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symposium with guests from abroad (see related stories below)....

**Adventists and World War 1 - Symposium Day Two:** The German symposium continued on its second day with a review of how failed prophecies made by Adventists about the fate of the Ottoman Empire affected evangelism in Germany in the 1900s; discussion then continued with study of divisive issues regarding participation by Adventists in the military (see related stories below)....

**Adventists and World War 1 - Symposium Day Three:** Although the Adventist denomination created a standard recommendation (on paper) for dealing with members' conscription and military service, in reality the Church dealt piecemeal with each warring nation, leading to great dissatisfaction among members and creation of a 100-year-long rift...

**German Adventist Leaders Release Statement on "Guilt, Failure," War:** Of all nations in the First World, Germany's relationship with the Seventh-day Adventist Church has perhaps been the most schismatic, fraught with serious reform movements and divisions about whether members should serve in the military or resist conscription. Now apologies are in order....

**News Briefs May 16, 2014:** Contains a selection of shorter news stories, beginning with an analysis of how Hispanic younger people and immigrants are choosing to leave Catholicism and join such churches as the Seventh-day Adventist; others remain nondenominational; Pastor Ted Wilson has preached a historic sermon in Vietnam, the first SDA minister from outside the country to be allowed to do so since 1975; Southwestern Adventist University has celebrated its 120th and how to recognize abuse and treat it within a church context....

**Be Beautiful (Poetry and Visual):** Poet/Artist Keeley Jones comments in verse on our obsession with beauty on the outside, with a breathtaking charcoal drawing and poem about true beauty, from a 17-year-old self-taught artist who has started going to school at home so that she can spend more time on her art. She hopes to make it her career...
anniversary; plus healthcare related items....
Church administrators from the Seventh-day Adventist denomination's North American Division (NAD) are meeting this week to discuss the organization's structure and other strategic issues. The current organizational plan was developed more than a hundred years ago, from 1901 through 1910. At the time travel was largely by railroad and horse, printing was done by steam presses and manual typewriters were new technology that took special action by denominational leaders to permit employees to use.

The denomination has five tiers of organization: local churches, state conferences, union conferences (eight regions in the United States currently), the NAD and the General Conference (GC) worldwide denomination. This structure reflects century-old technology and realities. There are a total of 59 local conferences and nine union conferences; 68 organizations plus the NAD itself.

A central question, which has been studied repeatedly by the NAD since it was reconstituted in 1985 is whether the cost of five tiers of organization is actually worth the cost or continues to be a practical necessity. Various estimates of the cost run from a few million dollars a year to as much as $50 million, although all of these are based on a variety of assumptions that have not really been examined in term of the real impact they might have. Other Protestant denominations with many more members and congregations operate with half as many administrative units.

The rate of church growth has slowed in the NAD from 3.7 percent in the 1970s to 1.5 percent in the last decade. It is still the fastest growing Christian denomination in the United States, but that is seen by many Adventists as testimony to the decline of other groups rather than the success of the Adventist Church. There has also been significant demographic change: The "graying of Adventism" marked by a median age of 51 among Adventists compared to 36 in the U.S. Census and 35 in Canada. And much greater diversity than in the general population, driven in part by the large role that immigration plays in Adventist growth in the NAD.

There are indicators that the socio-economic profile of the Adventist community is changing too. There are fewer upper-middle-class active members who regularly return a full ten percent of their earnings to the denomination's Tithe Fund. A growing number of members are retirees on limited incomes or from lower-middle-class and poor families. And surveys have shown an increase in those who report putting at least part of their tithe into other funds or projects.

"In many ways the business model that the denomination has operated on since the late 1940s is no longer working," a retired administrator told Adventist Today. "The GC leaders and Adventists in the rest of the world may not like it, but the NAD has to make major changes or we are going to run out of gas."

For many years there has been the question, "Do we need the union conferences?" This is often backed up with references to today's instant communication and rapid transportation, portraying union conferences as having been necessary a century ago because of distances and old technology. In fact, that represents a misunderstanding of the role of the union conferences. Outside the U.S., the union conferences are the primary vehicle for the national churches. For example, one of the union conferences in the NAD constitutes "The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada," which has become its official name.
The noted evangelist H. M. S. Richards, in the late 1960s, was the first to suggest a bolder solution to shrink the denomination’s structure in the NAD; remove the local conference layer and let the union conferences deal directly with the local church. That would cut the structure from 68 entities to about ten. That would likely represent the largest savings in dollars.

