Peering Into Organized Atheism:
Ryan Bell recently attended an atheist gathering of non-believers, determined to learn what makes the godless tick—and if a former SDA pastor standing at the intersections of Belief Street and Free-thought Boulevard can find enlightenment among the most ardent skeptics of our times....

Controversy Raised Around Pasadena Official for His Adventist Sermons:
Dr. Eric Walsh lives and works in the US of A, a country known for freedom of speech. But the good doctor and local health official learned this week that allegedly voicing controversial views about Catholics, gays, and women while standing before a live mike at his own house of Adventist worship can produce serious consequences in the age of Internet....

Adventist Summit on Abuse: Opening Day First Impressions:
A general campaign ("End It Now") by the Adventist Church to fight violence against women and girls convened a Summit on Domestic Violence May 1-4. Debbonnaire Kovacs, Adventist Today features editor covers the event and submits her first report. (see related, second report, immediately below....

Going to Church in the Grand Canyon:
Jack Hoehn visualizes in the gradients of the Grand Canyon a Jacob's Ladder of creation, beginning with primordial nothingness and culminating in the appearance of great throngs of life, by orderly decree of God, over time....

Slicing and Dicing the Law:
Guest writer and author Milton Hook helps us focus on the historical Adventist views relating "ceremonial" to "moral" law—and what the differences, if any, may ultimately entail....

The Apostle John: Antichrist and Antichrists:
International evangelist Borge Schantz says the anti-trinitarian "antichrists" written about by the apostle John describe both the behavior of the historical papacy and the radically intolerant and insurgent manifestations of Islam....

The Goatherd Psalm:
Debbonnaire Kovacs' goat, Willow, just had three kids and our good devotional writer extracts blessed lessons from the thoughts she imagines coursing through the minds of her protégés....
Adventist Summit on Abuse: Second Day Training First Responders: Debbonaire Kovacs continues her coverage of the Church's initial orientation for a campaign to end violence against women and girls....

10-year-old Donates Birthday Money to Loma Linda University Children’s Hospital: Sometimes giving financial support to a large institution can be a great way to say, "Thanks for helping my family," and "Keep up the good work."...

Religious Liberty Event Organized by Adventists Honors U.S. Official: Voices of intolerance appear to be on the move, advancing in many parts of the world where freedom seemed to be the emerging order of the day, says honored Religious Liberty laureate....

Another Tin: SM Chen opens a can of worms at AT by comparing Christ's way of handling violence with that of a legendary 110-year-old Loma Linda Adventist karate expert's....

Four People Sharing a Kidney Donation Bond Meet for the First Time at Loma Linda University Health Event: Read this winsome, extended feature about a quartet of life-sharing harmony expressed in extending the gift of life to others in mortal need....
Ryan Bell was an Adventist pastor who shocked many people, including a number of his close friends, last year when he announced that he would spend a year trying out atheism. Adventist Today asked him to document his first attendance at a major atheist event.

I have done some research and come away with unassailable, empirical evidence for my earlier hypothesis. Atheists do gather! Some of them, anyway. Seven hundred, in fact, met over Easter weekend in Salt Lake City, under the energetic leadership of David Silverman, president and spokesperson extraordinaire for the American Atheists organization.

I was honored to meet David a month or so ago at a friend’s house and he graciously invited me to be his guest at the American Atheist Convention. It was a strange place for this former pastor to be on Easter weekend but honestly, I mostly forgot it was Easter except for the fact that most places were closed on Sunday.

I left Los Angeles on Thursday afternoon and drove to Salt Lake City. That’s a solid 10 hours of driving, plus stops, but so worth it. I love the spare and rugged beauty of the high desert. It was a fitting visual accompaniment to my personal journey this year. Plus, I had never been to Salt Lake City.

Before I comment on the Convention I have to say that I really loved Salt Lake. For a city that is the heart and soul of the Mormon church, it was remarkably—how shall I say—not-super-Mormon. On top of its unrivaled natural beauty I found Salt Lake City to be a progressive, environmentally forward-thinking, bike-riding, public-transit-oriented, fair-trade-coffee-selling, 21st-century city. I can’t wait to go back.

Envisioning a post-religious world

The convention was as eclectic and energetic as you might imagine. I am certainly no expert, but in my short four months exploring the world of skeptical and non-theist thought, American Atheists has to be one of the most activist atheist groups in the country. The key speakers and leaders speak freely of “the movement”—a movement committed, it seems to me, to three primary things:

Number one, at a minimum, the preservation of the Founding Father’s vision of the separation of church and state.

Number two, if possible, the removal altogether of religious influence in the public square (which many interpret as the original intension of the First Amendment).

Number three, if more is possible, the eradication of religion completely. I don’t get the sense that anyone is out to destroy religion by force, even if they could. Many just feel the world would be better off without religion. An idealistic wish, perhaps, but something to work for.

I’m sure not everyone in attendance is as eager about the movement aspect of atheism as, say, David Silverman, but there was a general embattled feeling in the air. It was not unlike some Christian gatherings I’ve attended: “We are the underdogs and must stand and be counted.”

I don’t say this to disparage the American Atheist movement, though some will hear my comment that way. Not at all.
Inasmuch as the dominant forms of theism—American Christianity, in particular—stand for the public endorsement of Christianity through prayer in public schools, for example; tax exempt status for churches and other religious organizations; the suppression of science education; public funding for religious causes; and the general marginalization of atheists in public life, the cause has much merit and I heartily support it.

On the other hand, it is unlikely that religion is going away any time soon, given that religious life dates to before the dawn of recorded history. The socially dominant religion in America—Evangelical Christianity—is fundamentalist and proselytizing. However, this is not the only form of religious life in America. Some practice their religion privately, without proselytizing, and when their beliefs and practices do intersect with the public discourse, they are focused on the common good.

It seems to me that the atheist cause could be greatly helped by a more balanced view of religion, which recognizes that there is much common cause with progressive and liberal Christians as well as many other non-Christian and even non-theist religions like Buddhism, which are humanist at their core.

I didn't go to Salt Lake City to critique, though. I went to learn. I went to meet people that I have come to respect. The time between the main sessions—over meals, in the hallways—was where the real learning happened for me.

**It's the people**

As with any convention or conference, it's the people that make it interesting. The talks were good, but honestly I only heard three and a half of them, and there were a lot. The talks I heard were fantastic (Jeremiah Camara, Matt Dillahunty, Chris Kluwe and Barry Lynn), but the best part was meeting people I had talked or interacted with in some way in the past four months.

At the top of the list for me was meeting author and filmmaker, Jeremiah Camara. His recent documentary, Contradiction, examines the role of African American churches in the entrenched poverty that paralyzes predominantly black communities in America. You would expect a religion that focuses on Jesus and his empowerment of the poor and outcast to be a bit more empowering, but that isn't what he has found. I have wanted to meet Camara since my friend Teri told me about him back in January. Make sure you check out his film when it's available in your area.

I was also looking forward to meeting David Smalley, host of Dogma Debate. I was on the show in February, and David and I are speaking around Southern California together next month, but this was our first time meeting. He is a gentleman and a scholar!

Another very important voice in the atheist community is Sikivu Hutchinson and I was excited to finally meet her and hear her speak. I can't resist sharing one quote from her that highlights, for me, why her voice is so important in this conversation: "Simply put, secular white folk have the luxury and the privilege to focus exclusively on two issues [creation and school prayer] because they do not have to worry about being criminalized, policed and dehumanized by a regime of mass incarceration which begins in elementary school for African American children. Black children are the most suspended, expelled and incarcerated youth population in the U.S. and this fact shapes their limited access to and long term prospects for a college education, professional jobs and housing."

