, to be believed and passed on as such. Of course, if the bad report is about someone we favour or about us, we consider the reporter to be biased or guilty of reporting before all the facts are in. This is a natural way to act because it saves us from taking the time to investigate every report we come across.

At least that's what Mark Gutman said on the Adventist Today website¹. But his words ring true for many who have suffered at the hands of rumour and speculation. As Gutman infers, we sometimes want to believe something about someone because we don't like what they say or an encounter with them hasn't been to our liking. This gives us licence to justify passing on judgments.

In my own experience of leaving pastoral work and going on leave for two years, some church acquaintances would comment, "We heard you were sacked." When attending different churches looking for a place to settle down after ministry, I remember looking around and catching people staring at me in a weird unfriendly way—was I being paranoid or did these people know something I didn't? Then there were the occasions where people fell all over us to the point where I asked my wife later, "Did you see that?" Most ex-pastors will know exactly what I am talking about; those who have never left ministry won't.

Maybe we should query the next person who tells us something about someone that is negative. We may trust our friends on delivery of such information, but where did they get it from? Are we crucifying Jesus afresh when we allow ourselves to be informed by unsubstantiated reports of a person who isn't there to defend themselves? The rumours about Jesus were so many that they took on a life of their own and so people were prepared to just believe what they heard without questioning the accuracy of the reports.

Once when I was pastoring, three elders reported in a meeting that a teacher was seen smoking at the hairdressers. They wanted me to approach her and discipline her. I asked if any of them had talked to the woman first. They said they hadn't because it was the pastor's job and besides, "God has only gifted certain people to approach offenders." Their motives just went out the window.

As chairman of many committees, I never allowed ill reports about others to come into committee meetings unless Matthew 18 had been followed. The cold reality is that when negative reports come in without the right thing being done, we can no longer assume that the welfare of the individual is at heart. Before we know it, the whole committee can be tainted and made biased to what may eventually turn out to be nothing more than hearsay.

My favourite grandma warned, "Whatever the character of the offense, this does not change the plan that God has made for the settlement of misunderstandings and personal injuries" (Colporteur Ministry, 152). The damage of unconfirmed information and judgments on people who are not present to defend themselves is a shameful, fully blown culture in the Adventist church. Too often in our executive meetings, discussions about others that expose them to speculation and rumour is permitted. It is a current phenomenon at all levels of church government and needs to be stopped or at least curtailed by those who have control and responsibility in such meetings.
Where has the redemptive process gone? I challenge the church and its leaders to put this evil practice behind us and to deal truthfully and honestly with each other. As a friend of mine once said, "If they are going to stab me, I would rather it be in the chest so I can at least see who it was."

Yours in the war,

Danny Bell

1. Devil's Advocate
Out of the Depths

by Debbonnaire Kovacs
submitted April 3, 2014

Psalm 130
A Song of Ascents.
Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord.
Lord, hear my voice!
Let Your ears be attentive
To the voice of my supplications.
If You, Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with You,
That You may be feared.
I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait,
And in His word do I hope.
My soul waits for the Lord
More than the watchmen for the morning;
Indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning.
O Israel, hope in the Lord;
For with the Lord there is lovingkindness,
And with Him is abundant redemption.
And He will redeem Israel
From all his iniquities.

When I first moved to Berea, as I’ve said before, I was in rough shape emotionally. We had experienced nine major life crises in fourteen months. When I joined the choir at a large church here, one of the songs we sang during Lent, either the first or second year I lived here, was composed on this psalm. It was so incredibly beautiful and so moving to me that I have tried hard to find a YouTube link to let you listen to it.

I was unable to find the choral version (though I found several other songs written from this psalm), but I did find something similar to the particular composition that we sang, done beautifully by a cello and organ. Here is the link. While you listen, think of the ways you have or are calling to God “out of the depths,” and take the promises of this psalm to your heart.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvA_NPaH0dY
Let me begin by offering a clenched-teeth “thank you” to the 279 persons who responded to the “A Year of Living as a ____________” contest. A nerve has been touched, it would appear, as attested by the many previous yearlong experiments documented by other soul-searchers. One wonders if, since then, the genial author of A Year of Living Biblically has been turning restlessly on his pillow and muttering, “I have created a monster.”

For you out-of-the-loopers who are frothing at the mouth, toggling on your CapsLock key, and composing angry emails with the theme of “WHY DIDN’T I EVER HEAR ABOUT THIS? CAN I STILL ENTER?” let me explain.