This is an organizational alternative that is used throughout Europe and other places in the world field. It is officially labeled a "union of churches" because it operates like a local conference in dealing with congregations and like a union conference in dealing with the GC and other institutions. In 2009 the GC Working Policy was amended to specifically permit this kind of structure, although Pastor Ted Wilson, the current GC president, has stated that the GC must carefully review any proposals. At least one union conference in the NAD has already had such a proposal presented by one of its local conferences.

What makes this kind of decision more complicated in the NAD is the 1944 decision of the GC executive committee to permit the historically African American congregations in parts of the U.S. to withdraw from their state conferences and form "regional conferences." These became the first structures in the denomination actually under the control of African Americans at a time when many of the state conferences had pay scales that were racially discriminatory, a practice that would be illegal today.

The Regional Conferences have been a great success. Until recently their growth rates were much more rapid than those of the state conferences and, as a result, the percentage of Adventists among African Americans is about three times greater than among other ethnic groups in the NAD. As more and more Adventist African Americans have become middle class the growth rate of the Regional Conferences has slowed to about the same as that of the state conferences, but that fact also means that hundreds of thousands of African Americans have been lifted out of poverty by the Regional Conferences over the seven decades of this organizational arrangement.

Contrary to what has been published in some articles, there are other places in the world where Adventist entities are structured along ethnic lines. But they are few or hidden in geographic boundaries that follow cultural patterns. One example is the Swedish Conference in the Finland Union Conference which overlaps geographically with the Finnish Conference.

One solution that has been discussed would be to merge the state conferences into the Regional Conferences in the five union conferences where Regional Conferences exist. Because four of the union conferences have only a single Regional Conference, this would probably also involve merging the Mid-America and Southwestern unions and maybe the Atlantic, Columbia and Lake unions. The net result could be as few as 42 units instead of 68, and perhaps as much as a one-third reduction in the cost of operations. This plan targets the areas in the U.S. where consolidation is probably most needed and steps around the potentially explosive issue of organizations with white majorities instructing organizations with black majorities to go out of business.

What are your suggestions for changes in the denomination's organizational structure in the North American Division? Adventist Today will prepare a report based on the suggestions posted here and share that report with the NAD officers.
Are Vegetarians Less Healthy Than Meat Eaters? Study Raises Questions

By AT News Team, May 13, 2014

An article in the journal *PLOS One* has reported a study conducted by researchers at the Medical University of Graz, Austria, which concludes that, in the population studied, vegetarians suffer from higher risk of asthma, cancer, allergies, and poor mental health, compared to their meat-eating counterparts. *PLOS One* is an international, peer-reviewed, open-access, online publication dedicated to rapid dissemination of research from all scientific disciplines.

While vegetarians may have a lower body mass index (BMI), vegetarian diets were shown to be tied to generally poorer health, poorer quality of life, and a higher need for health care than their meat-eating counterparts in Austria. Also, according to the report, a vegetarian diet characterized by a low consumption of saturated fats and cholesterol that includes increased intake of fruits, vegetables and whole-grain products carries elevated risks of cancer, allergies and mental health disorders.

The study surveyed more than 15,000 people, a mix of vegetarians, vegetarians who eat eggs and cheese, and meat-eaters. The results showed that more than 30 percent of vegetarians surveyed had allergies, while less than 17 percent of participants who regularly included meat in their diet had allergies. Vegetarians also had a 50 percent increase in heart attacks and a 50 percent increase in incidences of cancers.

In the report vegetarians are found to have some elements of healthier lifestyles. They are less likely to smoke tobacco and also drink less alcohol. The research also found that vegetarians were more physically active, had better socioeconomic status, and had better health behaviors overall.

“Our study has shown that Austrian adults who consume a vegetarian diet are less healthy (in terms of cancer, allergies, and mental health disorders), have a lower quality of life, and also require more medical treatment,” the researchers conclude. "Therefore, a continued strong public health program for Austria is required in order to reduce the health risk due to nutritional factors."