Another speaker I've been following closely is Matt Dillahunty, host of The Atheist Experience. He and his wife Beth were among the first to reach out to me and offer to spend considerable time talking about Christianity, the Bible, atheism and all the rest—an offer I still hope to take them up on. It was a great privilege to meet both of them and hear Matt speak.
Controversy Raised around Pasadena Official for His Adventist Sermons

By AT News Team, May 6, 2014 Update added May 9

Dr. Eric Walsh, director of public health for the City of Pasadena (California), will not be the commencement speaker at Pasadena City College on Friday (May 9). He withdrew last week after a student group gave journalists what they say are transcripts of sermons that Walsh preached as a Seventh-day Adventist Church member in southern California.

Faculty members and student leaders were quoted in the Los Angeles Times and the San Gabriel Valley Tribune objecting to Walsh's "homophobic, misogynistic and anti-pop culture" statements in the sermons. They also criticized his "harsh attitudes toward other religions, particularly Catholicism" and his opposition to the theory of evolution. They stated that he is "a proponent of intelligent design."

The student group stated that they obtained recordings of the sermons from the web site of the Altadena Adventist Church where Walsh was listed as an associate pastor. When Adventist Today checked the web site it was found to have no recordings available for download, no listing of personnel and little information of any kind except a brief notice that it was under development.

Walsh was thrust into a conflicted situation when he was announced as the replacement speaker three weeks ago. Originally, Dustin Lance Black, an Oscar-winning screenwriter in Hollywood and graduate of Pasadena City College, was the announced commencement speaker. The college withdrew the invitation when a video surfaced which evidently shows Black having sex with a boyfriend.

Walsh is a graduate of Oakwood University with a medical degree from the University of Miami and a public health degree from Loma Linda University (LLU). He is the immediate past president of the California Academy of Preventive Medicine and a member of the U.S. Presidential Advisory Council on HIV-AIDS who has served through two administrations. He is an adjunct faculty member in the School of Medicine at both LLU and the University of California Irvine. He served as a public health official for Orange County (California) before his appointment in Pasadena.

Update on May 9

The City of Pasadena has placed Walsh on administrative leave with pay while an internal investigation of his reported statements in sermons is completed. Michael Beck, the city manager, said the suspension was "to provide the City of Pasadena the opportunity to complete an inquiry into statements made by him, in his private capacity, and to assess the impact those statements may have on his ability to effectively lead the City's Public Health Department."

The Pasadena Human Relations Commission has scheduled a hearing on Walsh, the actions of Pasadena City College, and disgraced Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling the Star-News has reported. Nat Nehdar, chairman of the municipal commission, was quoted, "We don't tolerate this type of behavior, this type of thought. ... it's not right ... they are ... not being fair and just to all human beings." A representative of the denomination's Southern California Conference told the Pasadena newspaper that Walsh "does not hold ministerial credentials [and] does not speak on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination."
Walsh is the latest in a series of situations where people speaking out on sensitive issues face threats to their employment, a story in the Salt Lake City Deseret News pointed out. "Mozilla Foundation co-founder and CEO Brendan Eich left his job after an Internet firestorm over his $1,000 donation in support of California's Proposition 8, which defined marriage in the state as being between one man and one woman," wrote Mark Kellner, a Deseret reporter who was until recently the news editor of the Adventist Review. "Several months earlier, cable network A&E temporarily suspended appearances of Phil Robertson, the patriarch of the popular reality show Duck Dynasty, after he told GQ magazine that the Bible views homosexuality as a sin. And a minor kerfuffle erupted Wednesday when popular cable network HGTV first approved and then yanked support for Flip it Forward, a home-fix-up show hosted by twin brothers David and Jason Benham, sons of a controversial Christian preacher and graduates of Liberty University. According to Entertainment Weekly, the brothers' show was scheduled to premiere in October. However, RightWingWatch.org, a blog site operated by People for the American Way, called out David Benham for expressing conservative views on marriage, abortion and other social issues."

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Adventist Summit on Abuse: Opening Day First Impressions

The End It Now campaign to stop violence against women and girls convened a Summit on Abuse May 1-4 at the offices of the General Conference (GC) of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in Silver Spring, Maryland. Adventist Today sent an editor to cover this event.

By Debbonnaire Kovacs, May 2, 2014

We came from everywhere—about 130 people, overwhelmingly female, but not entirely; all races, several languages, from all over North America as well as Australia, Togo, Switzerland, Guam, and other places; church leaders, business professionals, and “just folks,” overwhelmingly Adventist, but again, not entirely. I sat next to Maria Suarez Hamm, who works with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington on family issues and domestic violence, particularly among the Hispanic community; and there were others from other faith communities. I wondered if I should worry about what might be said, but I was proud, instead. Speakers consistently acknowledged that there might be other varieties of Christians in the audience. Christopher Bradford, a businessman who took a master’s degree specifically so he could help both abused and abusers, said passionately that the church should be the safest and most helpful place in the world, “whether it’s Adventist, Baptist, Catholic, or Muslim!” He got a hearty chorus of “Amen’s.”

We sat through recitations of horrifying statistics: long lists of lifelong illnesses that are far more likely to occur if a person has been abused, especially in childhood while body and brain are still forming; the fact that of the 11,000 respondents to last year’s Adventist long-term health study, a whopping 62 percent said they had had at least one “Adverse Childhood Event” (ACE), and another study that showed a drastic correlation between childhood abuse and adult illnesses. When those same researchers tried to study the same people again as senior citizens, it turned out to be impossible: they were mostly dead. Turns out, abuse is also a predictor for early death.

We sat through sessions on how to recognize abuse, what some of the myths are, and yes, children are still believed to be “making it up” and wives are still told to go home and pray harder. We heard about the fact that perpetrators are also beloved children of God who need healing, and that we need to honor the coping skills, negative though they may seem (denial, self-medicating, minimizing, super-vigilance, and the like), because they keep people going until they can get to the place where they can find and accept real help and healing. We sat through a heart-breaking, heartwarming, indescribable drama entitled “Tamar’s Anguish.” It is a Bible story about the rape of Tamar by Amnon, and then Absalom’s compounding the whole mess with fratricide. (Watch for more details!) We sat through sessions of hope: what we can do, how we can, as Roberta Fish puts it, “minister hope to the hurting heart,” and how we can work to end it now!

Oh, and if you wish you were here, you can be! All sessions are being videotaped and will be available on the website: www.EndItNowNorthAmerica.org

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Adventist Summit on Abuse: Second Day Training First Responders

The End It Now campaign to stop violence against women and girls convened a Summit on Domestic Violence May 1-4 at the offices of the General Conference (GC) of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in Silver Spring, Maryland. Adventist Today sent an editor to cover this event.

By Debbonnaire Kovacs, May 3, 2014

During the second day, a team from Southern Adventist University, including Dr. Renee Drumm, Laurie Cooper, Tricia Foster, and Stephanie Sheehan, led a complete Christian Abuse Response Education (C.A.R.E.) training seminar. This is a seven-hour interactive workshop which results in certification as a first responder. All the attendees who were here for the whole day will receive a certificate which shows that they have enough training to help their churches create a domestic violence prevention team that is effective and safe.

For this story I have chosen to showcase a mnemonic device we were taught for responding to abuse. **Important caveat:** This article gives a very small taste of the training. **Do not take this information and try to provide intervention!**

PRAY is a way of remembering what one needs to get ready to respond to abuse situations.