Adventist Today technically did not promote this contest. Like every courageous, near-the edge journal, we have on our staff those who long to spawn an even edgier periodical. In remote basement rooms in our building, these radicals have stood shakily on the shoulders of Adventist Today (whose name and concept are both perfectly fine, thank you, and already express the immediacy of the moment) and have launched a new magazine, Adventist Later in the Evening (A-LITE). A-LITE’s scrappy first issue featured the “A Year of Living as a ____________” contest, more as a circulationbuilder than from any loftier motives. Lo and behold, circulation was built and the entries poured in.

The contest’s two winners, once winnowed, will be awarded a grant to keep them fed, clothed, and sheltered while they pursue whatever 12-month quest they wish. And if the quest is loopy enough, they’re virtually guaranteed a book tour, a grilling by a CNN commentator panel, and that Holy Grail of success: a thoughtful hour on NPR’s Fresh Air.

Yes, the contest has closed. No, it will not be offered again. Yes—as you can tell by my tone—I am
annoyed. Because, guess what? The A-LITE guys with their scruffy beards and the girls with their solemn spectacles have long since lost interest in “Year of” (if they ever had any to start with) and are now consumed with working on TED talks about life insights they learned as student missionaries, leaving your steaming columnist to tie off the “Year of” paperwork.

But this is where you can help. Let me tell you about the finalists, and you can email me about the one you think most worthy.

**Hans Linkersloopft**, head deacon of an Adventist congregation in the Netherlands whose church board (with begs and threats) have urged me not to mention its name, plans to spend a year with his index finger inserted nobly into the leaky nozzle of a water fountain near the children’s Sabbath School classrooms.

Hans assures us that he will wear latex gloves, squirt obliging shots of water into young mouths upon request, and subsist on rations of Pathfinder campout wieners. This valiant finger-in-the-fountain gesture—though I would advise Hans not to attempt to gesture at all lest he lose his grant—is not necessary to preserve his homeland from flooding, but it will still save the church budget the equivalent of US$19.

**Mindy Manderlinski-Mgumbo** has vowed to spend her 12 months providing in-depth answers to the question “How are you, Mindy?” whenever she is asked. She is assembling an array of talking points, including her medical symptoms both past and present, the childhood traumas and naysayers who have prevented her from realizing her true destiny, her political views, her helpfully corrective fashion critiques, and much-much more.

Mindy has been reading Coleridge’s poem The Rime of the Ancient Mariner so she can perfect the “glittering eye” with which the Mariner fixed his helpless listener.

**Fortescue Dunleavy Schmork** (Who names these people, anyway?) has long believed that the Adventist church should follow a liturgical year, and he is making a list of 365 Seventh-day Adventist “feast days” that he will successively celebrate, such as Doug Batchelor’s birthday (March 9), the anniversary of the first Pathfinder Camporee (May 7, 1954), and so on. On his own recognizance, Fortescue has added to the liturgy a daily lentil loaf “wave offering.” (It’s a goodbye wave.)

**Anton Chekhov Chicklesworthy** attends a church whose musical style involves a great deal of audience participation. It is his plan to spend a year deliberately clapping off-sync with the rest of the congregation, resisting with a bland smile any attempt to get him back on track.

Send me your votes, pronto. Get this project off my back!

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1 TED talks aren’t speaking engagements by the GC president. Read about TED online at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TED](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TED) (conference), or view a sample on YouTube.

Do you have a tough question? Adventist Man has “the answer.” As a former member of “the remnant of the remnant,” Adventist Man was ranked 8,391 of the 144,000—and working his way up. Now he relies solely on grace and friendship with Jesus. You can email him at atoday@atoday.org
The Purpose of Journalism

http://www.atoday.org/article/2414/poetry-the-arts/poetry-prose/the-purpose-of-journalism

by S M Chen
submitted April 3, 2014

Iconoclast and curmudgeon H. L. Mencken opined that the purpose of journalism was to ‘comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.’

I find this statement an also apt mantra for one’s spiritual journey.

Christ, in His life and teachings, defined true piety in terms of how one relates to those less fortunate (in material goods, health, and circumstance). He enjoined us to reach out to the poor, the sick, the imprisoned. Our ministry to them is considered tantamount to ministering to the Master Himself.