**Response from Adventist Health Study Research Team**

Because many studies of Seventh-day Adventists have had significantly different findings, Adventist Today asked for comments from researchers at Loma Linda University (LLU) who have worked on these projects under grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Dr. Gary Fraser and Dr. Pramil Singh of the LLU School of Public Health stated, "We congratulate the authors on their study of Austrian vegetarians. As the authors point out it is not possible with this study design to decide whether associations are causal in the direction of diet causing or preventing disease."

"It is well known that many subjects who experience chronic disease, including cancer, may gravitate toward a plant-based diet. Then the association results from causation in the reverse direction i.e. disease causes a dietary preference. It would have been helpful to know about past dietary habits and the duration of the diets in the Austrian study. Thus we suggest that this study is an interesting sociological description of vegetarians in Austria as compared to others, but has little to say about the cause of disease."

"Interestingly, our data on U.S. vegetarians also suggests that they are less likely to participate in preventive health
testing against cancer (see notes 1 and 2 below), although as distinct from the Austrian findings, vegetarians that we study longitudinally have lower rates of many common chronic diseases (see notes 3-5).

"A previous longitudinal study of German vegetarians has also found that they experienced much lower mortality from cancer, cardiovascular disease, and lower total mortality (6). British vegetarians may also derive some benefits (see notes 7 and 8), but perhaps less clearly so.

"U.S. vegetarians as compared to non-vegetarians in our studies do seem to experience better mental health (see notes 9 and 10), a finding that differs from the Austrian data, perhaps reflecting different motivations for the dietary choices. So findings among studies of vegetarians are somewhat diverse for some disease endpoints, and this is perhaps not surprising as vegetarians worldwide have diets that may differ greatly. Thus one would not expect the same health consequences in U.S., British, Austrian, German, and Indian vegetarians, as we have previously discussed (see note 11).

"We would strongly suggest that studies of vegetarians describe their diets with additional qualifiers that will allow the reader to understand more clearly what the study participants are actually eating, this both in terms of nutrients, vitamins, minerals, and also particular foods and food groups (see note 12)."

Reference notes attached to the statement from Gary E. Fraser MD, Ph.D.; Pramil Singh DrPH


12. Rizzo NS, Jaceldo-Siegl K, Sabate J, Fraser GE. Nutrient profiles of vegetarian and nonvegetarian dietary
Details of Plan to Restructure Adventist Publishing Houses Emerge

By Adventist Today News Team, May 9, 2014

A restructuring proposal for the two Seventh-day Adventist publishing houses that are under the direct supervision of the denomination's General Conference (GC) has been distributed to members of its governing body, the GC executive committee. Adventist Today has obtained a copy of the six-page document which envisions the Review & Herald Publishing Association (R&H) becoming an office at the GC complex in Silver Spring, Maryland, and the Pacific Press becoming an institution of the denomination's North American Division (NAD).

R&H facilities and equipment in Hagerstown, Maryland, would be sold and its employees transferred to Pacific Press or laid off. The intellectual property of R&H and the periodicals that it publishes for the GC would be transferred to an office within the GC staff in Silver Spring where it is anticipated that little or no additional personnel are needed because the GC already employs the editorial staff for these products.

Pacific Press will provide the production and distribution activities for R&H so long as it can provide these services at an acceptable cost. As an NAD institution, it will have the central role for the Adventist publishing ministry in the United States, Canada and related island nations.

R&H "will no longer operate a printing/production facility," the plan states. The R&H office will be "moved from Hagerstown ... to the General Conference office" and "will require minimal staffing, if any" beyond the editors who "are already employees of the General Conference." R&H "will function as the publisher for current General Conference publications and as the publisher for designated new products originating from the General Conference and intended for global use."

"Publications and production functions" of R&H "that primarily serve the North American Division ... will become the responsibility of the North American Division and its publishing house," the document states. Pacific Press "becomes an institution of the North American Division" under the plan and "continues to function from Nampa, Idaho." It will accept responsibility "for the printing/production and fulfillment services required by both the North American Division and the General Conference," including "the publishing house activities" that R&H "performs for the North American Division."

The plan anticipates that once it is voted by the GC executive committee it will be recommended to the two boards of the institutions and these groups will also endorse it and send it to their respective constituency meetings for final approval. It also instructs that the charters and bylaws for the two institutions be revised to constitute new constituencies and boards.