**P is for Prepare to be an effective first responder.** This means training such as the C.A.R.E. curriculum provides, gathering local resources as well as national and online sources, and additional preparation. With certification and proper preparation you can identify yourself in your church and community as someone who has enough information and training to be a first responder and especially to be a visible and vocal advocate for **ending violence now**. If someone is known to be a visible advocate, a person in trouble is far more likely to come forward and break the silence about their terrible secret.

**R is for Respond appropriately to disclosures of abuse.** The advocate must always take the person very seriously, believe, listen, affirm that all abuse is **always** unacceptable, and refrain from judging or trying to “fix” the situation. Attendees were given helpful statements to practice, such as, “I’m so sorry to hear that this is happening to you.” And, “No one deserves to be abused.” We were also taught how to help the person assess present safety, thus determining when they simply need to connect with a domestic violence team and when they need emergency shelter.

**A is for Act: Build and grow a response team.** This team creates a resource center at the church (or other organization), develops resource information, and keeps it current. It also should meet at least monthly, assess its functioning, and develop funds for survivors and to support the team.

**Y means Yes, you!** A person who has gone through this training, or better yet, a complete End It Now Campaign event, is then prepared to respond proactively to people who are vulnerable or in danger.

I cannot recommend this training highly enough. Although it includes a great deal of information delivered in the traditional way, from the podium, it also includes video presentations of the story of a courageous abuse survivor, plenty of interactive discussion, and geographically organized break-out sessions in which groups can actually build teams to go forward. There is also role-playing practice of how to respond to someone who tells you she is being
abused. We were amazed how difficult these role plays could be, even though they were “only pretend.”

To arrange for the team to come to your church or community center or school or metropolitan area or conference, contact Southern Adventist University Care Project at (423) 236-2629.
10-year-old Donates Birthday Money to Loma Linda University Children’s Hospital

From Loma Linda University, May 8, 2014

Ruby Segura drove out with her mom to Loma Linda University Children’s Hospital (LLUCH) from their Cathedral City (California) home yesterday (May 7). They did not go for any sort of treatment or to visit a patient. The 10-year-old wanted to donate her birthday money to the kids at the hospital.

“Her sibling was treated at Loma Linda for epilepsy,” said Ruby’s mom, Yvette. “Rather than have a party or gifts, Ruby decided on her own to give the money that would have been spent on her birthday to the hospital.”

Ruby donated $300 to the hospital designating half to go to the pediatric oncology unit and half to toys for the playrooms at the hospital. Ruby and her mom delivered the money to LLUCH during the 29th annual Children’s Day. After making her donation, she was able to enjoy the various health and safety attractions designed specifically for kids.

“Loma Linda University Children's Hospital is grateful for Ruby's selfless contribution to the kids in our care,” said Dinah Evans, director of child services. “Children’s Day is just one of the many ways we try to give back to our community and teach these kids how to be safe in their environment. We're very pleased to bring a smile to the their faces and make this day all about them.”

Nearly 700 children from San Bernardino and Riverside communities attended Children’s Day and took part in activities such as the teddy bear clinic, fire safety and prevention demonstrations, and ambulance tours. Loma Linda University is the leading health sciences center operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church with graduate education in medicine, dentistry, nursing, public health and many other healing professions, as well as advanced research programs.
Knox Thames, an official of the United States government, addressed the 12th annual Religious Liberty Dinner last week at the Willard InterContinental hotel in Washington D.C., an event sponsored each year by a group organized by Adventists, the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA). It came on the same day the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom released its 15th annual report.

“Sadly our report shows us that the forces of intolerance are on the move, be they repressive governments or extremist groups,” said Thames, policy and research director for the commission. He was presented with an award by the IRLA. He has worked throughout his career to promote freedom of conscience and has known friends in other countries killed for speaking out against religious intolerance.

He described religious repression and violence as “casting a shadow” to create darkness. The answer to combat the darkness, he said, was “light,” and invoked the symbol of a flame, which is used by many faith groups. “With conditions the way are globally, we need to redouble our efforts. … I know that if we all carry individual lights into dark places, the darkness is pushed back,” he said.

The annual dinner has become a tradition in the U.S. capital—Thames in a lighter moment called it “the best religious freedom party in town”—and underscores the case of the hundreds of millions of people who are mistreated because of their faith, now more than 60 years after the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The annual gathering honors those who work to protect and promote religious freedom and draws members from the diplomatic community, U.S. government, religious leaders of various faiths, and religious freedom advocates. The dinner is jointly sponsored by the IRLA, the North American Religious Liberty Association (NARLA), Liberty magazine and the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

Attendees also heard from Melissa Rogers, special assistant to the president and executive director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. In a keynote address, Rogers, who is the principal advisor on faith issues to President Barak Obama and the administration, stressed the need to focus on commonalities in working for religious freedom in the U.S.

“Americans don’t always agree on the specific applications of these principles,” Rogers said. “Indeed, it’s when we have serious areas of disagreement that we ought to double down on trying to find areas of agreement. Because when we don’t, we are apt to start treating one another as enemies rather than as opponents on particular issues, we are apt to miss opportunities where we can work together to do real good for our neighbors, and we are apt to forget that that which unites us is far greater than that which divides us.”

Rogers said an example of various groups finding common ground was in 2009 when President Barak Obama created an advisory council on faith-based and neighborhood partnerships, which she chairs, to examine how government works with religious groups to serve people in need. The task force, Rogers said, was comprised of advocates for religious freedom and separation of church and state. She said the group has helped more clearly define roles of religious organizations as they receive governmental funding for charity work—beneficiaries receiving federal funds aren’t required to participate in the religious activities of the provider. “May we always maintain this country as a place of incredible religious diversity and remarkable religious cooperation and peace,” Rogers said to
end her speech.

Another award was given to Eric W. Treene, special counsel for religious discrimination in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. Recognition was also given to Pastor Antonio Monteiro, the Adventist minister who was jailed for nearly two years with a blood libel, a case that illustrates numerous people worldwide suffering for religious reasons.

IRLA Secretary-General John Graz called religious freedom a gift from God, but a “fragile gift.” He stated, “We can lose it. The best way to lose religious freedom is to do nothing to promote it and defend it. … “And that’s why we have done our best to promote religious freedom around the world since our association was incorporated in 1893.”

Keynote speakers for the Religious Liberty Dinner in previous years have included Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs John Baird, former U.S. Secretaries of State and Senators Hillary Clinton and John Kerry, Senator John McCain, and members of the U.S. House of Representatives from both major political parties.

The Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

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Going to Church in the Grand Canyon
by Jack Hoehn, May 8, 2014

There is an outdoor natural church in the Grand Canyon. Perhaps a throwback to a time when freedom of religion was more important a national virtue than freedom from religion, there is still a sign along the South Rim after the few miles of National Park Hotels, Visitor Centers, and Gift Shops, just beyond the start of the Bright Angel trail starting down through 540 million layers of geology to the Colorado River a mile straight down, that says: “Interdenominational Worship 300 yards.”

Also a small plaque on one of the historic buildings now a gift shop, still quotes at the edge of the 10-mile wide and 277-mile long natural wonder of the world, Psalm 68:4--

Although in this secular world these are relics from a bygone age of public freedom of religious expression, perhaps these permitted religious sentiments remain in keeping with the fact that even today, when the 5,000,000 visitors a year to the Grand Canyon from every nation of the world spill out of their tour busses or walk from their rental cars to the edge of this massive wonder, the first words out of the lips of at least half of them as they stand at the canyon edge are the very same expression: “Oh, my God!”