That is one reason “the poor will be with you always.” (Correctly or not, I interpret this broadly to mean poor not only economically, but also in body and spirit). They are here so it can be observed how we deal with them. Their ultimate fate is not our concern, but our ultimate fate may depend to no small degree on how we choose.

Just how should the comfortable be afflicted? ‘Comfortable’ implies those whose needs (and likely most, if not all wants) are met. They deem themselves self-sufficient, and apparently lack for nothing. Their relative fame and/or good fortune seem to be due to innate talent, intelligence, and a consequence of right decisions.

They need be afflicted with the knowledge that it is only with the consent of the Almighty that they are where they are in life. “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed...” Lamentations 3:22.

It is no accident that Christ’s ministry was more to the common man, the disadvantaged, the poor, the downtrodden, the social outcasts, than to the religious leaders, the affluent, and those who, by virtue of their class, breeding, or any other advantage, felt little or no need for His revolutionary message.

Those of the latter who end up in the kingdom will be there because they have come to the realization that in themselves they can do nothing, and that the essence of the Gospel is that man, having once failed, cannot pull himself up by the bootstraps but must, rather, recognize that it is only by losing self and looking to Another that we can live - more abundantly here and, by grace, with Him whose love surpasses comprehension.

I can think of no prayer more appropriate than that erroneously attributed to St. Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is error, truth;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
A scene from *The Hideout*, the film that won Best in Fest at the Sonscreen Film Festival

Jump back about a decade and you would’ve found young Daniel Wahlen sitting spellbound in front of a television set. From an early age, Wahlen loved writing and photography. When the *Lord of the Rings* movies came out, he realized that “writing plus photography equals film…so I was able to take those two passions and unite them into one love.”

Since that time, he enrolled in the film program at Southern Adventist University where he’s spent the last four years making cinematic art. Wahlen will leave Southern in May with a bachelor’s degree in film. Wahlen also departs with many awards. Most recently, his short film *The Hideout* won “best in fest” at the Sonscreen festival hosted at Southern last week.

Wahlen describes Southern’s film program in the School of Visual Art and Design as very production-oriented. Over the course of his time at Southern, he has worked on 14 films.

“When I’ve gotten onto professional sets, I already understand set etiquette, I’ve worked with this professional equipment before and it makes for an easy transition. Here at Southern, we actually make films and I think that has been a big asset to my career.”

Daniel’s favorite part about film is the way the medium can be shared.
“There’s nothing so powerful as having something that you’ve poured your heart and soul into for months on end and finally being able to share it with someone else and connect on this deeper, unspoken level that just unites people from all spectrums and walks of life into one shared experience. “

A self-described “creative who loves the craft,” Wahlen admits he “isn’t as business oriented as I probably should be.”

His senior film, *The Hideout*, has captured his passion for now. Wahlen reports the film’s Facebook page has over 900 likes from around the world. He says he’s appreciative of all the overwhelming support. In addition to the “best in fest” award, *The Hideout* also won Sonscreen awards for best dramatic short, best cinematography, and audience choice.

*The Hideout* is a short film about a young girl whose life is thrown upside down when her favorite teacher molests her. Through the support of her best friend, she finds the strength to tell her mother.

Wahlen said the production team’s primary goal right now is producing DVD and BluRay packets with information about child sexual abuse and ways to prevent it. Wahlen plans on submitting the film to more film festivals and is currently working on its online release. The film will be played on May 2 for the *End It Now* summit at the General Conference.

In Wahlen’s opinion, the Adventist church needs to embrace film and start using it to its own advantage.

“It is the language of today and if we don’t embrace film now, we’re going to severely fall behind as a church.” He expressed his happiness about how much support his films are receiving so far. “We’ve gotten great support from within the church already and I think that if this trend keeps going, it will be good for filmmakers, young people and the church as a whole.”

Wahlen firmly believes that film is a perfect way to reach out to others in a way that other media cannot. “I think it’s important to realize why film is so special in the sense that you’re able to approach sensitive subjects, such as child sexual abuse, and bring it to a wide audience that wouldn’t necessarily be open to talking about something like this or are completely oblivious. It’s able to get conversations going, it’s able to bring people to a common ground and share an experience where they really understand things like this. I think the potential for that is huge, not just with issues in our society but also with our Adventist truth and I think our message can really be brought out if we embrace film.”

Learn more at:
https://www.facebook.com/TheHideoutFilm
https://twitter.com/TheHideoutFilm