In addition to a summary of the need for this restructuring plan, the document anticipates arguments against the plan, especially those based on quotations from Ellen G. White, the denomination's cofounder believed to have exercised a prophetic role during its founding and developmental periods. It describes the vast changes in publish technology, reading patterns, marketing methods and economic realities since R&H was formed in 1861 and Pacific Press in 1875. It traces developments since 1980 when Southern Publishing Association was merged with R&H, listing in a footnote five major assessments of the situation completed from 1991 through 2013.

"Within the last 25 years [these] studies have all recognized that in due course it would be expedient for the North American Division to have a greater oversight role in the publishing activities serving its territory," the document states. 

Update added May 14
notes. It views the new plan as essentially left-over business from the decision in the mid-1980s to organize the NAD as a separate entity from the GC.

Perhaps anticipating that some will argue that White stated that a plan such as this should not be implemented, the document points out that today the denomination has 62 publishing houses around the world and at the time she wrote there were only two. "Many of her messages ... came during a period marked by tensions between the two. Less than cordial relations prevailed" and White "gave pointed messages about the danger of centralizing control of the denomination's publishing work in one institution." It also lists significant restructuring of these two publishing houses in 1903, 1904 and 1980.

The document cites three principles that summarize White's views. (1) "Large institutional concentrations in one locale are not the best way for the Church to fulfill its mission. ... (2) No single individual or small group of individuals should have sole determination of the content or expression of denominational beliefs and teachings. ... (3) Ellen G. White recognized a fundamental hermeneutical principle in the use of her writings. 'Regarding the testimonies, nothing is ignored; nothing is cast aside; but time and place must be considered.' [Selected Messages, Vol 1, Chapt 4] Changed circumstances call for 'common sense' application of principles."

It remains to be seen how the plan will be received by denominational administrators. Many of the people who will vote on whether or not to adopt this plan (or amend it) have a stake in maintaining the status quo no matter how desperate the financial realities have become. In the summer of 2013 an effort to develop a similar plan quickly came to an end, as Adventist Today has previously reported.

**Update**

On Monday (May 12) the boards of R&H and Pacific Press met separately and both voted to approve the reorganization plan and recommend it to their constituency groups. Two separate constituency meetings will convene on June 17, both at the GC office in Silver Spring, Maryland. If approval is given by both groups, the new structure will begin to be implemented on July 1.

Opposition to the restructuring plan is being organized by some retired employees of R&H. The *Hagerstown Herald-Mail* reported that a meeting was held last Thursday evening (May 8) at the local Adventist church. It was addressed by Harold "Bud" Otis, who was the president of R&H when it moved to the town in the early 1980s and supervised the construction of the facilities. He "expressed heartache" about the planned changes and revealed that the floor had been installed during the original construction to expand the plant to twice its current capacity.

The R&H factory "needs to stay until the Lord comes," the newspaper quoted Otis as saying to the 70 people present. He shared plans for an independent review of the decision to reorganize and told the group that the Columbia Union Conference had agreed to pay for a study to examine the viability of the R&H continuing to operate as it has in the past. The newspaper also reported that the Chamber of Commerce in Hagerstown and local government officials have been approached to support keeping the printing plant in operation.
By Jeff Boyd, May 12, 2014

The international symposium, "The Impact of World War I on Seventh-day Adventism," began today at Theologische Hochschule Friedensau, an Adventist university near Berlin, Germany. The Institute of Adventist Studies is hosting the international event, which includes sixteen presenters from twelve countries and fifty registered attendees from eleven countries.

Event organizer Rolf Pöhler shared the symposium's three areas of overlapping concern; prophetic interpretation, Adventist faith and military action, and the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement. George Knight, a well-known Adventist historian retired from the faculty of Andrews University, was the keynote speaker at Monday evening's inaugural session, focusing primarily on the second of these areas (military service) which is at the heart of the situation that spawned the Reform Movement, today a separate Adventist denomination.

Future reports from the symposium will address the Reform Movement in more detail. Briefly, the movement began in Germany when Adventist leaders informed the government that church members would take up arms in the war, even on Sabbath. Because both positions were out of harmony with Adventist history and teachings up to that point, a portion of the membership rejected these changes and eventually formed a new denomination consistent with their convictions. This movement has since split, yet it remains the most significant group to branch from the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Knight provided a context for the forthcoming presentations by providing an overview of Adventist history regarding military service. A major theme was the struggle to live faithfully as citizens of heaven in a sinful world where Christians are also citizens of political nations. Another prominent theme was the pragmatic and flexible approach the Adventist Church has taken over the years toward participation in combat duty in times of forced conscription, or the draft, opting for institutional security over consistent and absolute pacifism.