As a Young Visitor

I had visited the Grand Canyon as a child, both on the higher and colder North Rim and the open year round South Rim. As an 18 year-old employee of the Southern California Conference Camp Cedar Falls, I had driven a bus full of junior campers to the edge of the Grand Canyon and twice had led groups down the Havasu Canyon which is a tributary to the Grand Canyon, with beautiful turquoise water and travertine pools and water falls. But at that time I still thought it possible, as I had been taught by Ellen White and her church, that the world and life on it were only about 6,000 years old, and that all the wonders on it including the Grand Canyon were simply testimony to a single Noah’s flood.

In April I drove with my wife, my sister and brother-in-law south from Walla Walla, Washington, through the Blue Mountains of Northeast Oregon, across Idaho into Utah. We spent a night at Temple Square and listened to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir before driving down past Bryce Canyon and Zion, along the Vermillion Cliffs, nearing the North Rim of the Grand Canyon that was still closed in April, around to the Glen Canyon Dam and then back to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, open year-round. We spent two nights and parts of two days there just walking along the edge of the Canyon, thinking about the Lord “who rides upon the clouds,” and exulting before him.
"Oh, my God!" is still the right phrase to use for this experience. And reading about it in an article, or seeing photographs of the canyon is not comparable to the experience of actually standing on the edge of this wonderful place or hiking or riding down into its giant maw. The book of nature and evidence of the history of life on earth are opened to us by the Grand Canyon. I invite you to hike along the South Rim in person, or else vicariously with me, the short distance to the Interdenominational Worship Center with your binoculars and sense of awe and reverence intact, and read a few pages from that giant natural book.

**Progressive Step by Step Creation Supported**

Standing on the edge of this giant canyon we see layer upon layer of evidence compatible with the Bible’s teaching that God indeed is the Creator who created not instantly, but progressively, first this, then that, then the other thing in subsequent Creation Days. Looking way down to the Colorado River below, it is quite obvious that the one mile of earth from the vertical granites where the river now runs in the bottom of the canyon, to the top on which we stand is made of flat sedimentary horizontal layers. Like layers of a layered cake made of chocolate cake, white cake, red cake, with layers of frosting or whipped cream or jam in between, the walls of the Grand Canyon are clearly flat, giant layers.

These layers are of sediments laid down in waters of oceans, or seas. Is this not compatible with a Genesis record that life began as God moved upon the face of earth's deep waters?

**Firmament First**

Above the foundation basement rocks of igneous granites, the first layers of pre-Cambrian sea sediments show no complex creatures, only the sudden appearance (i.e. created, intelligently designed) of billions of quite cleverly-designed photosynthesizing plants called algae. Some were single cells of microscopic complexity; others were “complex multicellular plants” found in those deepest layers and seen as the fossilized Stromatolites. The algae plant bodies by the billions in the ancient seas lived as they live today, photosynthesizing (yes, just as the Bible teaches, light above the waters was first necessary on Day One) the oxygen that gave the earth our atmosphere (Firmament of Creation Day Two). Their billions of tiny bodies settled to the bottom of Earth’s seas to make the limestone of so many of the Grand Canyon’s layers. But there are no fossils of seed-bearing plants, no fish or crustaceans, no shells, no insects in these deepest layers of Creation days 1 and 2, just as Genesis suggests.

**Land Masses?**

Genesis says that on Creation Day 3 land masses appear above the surface of the waters for the first time. Is there any evidence of land appearing in the layers of the Grand Canyon? The very bottom layers of the Grand Canyon are all limestone, dead bodies of algae and bacteria, diatoms and desmids, settled to the bottom of the ancient seas, after they had finished their job of creating oxygen by photosynthesis to make the atmosphere required by the Creator. The next-to-the-bottom layers, however, show evidence of land masses appearing, because the first limestone layers are then covered by mud running down from Earth’s first continents, and deposited into the waters as shales or slates.

Geologists speculate that the appearance of land masses began in the late Precambrian, just as Genesis suggests. Mud running down from newly exposed land masses spread out into the waters of the seas covering what is now the uplifted Columbian Plateau, but back then was the bottom of an ocean surrounded by the new land masses. (Creation Day 4 happened out in space, so the Grand Canyon holds little direct evidence of the appearance of the
sun and moon and stars, perhaps from atmospheric changes of earth?) However, the muds or shales flowing into the ancient oceans from surrounding land masses amazingly preserved the next explosive step in the creation of life: Creation Day Five.

**Sea Life, Creation Day 5**

The first layers of shales or slate, which is compressed mud that flowed down streams from the first mountains onto the bottom of the ocean floor, are the Cambrian layers. Wonderfully preserved in these shales or slates is the evidence of the sudden appearing of complex sea life in the “Cambrian Explosion.” These layers deep in the Grand Canyon are the strongest fossil evidence of the sudden (in geologic terms) and unprecedented appearance of “a tremendous diversification of life forms…proliferating at an astonishing rate…Members of almost every major animal group appearing in the oceans in a relatively short period, perhaps as little as five million years.”

You and I call the Cambrian Layer Creation Day 5. This layer and its characteristic fossils are found not only in the Grand Canyon, but all over the world. In China, Cambrian muds have revealed that a small complex animal with a heart and circulatory system, mostly feeding its little brain with eyes on long stalks (think of a little lobster), suddenly appears fully designed with NO FOSSIL PRECURSORS, no evolutionary intermediates, and no basic design changes in the 540 million years since then. These muds are found in Canada in the Burgess Shale, again telling the story of millions of complex animals’ appearing in the early oceans of earth. This layer is also found in England (in Wales or “Cambria”), repeating the very same story of the sudden appearance of complex life. “Early members of major invertebrate groups such as brachiopods, mollusks, sponges, corals, echinoderms, and arthropods emerged during this time period. Even primitive vertebrates appeared…” In fact, 22 of the 27 phyla of life found in fossils (or the 35 phyla recognized today) are found in this very first layer of life preserved in the muds of the early mountains washing into the seas all over the earth.

So with your binoculars, from up here on the rim of the Grand Canyon, or up close when you hike down to the bottom just a few feet above the granite bedrocks, you see a few thin layers of limestone with no fossils except those of algae, and then the horizontal 277 miles of Cambrian Shales above the granites, testimony to the time when God said (on the morning of Creation Day 5), “Let the waters swarm with a swarm of living beings.”

**What about Creation Day 6?**

Above the Precambrian photosynthesizing algae of Creation Day 2, the muds from mountains appearing on Creation Day 3 and the sudden appearance of complex sea life of Creation Day 5 in the bottom shales, are at least 38 other layers up to the top of the present Canyon. These layers are both marine (limestone) and terrestrial (washed in from land about the seas). All 40 layers are grouped into 7 major sections. From the bottom up they are as follows:

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Section 1 is the granites and schist, or basement rocks, without signs of life.
Section 2 is limestone, sandstone, and shales of Precambrian earth.

Section 3 has sandstone from ancient beaches to 325 feet thick, the Cambrian Shales some 450 feet thick, and above the shale more limestone from 136 to 827 feet thick.

Section 4 has limestone, some from freshwater lakes replacing salt water seas. Some of these layers are 400-800 feet thick. Salt and fresh water fossils are found in different layers, showing different types of bodies of water over time.

Section 5, or the Supai Group (where I hiked from summer camp), shows layers of mud, silt, and sand, suggesting a time of coastal plain like the Texas Gulf Coast of today.

Section 6 shows fossils from the later part of Creation Day 5, with winged flying creatures, cone-bearing plants, and ferns. There are tracks of lizard-like animals in some of the sandstone layers, with reptiles walking along the beaches. There are also fossils of creeping things here like millipedes and scorpions, which may show the start of Creation Day 6 with land animals appearing.

(Section 7 is mostly washed away from the plateau about the Grand Canyon, so visitors to the Grand Canyon rims are walking on limestone and sandstone of the Section 6 top layer called the Kaibap Limestone. A few remnants of the Mesozoic depositions are left in Red Butte, south of the Grand Canyon Village, but these layers are mostly found many miles to the north of the Grand Canyon in the Vermillion Cliffs, Zion Canyon, Kolob Canyon, and Bryce Canyon areas, known as the Grand Staircase, of the younger, top layers, no longer present in the Grand Canyon.)[4]

So the Creation of land animals on Creation Day 6 is mostly NOT recorded in the Grand Canyon itself, except for those tracks of reptiles and insects on the sandstone beaches of Section 6. Monument Valley’s younger layers to the east of the Grand Canyon have bones of amphibians. Petrified Logs from those younger layers show evidence of beetle and termite damage. The Triassic and Jurassic, or Dinosaur, eras are recorded in younger and higher layers in other parts of Arizona and Utah. Small mammals are also found with the dinosaurs but the mammalian explosion only came after the dinosaurs disappeared.

The Grand Canyon itself has no mammal fossils, no dinosaurs, no mammoths or giant sloths. And, of course, no fossilized human remains, which come very recently in the geologic record of creation, just as the Bible says, at the very end of the last Creation Day: Day 6.

Floods and Noah

As you and I stand on the rim of the Grand Canyon looking down at the one-mile deep, 10-mile wide, and 277-mile long exposure of the early history of the world, we of course want to know about Noah’s flood. Wasn’t a huge flood recorded in Genesis? Of course it was, and what we are seeing today has given us no reason for doubting that a massive, destructive, history-altering flood did come to an early human ancestor of ours. All human cultures know of a type of Noah in their ancestral stories, as did the Babylonians (Gilgamesh knew him as Utnapishtim), the Egyptians who educated Moses, and the inspired Scriptures themselves. A recently-translated Babylonian tablet almost 1000 years older than Genesis still has the animals going in two by two! But before God created humanity, it is clear that
there were oceans, lakes, floods, uplifts, volcanos, continental separations and collisions involved in the preparation of an earth suitable for us.

Perhaps Noah's flood or another one similar to it did carve out the canyon that now holds the Colorado River, running from the uplifted Rocky Mountains on the east of the Colorado Plateau to the Gulf of California down on the west of the plateau, where the Pacific plate subducts under the North American plate, lifting the Colorado Plateau between these two geological bookends up 8,000 feet higher than the ocean and lake bottoms they previously were, as recorded in the rocks. But Noah's flood did not create the sedimentary layers in 40 days and 40 nights, and then cut through them on the 41st day of the flood!

Those sediments of dying bacterial, algae, and plankton are hundreds of feet thick. They are interspersed with dry eras caused when sands blew in, they so have animals buried in the muds, but they also have layers of sandstone with tracks of animal running along the beaches, covered by later inland lakes and seas, and topped by 400 feet of limestone with fossilized sponges, sea shells, corals, and crinoids growing and preserved. Those 40 layers, each so different, each with the finger prints of different types of creatures, different types of sediments, now a flow of mud, now a drying up and sand blown beach, then another fresh water lake, then another salt water ocean with years and years and years and years of accumulation of sediments present, are impossible to put into a short Noachian flood.

**Conclusion?**

So what did I learn? and what am I suggesting to you as we stand together as fellow Adventists on the Rim of the Grand Canyon at the Interdenominational Worship Site, and stretch our minds over the evidence of Creation recorded in the layered stones revealed by the canyon?

No contradictions at all to the Genesis revelation that, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, formless and void. And then, in what the Bible calls successive days, God fills the void step by logical creative step with life. This life was started on a watery planet with Satan and his angels cast into this earth’s primal darkness [6] In this context, God now acts:

Creation Day 1, starting on a dark, dead planet that is home to Satan, God introduces into the darkness time with light. And it is good.

Creation Day 2, after another period of darkness and possible conflict, God introduces intelligently-designed algae and other one-celled and multicellular creatures to make an oxygen-rich atmosphere over those ancient oceans. And it is good.

Creation Day 3, after another period of darkness and possibly conflict, God has the land appear and asks the land to bring forth plant life. And it is good.

Creation Day 4, after another period of darkness and possibly conflict, with a newly-formed atmosphere it is time for the heavenly time-keepers to be revealed, so the sun and moon and the stars now are visible on the surface of the planet. And it is good.

Creation Day 5, after another period of darkness and possibly conflict, the Creator creates a multitude of animal types to inhabit the seas and lakes of earth, and still later introduces animal types to inhabit the atmosphere of earth. And it is good.

Creation Day 6, after another period of darkness and possibly conflict, the Creator creates a multitude of animal types to inhabit the land, and then later creates mankind in His image, male and female, and finally it is very good.
Creation Day 7, a Sabbath. No more darkness of conflict, Earth has been created and now God stops creating, and in a safe and perfect garden on earth called Eden turns over care of this dynamic, changing earth into human hands. From now on, instead of working with life, he works with humanity. They are asked to direct the progress and improvement of life on earth. He asks them to pattern their human week after his Creation Week. How are we doing?

Let Ellen White Be Human

What do we do with the fact that Ellen White wrote that God’s creation days were 24 hours long just like our days, and that this all happened as many others before her had taught, only about 6,000 years ago?

Admit that our departed prophetess was not error-free about dates and chronologies, and never claimed to be. Agree that in this case of the chronology of creation and age of the earth she was wrong. Forgive her for that and move on to a broader larger understanding of the truths about creation, unhampered by our errors on the chronology of creation. Agree with her that Creation did not happen by itself but has God's fingerprints all over it. Understand that Creation also has Satan’s fingerprints all over it.

God Does Not Lie and the Stones Don’t Lie

God does not lie, the Bible does not lie, and the stones do not lie. Adventists must not lie either. As we stand on the edge of the Grand Canyon we can see that life was created over a long period of time best understood as stages or eras. We can see that there was plant and animal death before the creation, much less the fall of mankind. That it was human death, not plant and animal death, that came from Eve and Adam’s sin.

This does suggest to me that the Great Controversy has been going on before the beginning of God’s Creation Week, much as it continues to do today, but that is a subject for much further discussion.[7]

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3Genesis 1:20
4http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Staircase has a great graphic showing the Grand Canyon’s layers to the right and the younger higher layers of the Grand Staircase to the left. These steps are from bottom (above Grand Canyon) up as the Chocolate Cliffs, the Vermillion Cliffs, the White Cliffs, the Grey Cliffs, and the Pink Cliffs. Each can be reached within one day’s drive going North from the Grand Canyon on highway US
5http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/hebrew-bible/the-animals-went-in-two-by-two-according-to-babylonian-ark-tablet/
6Revelation 12:7-9
7For different ideas on how animal death came to be, I’d suggest you consider the following approaches to death before the fall:

Ronald E. Osborn, Death Before the Fall – A Seventh-day Adventist view of why there was animal death before and after Adam’s fall.

C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain—This modern prophet suggests that death before the fall was due to Satan’s fall before the creation. I agree with him.

William Dembski, The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World – says that there was death before
the fall of Adam. In anticipation of the fall, God permitted or created a good and evil world because he knew Eve and Adam would need it based on his foreknowledge of their disobedience. Interesting, and a bit convoluted, but worth a read.