While there have been elements of continuity to the Church's approach to the war question (e.g., favoring noncombatancy in the context of a draft, supporting Sabbath observance even in times of war), there have also been significant changes over time. For example, Knight noted that while noncombatancy remains the suggested approach, both combat duty and refusal of military service are now considered options for Adventists in good standing. Other changes include an increasingly uncritical support for governments and military action, a shift from distinct official pronouncements to personal choice by individual members, and the acceptance of Adventist clergy in the role of military chaplains.

In his concluding remarks, Knight lamented the changes that have resulted from the lack of education provided by the Church in relation to these questions: "In the void of education on the topic and lack of information about the denomination's historic position against volunteering for military service, slowly but steadily Adventist young people began to enlist with hardly anyone noticing what was happening. And with that transition Adventism lost what had truly been an important aspect of its Christian heritage."

In its first pronouncements on the issue, the General Conference in the 1860s was strong pacifist and associated Adventist teachings with those of the Mennonites and Quakers, historic "peace churches." This position changed over time and today many Adventists have no awareness of the historic roots of the faith on this topic. World War I provided the context for significant change in Adventist faith in the aftermath of the death of Ellen White in 1915,
leading up to the pivotal 1919 Bible Conference and 1922 GC Session.

*Adventist Today has sent Jeff Boyd, its assistant editor, to Germany for this important symposium examining a crucial turning point in the development of the Adventist movement. Daily news reports will be published online.*
Adventists and World War 1 - Symposium Day Two

By Jeff Boyd, May 13, 2014

The second day of the symposium on the impact of World War I on the Adventist movement at Friedensau Adventist University's (FAU) began by focusing on prophecy, specifically how failed prophecies relating to the Ottoman Empire during WW1 affected Adventist evangelism. The day finished with a consideration of Adventists and military service; however, I will wait to report on these war questions until after the remaining papers on the topic are presented tomorrow (Wednesday).

Jón H. Stefánsson, a research assistant at Andrews University originally from Iceland, set the stage for the prophetic analysis by tracing the development of Adventist interpretation of Bible prophecy relating to the Ottoman Empire. William Miller and Josiah Litch, two influential leaders in the early Adventist movement of the 1830s and 1840s in the United States, viewed the end of the Ottoman Empire as an important future step toward Armageddon and Jesus' return. In 1838 Litch predicted the empire would end on August 11, 1840.

When Egyptian forces were advancing on the Ottomans, European powers intervened, stopping Egypt on August 11, 1840. Stefánsson explained that "this acceptance of European protection and intervention was regarded by many as the end of Ottoman sovereignty. Thus the day-year principle appeared vindicated, and the ... movement gained great momentum." Consequently, the last plagues, Armageddon and Jesus' return were imminent.

After the Great Disappointment of 1844, those remaining in the movement revisited this chain of final events. By the 1850s Uriah Smith had connected the Ottoman Empire with the sixth trumpet of Revelation 9 and the sixth plague of Revelation 16. In 1871 Smith declared "the king of the north" (Dan. 11:40-45) to be Turkey. By the 1880s, the Ottoman theory had become "the unanimous consensus among Seventh-day Adventists," reported Stefánsson.

Bert Haloviak, former head of the denomination's archives at the General Conference (GC), explained that this prophetic interpretation addressed an important issue of the time; "The Eastern Question," or the concern by European powers regarding their national interests in the territories of the Ottoman Empire. Haloviak summarized how Adventists believed the Eastern Question would be solved in light of their views on Daniel 9, 16, and 11:40-45, as described by Stefánsson. The solution "involved Turkey losing all its possessions and being forced to retreat to Jerusalem where the events of the final confrontation in the Great Controversy would take place." Haloviak described how important this idea was to Adventists at the time. "By the outbreak of the Great War, the theme of the predicted fall of Turkey as a nation had become so dominant in Adventist thought that the entire church ... amassed its full resources in support of the idea and seemed prepared to proclaim the Eastern Question as its central message of warning of the nearness of the end-time to the world."