**Gregory Boyd**, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy*—I haven’t read this yet, but I’m ordering it based on Ronald Osborn’s recommendation.

**Jack Hoehn**, “The Greater Controversy—How Ellen White’s Great Controversy Theme May Help Coordinate Geologic and Biblical History” – article Submitted to Adventist Today print magazine, awaiting publication; subscribe now so you can be the first to read it.

_______________________Join in the discussion:

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Slicing and Dicing the Law

by Milton Hook, May 3, 2014

Our Sabbath school lesson studies recently sliced and diced the Mosaic Law into the “Moral Law,” the “Ceremonial Law” and the “Civic Law.” That the Mosaic Law can be partitioned that way is a hoary claim that bears investigation.

The Moral Law or Decalogue

There is no dissent about the moral tag given to the Decalogue except that it is simplistic because at its center is something that is also ceremonial. The core of the Decalogue contains the admonition to “remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.”

The Sabbath is listed as one of the appointed feasts or sacred assemblies in Leviticus 23. The salient point is that the Sabbath is cast as an equal among the other ceremonies. With the passing of time the actual elements of the ceremony probably varied in the details without changing the intent of the celebration.

The Sabbath ceremony is usually explained as one beginning each Friday afternoon with the blowing of trumpets to herald the oncoming celebration. Each family put aside an offering to give at the worship assembly the following day. Everyone bathed and put on festive garments. The incoming roster of priests went to the sanctuary in readiness to swap on Saturday with the incumbent roster. Two candles were lit in each home, prayers were recited and a festive meal was served.

On Saturday morning the retiring roster of priests conducted the morning sacrifice, which was followed by the offering of two lambs (Numbers 28:9,10). The Levites sang Psalm 92 and Deuteronomy 32, interspersed with trumpet blasts as the assembly worshipped. The Bread of the Presence was swapped with a fresh batch brought by the incoming roster. The older bread removed from the table was eaten within the precincts by both rosters of priests. The assembly returned home for a second festive meal, an afternoon of informal reading of the Torah, socialising between families, and a Sabbath stroll or nap.

Late afternoon the evening sacrifice took place while some priests sang Exodus 15. In the homes a third festive meal was taken (Luke 14 is an example). The Sabbath finished when three stars or planets were visible in the sky.

In the sanctuary itself the Sabbath ceremony was simpler than Yom Kippur or the Feast of Tabernacles but a cherished ceremony nevertheless.

The Ceremonial Law

This section is generally cut to fit the animal sacrifices, both in and away from the sanctuary, in addition to the thank offerings and food and drink offerings. Integral to these ceremonies were moral concepts of the forgiveness of sins, atonement, God’s imputed righteousness, renewal of the covenant promises and thanks to God. These ceremonies were prompted by the reality of humanity’s immorality and were designed to symbolise a renewal of morality with the covenant vows. It is impossible to cut and slice morality from these ceremonies.
The Civic Law

The so-called Civic Law contained numerous ethical taboos. Many of these laws were clearly a sub-set of the so-called Moral Law; e.g., much of Leviticus 18 is an elaboration of “You shall not commit adultery.”

The violation of many of these laws was atoned for by a simple ceremony. For example, anyone who ate the meat from a lamb killed by a wild animal became ceremonially unclean until he washed his body and clothes (Leviticus 17:15). Civic Law and ceremony were therefore a unity.

“Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material” (Leviticus 19:19). “Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves” (Leviticus 19:28). Such laws do not seem to have any direct link to the Decalogue. They are more likely ones outlining a deliberate cultural distinctiveness between Hebrew and Gentile, between worshippers of Jehovah and idolaters. But these laws grew to be part of the infrastructure of Hebrew morality or ethics. They were taught and policed by the priests. It is wrong to think of these laws as belonging to a civic or secular government. Individuals who practised these laws were considered morally upright. Morality was something attributed to the so-called Civic Law.

On one occasion when Jesus summarised the Law of Moses and the Prophets (Matt. 22:37-40) He extracted from the context of the so-called Moral Law (Deuteronomy 6:5) and joined it with a phrase from the so-called Civic Law (Leviticus 19:18). Paul, too, highlights a moral principle from the same corpus (1 Corinthians 9:8,9; Deuteronomy 25:4).

Summary

The chief point of this piece is to demonstrate that the Mosaic Law is not to be sliced and diced. That would be far too simplistic. A little analysis shows that Hebrew morality under-girded all of it. There are only a couple of hints in the Sabbath school study pamphlet that the three elements are inter-woven and that the Mosaic Law stands as a unity but even these hints are smothered by a separate treatment of the elements. Cutting the Mosaic Law into segments only results in artificial divisions and, in the opinion of this writer, may lead to poor interpretations of Law within the context of the New Testament.

Some sources:
Website: Judaism101:Shabbat

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The Apostle John: Antichrist and Antichrists

by Borge Schantz, May 1, 2014

The apostle John in his epistles is the only Bible writer who uses the words antichrist and antichristians. In 1 John 2:18, 1 John 4:3 and 2 John 7 he reveals that in the end time antichrist and antichristians will appear. These texts make it clear that (1) there will not only be one Antichrist, but many antichrists; (2) their presence is a warnings about the end of time; (3) they reject the Trinity as they do not accept the Father/Son relationship; and (4) they do not recognize the incarnation. In other words, the only information we get from John about the antichrist and the many antichrists, is that Jesus is not recognized as part of the Godhead.

The Great Antichrist

The expression antichrist has, through the Bible commentaries, interpreters and preachers of various Christian traditions, become a common title used for all forces, religious or secular, who in a visible often violent way go against the Word of God, the plan of God or the people of God. The Protestant reformers in the late Middle Ages as they studied prophecies in both the Old and New Testament, found passages that pointed directly to the abuses of the papacy, and aptly applied the term The Great Antichrist to the institution. The reformers had no major problems with interpreting the medieval history of Rome as a fulfillment of prophecy.

The most notable Bible descriptions of the Great Antichrist included (1) it will speak against the Most High, Daniel 7:25; (2) it will oppress the saints, Daniel 7:25; (3) it will change times and laws, Daniel 7:25; (4) it will speak blasphemous words against God and His people, Revelation 13:5-6; and (5) it will exercise power over tribes, tongues, peoples, Revelation 13:7. The Reformers also found Bible texts that defined a time frame for the dominance of the papal institution in Christendom; 1,260 years (usually understood to be from 538 to 1798) was the time prophecy for the Antichristian based on Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 11:2, 12:14, 13:5.

Seventh-day Adventists in their seminal Bible studies after the 1844 Great Disappointment, found in the prophecies important references to the end of history. They predicted, based on prophecies in Revelation, that the papacy in alliance with a major political power in the New World and apostate Christian churches would resume the political dominance that it once had. The historic disregard for the authority of God and the oppression of the true followers of Jesus, which existed for 1,260 years, would be repeated. The papal institution with its allies would resume oppressive power. In this move the Sabbath/Sunday question among other things would become an important factor. Other Antichristian Powers

The western Christian world is for the present reasonably undisturbed in terms of religious freedom. Wars among nations did, unfortunately, not stop in 1798. Napoleon, however, did dis-establish the political power of the papal institution. A period of religious tolerance had its beginnings. It will, however, according to prophecy come to an end with the predicted future religious/political alliances. For the present we experience no significant limitations on religious freedom in the West and much of the rest of the world. It is an era with the opportunity to proclaim "the everlasting gospel to all kinds of people" in many places. However, in the present Christian practice of tolerance and peaceful coexistence among denominations, another problem has arisen. In the recent decades adherents of Islam, a monotheistic, non-Christian world religion, have for various reasons in considerable numbers immigrated to Western countries. And here they gradually become more visible and change in the established religious patterns.
**Muslims Among Christians**

Most of the Muslims in the West immigrated from Islamic kingdoms and republics, often due to oppression they encountered. They found a haven in societies where hospitality is part of a culture largely shaped by Christian values. However, some Muslim Fundamentalists have behaved in ways that seem to suggest the abusive antichristian regime from the Middle Ages. Observations of the lifestyle and activities of some Muslim immigrants brings to memory the abuses of the papacy hundred of years ago. A relatively high percentage of Muslims in the West are attempting to live a life dictated by the Koran and Sharia law. Some are also trying indirectly to impose their religious laws, culture and lifestyle on their new context. These efforts have gradually become key themes in the secular news media. They include Islamic control of speech, dress, diet, holidays in schools and neighborhoods, rules on marriage/divorce and inheritance, early marriages, oppression of young women, etc. Negotiations on these controversial relationships have, on occasion, led to threats, terror tactics and even violence in the name of Allah. A small number have even joined terrorist groups.

It must be clearly stated that most Muslims living in Western countries are good citizens who wish to make a contribution to a free society. Some appreciate the liberty of Western culture and want to practice their faith privately, within their families. But an aggressive minority of Islamists feel that their religion allows them to use severe threats and punishments on fellow believers in their own ranks who do not follow the strict ways of Shari'ah.

At the same we in the West hear what is going on in the Muslim world. The presence of missionaries and proclamation of the Gospel is forbidden in areas with a billion Muslims where Islam is the absolute and autocratic religion. There are reports from Muslim countries where a minority of Christians are treated as second class citizens and exposed to increasing persecution and sometimes even murder. Churches are raided and burned down. One tragic result of these atrocities is that the few confessing Christians living in a number of Muslim kingdoms and republics are immigrating to safer countries.

To these persecutions of Christians must be added that many types of Islamic belief allow Muslims to commit brutal attacks on other Muslims belonging to other Islamic sects. All these incidents reveal a religious power that speaks against the highest, oppresses and enslaves Christians, changes times and laws, and seeks to have dominion over tribes and peoples.

**Islam: Congenial Monotheistic Religion**

The Koran has several, although usually very distorted, references to stories and personalities also found in the Bible, from Adam to Christ. The Koran and Hadiths (traditions) quote biblical prophets by their names. In theory, Islamic literature places Jesus in line with Abraham and Moses and he is regarded as a great religious leader and prophet, even compared with Muhammad. But Christ is not recognized as the Son of God, and the doctrine of the Trinity is labeled polytheism.

The interesting point in this connection is that not only does the apostle John in his epistles use the term antichrist and antichristian, he also outlined the definition of antichrist as a religious power that does not accept the Father/Son relationship. In the course of history, Christians have been able to identify apostate Christian churches, secular governments as well as clerical orders and dictatorial leaders as antichrists. Adventists have to some extent and rightfully identified the papacy as the Great Antichrist. Does the apostle John suggest that Fundamentalist Islam could be added to the list of antichristian powers?

As a world movement Adventists have members and congregations in Muslim areas where there is oppression and even persecution of Christians. They often have Catholic neighbors who also are persecuted. Many of these unfortunate regions are places where Catholic influence is, if not completely absent, very minimal. For these isolated, vulnerable and often persecuted Christians, the Bible’s words confirming that their persecutors are antichristian powers could be a sign that God has not forgotten them.

In their Bible study these persecuted Christians find comfort in the rewards they are promised after the final
tribulations under an antichrist powers. They will experience the ultimate victory. The words of Revelation 7:14-17 expresses their consolation.

And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ‘Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Response to Comments by the Author

Dr. Schantz wrote this May 9 in response to the comments posted below:

John the apostle no doubt had the proto-Gnostics in mind when he, as the only Bible writer, coined the title Antichrist. Writers in the first century later gave Nero the title. It has since been applied by reformators, theologians, church leaders and others to any power that "will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws" (Dan 7:25). Personally I have even heard Germans after WWII call Hitler an antichrist. And Russians in 1953 after the death of Stalin gave him the same title.

The hostile actions of extreme fundamentalist Muslims in the world, remind us of the history of the papacy in the Middle Ages. And we have been keen to be reminders of the facts about the papacy. If some Catholic group today were to be guilty of just a fraction of the terrorist acts performed in the name of Islam, it would get the front covers of the newspapers and Adventist magazines in the West. My experience, however, is that the Opinion article would not have been published in a European Adventist magazine. The official reason for refusing to publish the article could be that the content would make matters worse for the few Adventists living in the Muslim world. That is definitely a valid argument. But perhaps the main reason would be a fear that “terror” would be aimed at the editor or the building where the office is?

On this silence: Due to a general Western Christian faintheartedness, Islamists feel safe and prosper.
Some of you know that my goat, Willow, recently had babies. This is her last breeding; she's getting old, and she had a lot of difficulty. I thought for a while I'd lose her. The plan was that she'd have one or two girls to be her milking replacements. So of course she had three boys, and one died at birth—the first baby goat I've lost in nearly 20 years of goat keeping. I bought a girl born only two days after Willow's kids, and she kind of adopted her, but I had to hold her to let the girl nurse. I later got a second girl, so I now have four kids, and Willow feeds the boys while I bottle feed the girls. (Note to the interested in my area: I need to sell the boys ASAP!)

These are the boys; to see a video of the boys and the first girl, go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVaE_RA0b48&feature=youtu.be

For a devotional this week, I thought I'd take a look at the Shepherd's Psalm from what might be their point of view.

The lady with the bottles is my goatherd; she gives me everything I want—though not everything I think I want! She lets me play in the green grass of her back yard and brings me buckets of water from the creek. She pets me and makes me happy, but makes me stay down and not jump on her; I guess that's the right thing to do...

Even when the dogs bark at me or the chair I'm jumping on falls over, I won't be scared; she is nearby (and so is my mommy) and she protects me.

She brings me bottles (and green hay, and nice mixed grains) and makes sure I get my share; she sprays iodine on my sores and takes good care of me. [From me and all my goats and other animals to God:] Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, and we will dwell in the house of YHWH forever!
Bear with me while I fetch a can opener. I have a tin of worms.

Recently, a close relative, who dwells in a largely Christian senior facility, sent me this news item:

Loma Linda centenarian sends would-be mugger to hospital

Loma Linda, Calif. — Muggers in the Loma Linda area have been dealt a serious setback when it comes to access to the local geriatric population. Ed Sutherland, 23, was no match for 110-year-old Edith Greenley’s vicious self-defense moves when he cornered her in the parking lot of Loma Linda Market, a local vegan grocery store. Seconds after demanding Greenley’s wallet, Sutherland was struck on the forehead by the centenarian’s shopping bag.

“I swung that bag like David’s sling,” said Greenley. “I had just stocked up on tracts at my local Adventist Book Center so I was armed and ready. That’s how Adventists slay people in the spirit.”

The incident was captured in its entirety on video by Greenley’s 11-year-old great-grandson who was just emerging from the store as Sutherland began to threaten Greenley. The tween instantly uploaded the video which went viral before Sutherland even reached Loma Linda Medical Center. Sutherland left the hospital in the custody of local law enforcement with eight stitches to his forehead.

For her part, Greenley has announced that she will be opening a self-defense class at the Green Oaks Senior Center. She has promised to demonstrate how students can defend themselves from any attacker using veggie food from the frozen food aisle of any mid-sized supermarket.

Following the foiled attack, Greenley and her friends command a whole different level of respect around Loma Linda and the greater Riverside area. They are said to have inspired fear and trembling in the hearts of local petty theft enthusiasts. The word on the street is to stay away from anyone over 90 with a King’s Heralds sticker on their walker.
Asked what her secret was to living a long and secure life, Greenley said, “The Okinawans have Karate, the Sardinians have the Mafia, my knitting group and I — we stay off the hooch and carry cans of Big Franks http://astore.amazon.com/barelya-20/detail/B000DIN3LC.”

Perhaps I should have recognized the above as satire from the outset. I didn’t.

Instead, my initial reaction (akin to if not actual gloating) was quickly replaced by remembrance of Christ’s teachings in Matthew 5:38-48, and I shared those with my relative, who responded that, were she in Greenley’s shoes, she’d likely have done the same thing, Jesus notwithstanding.

Another close relative also lives in the same facility. He related that, over a meal (denizens share meals in a common eating area), every one of those at his table agreed that the perpetrator, Sutherland, deserved what he got. Huzzahs for Granny Greenley.

I lean toward this way of thinking: If we, as Christians, got better than we deserve (Christ died a death He didn’t deserve so that we might have a life we don’t deserve), should we not adopt the mentality that, in our interactions with others, we should cut them slack and allow them to get better than what we deem they deserve?

It seems to me that this is the crux of Christianity: to love others as ourselves (the second great commandment).

How does this square with the news item? Well, for one, perhaps Granny shouldn’t have sent Sutherland to the ER. For another, maybe we shouldn’t gloat over this incident (admittedly suppositional; my relative, in calling Loma Linda Market, was unable to substantiate that such an event ever occurred).

My relative subsequently sent me a lengthy web link entitled “Biblical Self Defense,” which seems to me an oxymoron.

One of the heroes of Adventist lore was Desmond Doss, who, despite being a conscientious objector, and refusing to bear arms or kill, saved the lives of at least 75 fellow soldiers in combat during WWII. He was the first conscientious objector to win the Medal of Honor.

Speaking of war, it’s often started as the result of violence (where does self-defense end and violence begin?). Violence begets violence, and frequently escalates beyond control, at which point older men decide to send young men (and women) off to be killed or maimed.

One of the strongest arguments in favor of giving better than we get is what happened in South Africa after Nelson Mandela was released from prison after serving 27 years, and became the country’s leader. How to mend a country torn by years of racial violence and apartheid?

Mandela came up with a policy of reconciliation, in which all a perpetrator (usually white) of
sometimes heinous crimes needed to do in order to obtain expiation and avoid punishment was to admit guilt and ask for forgiveness.

While controversial, it was consistent with Christian principles and likely resulted in more healing than would have occurred had the government adopted a policy of retribution.

The one time Christ demonstrated anger, and the closest He came to violence, is when He chased the moneychangers from the temple. But He was acting against desecration (although He was God, I’ll make a distinction here and say that He was defending His Father’s honor, as it were).

I don’t recall His using violence (or self-defense) for His own good. And He remonstrated with Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane when He told him to sheath his sword after Peter had amputated an ear of one in the crowd who had come to take Jesus.

That is what bothered me about the little old lady at the Loma Linda market beating the mugger with her bag. She was defending herself, not someone else.
Four People Sharing a Kidney Donation Bond Meet for the First Time at Loma Linda University Health Event


by Herbert Atienza
Media Relations Specialist
Loma Linda University Health
submitted May 8, 2014

RIVERSIDE, CA – May 2, 2014 – Four Southern California residents who share an improbable bond of kidney donation met for the first time this week (April 30) at an inspiring event hosted by Loma Linda University Health to honor living kidney donors.

Ivan Vasquez, 31, of Los Angeles, wanted to donate one his kidneys to Haing Yun, 67, of
Rancho Cucamonga, a patient at Loma Linda University Medical Center whom he considered to be “like a second mother.” Unfortunately, they did not match for organ donation purposes.

Meanwhile, Nichole Hurtado-Silva, 40, of Bakersfield, wanted to donate a kidney to her cousin, Yvonne Hurtado, 38, of Ventura, a patient at UCLA Medical Center. But they, too, were incompatible for organ donation.

In a unique “loop paired kidney exchange” program overseen by medical teams from Loma Linda University Medical Center and UCLA Medical Center, the four found matching kidney donors and recipients between them. Through the kidney exchange, Vasquez donated a kidney to Hurtado, and Hurtado-Silva donated a kidney to Yun.

All are now doing well, and met for the first time at the second annual “Gift of Life” Living Donor Award ceremony, hosted by Loma Linda University Medical Center Transplantation Institute. The four were presented before more than 140 people, including other 2013 kidney donor/recipient pairs, at the gathering held in Riverside, where the living kidney donors were honored with awards.

“Our living kidney donors are the true heroes, because their selfless act has resulted in saving the life of another person,” said Dr. Pedro Baron, kidney transplant surgeon at Loma Linda University Medical Center. He said a vast majority of patients succumb to their illness while waiting to receive an organ transplant.

According to Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN), more than 107,000 patients are currently waiting for a kidney transplant.

Ivan Vasquez had known Haing Yun as a co-worker at a clothing company in Los Angeles, and they have formed a bond. “She cooked food for me and brought food for us to share,” he said. He said Yun started becoming sick, and confided that she was planning to leave California because of the long wait for a kidney transplant. He told her she did not need to move because he was willing to donate his kidney.

“It’s an amazing feeling knowing that you made a difference in someone else’s life,” Vasquez said. Yun said, “We were close before, but we’re even closer now.”

Yvonne Hurtado had been on dialysis for 10 years and her chances of receiving a kidney transplant were diminishing. Her cousin, Nichole Hurtado-Silva, has six children, was about to be married, and planning to relocate shortly from Ventura to Bakersfield, where she was going to start a new job. But she could not bear the thought of her cousin’s health further deteriorating without her taking action.

“I feel I was just an instrument used by God to save a life,” Nichole Hurtado-Silva said. Yvonne Hurtado expressed gratefulness to her cousin and her donor “for giving me a chance at life.”

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**About Loma Linda University Health (LLUH)**
Loma Linda University Health includes Loma Linda University's eight professional schools, Loma Linda University Medical Center's six hospitals and more than 800 faculty physicians located in the Inland Empire of Southern California. Established in 1905, LLUH is a global leader in education, research and clinical care. It offers over 100 academic programs and provides quality health care to 40,000 inpatients and 1.5 million outpatients each year. A Seventh-day Adventist organization, LLUH is a faith-based health system with a mission "to continue the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus Christ."

**About Loma Linda University Medical Center (LLUMC)**
Loma Linda University Medical Center’s comprehensive health system includes: Loma Linda University Medical Center, Loma Linda University Children’s Hospital, Loma Linda University Medical Center East Campus, Loma Linda University Behavioral Medicine Center, Loma Linda University Heart & Surgical Hospital, Loma Linda University Medical Center - Murrieta, and physician clinics. LLUMC is widely respected as a health care leader and is known for its pioneering and cutting-edge work in such areas as organ transplants, proton treatment for cancers, cardiac care, physical rehabilitation, acute pediatric and adult care, as well as treatments for chemical dependence and other behavioral disorders. LLUMC is the only Level 1 trauma Center in the San Bernardino, Riverside, Inyo, and Mono counties, which covers over 40,000 square miles in Southern California. With a total of 1,076 beds, the Loma Linda University Medical Center includes the only children’s hospital in the region. Loma Linda University Medical Center sees over 40,000 inpatients and more than 750,000 outpatient visits a year.