The only problem with this prediction was that it did not come true. Rather than move its capital to Jerusalem, ushering in Armageddon and Jesus' return, the Ottoman Empire dissolved into the present country of Turkey. Stefánsson stated bluntly that "World War I did not cause the Turk to leave Istanbul," but instead "quickened his departure out of Adventist eschatology."

Given this failed prediction at the heart of the evangelism of the time, what was the church to do? Rolf Pöhler, director of FAU's Institute of Adventist Studies, offered a number of potential responses; disbelief there is a problem demanding new insights, cautionary restraint, silence, disagreement and reinterpretation. With the view that reinterpretation was deserved, Pöhler noted seven troubling areas for reflection: soft time-setting, sensationalism,
classical historicism, literalism, an unconditional view of prophecy, misinterpretation of signs of the times, and semi-rationalism. Given these areas of concern, Pöhler asked, "Have we learned from our history?"

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Adventists and World War 1 - Symposium Day Three

By Jeff Boyd, May 14, 2014

The overlapping themes of military service and the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement were the focus of the third day of Friedensau Adventist University’s symposium on the impact of World War 1 on the Adventist movement. The event involves careful, prayerful reflection after one hundred years.

As an international conference for an international denomination, it was fitting to have presentations on the experience of Adventists in a number of countries involved in WW1, including Australia, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Russia, South Africa, Sweden and the United States of America. When the collection of papers is published, chapters on Canada and Romania will also be included.

Although the Adventist Church advocated non-combatant status and Sabbath observance by those drafted into the military, the actual experience of Adventists was different in each context. What the denominational leaders did in each nation depended on factors such as how strict the draft was (were exceptions allowed), government acceptance of non-combatant status, the if alternative service was available, and the level of nationalism.

For example, in South Africa the denomination successfully campaigned for an exemption from compulsory military service. Nevertheless, Adventists still faced pressure in places where local authorities disregarded the exemption, leading to the imprisonment of several young men, explained Jeff Crocombe, senior lecturer at Pacific Adventist University. In contrast, both French and German governments did not recognize conscientious objection or religious freedom of worship. Instead, the military "expected strict performance of duties at all times and considered refusal to carry weapons as an attempt to undermine military morale, punishable by imprisonment or execution," reported Denis Kaiser in his presentation on Britain, France and Germany.

Similar policies were followed by other European nations, a reality that set the stage for a break with the traditional Adventist position by many national denominational leaders and then the emergence of the Reform Movement. It was initially simply a protest among church members, sometimes termed the German Reform Movement, but later became a new denomination, a fact rarely acknowledged today and unknown to most Adventists.

With the outbreak of war in Europe in the late summer of 1914, German church leaders met to establish guidance for members facing the draft. At an August 2 meeting, "a decision was taken that in the present context the demands of military service and the bearing of arms were the rightful prerogatives of the civilian authorities and Adventist Christians should cooperate and do their duty," explained Gilbert Valentine, a professor at La Sierra University and established historian. This position supporting patriotic duty was communicated to the German War Department. It specifically included using weapons and engaging in regular military service on the Sabbath. This change in Adventist teachings was accepted by most Adventists in Germany at the time. Only a small faction refused to comply. This symposium at Friedensau marks the 100th anniversary of this schism.

After the war, with oversight from General Conference (GC) officers, German leaders would rescind these pronouncements. However, division in the denomination would prove difficult to overcome. The continued schism was at least partly due to actions taken against the dissenting minority. Many were kicked out of the church. In some cases Adventists informed authorities about the dissenters, even testifying against them. Woonsan Kang and Antonino Di Franca, both members of the Reform Movement, reported that some dissenters were imprisoned and beaten, while others were killed for following their convictions. Understandably, some people fled in an attempt to
avoid such abuse. Given this war-time abuse, it is little wonder that reunification proved illusive.

The most significant group of surviving dissenters (with members from 14 to 16 countries) began to coalesce, and in 1925 this group organized in Gotha, Germany, as the Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement. The Gestapo would later dissolve the denomination in 1936, which meant it would remain an underground network until it re-established as a recognized religious body in the United States in 1936.

Administrative conflicts led to another split in 1951. This resulted in the formation of a third denomination, the International Missionary Society Seventh-day Adventist Church Reform Movement (IMS). Today, the two small denominations have approximately 70,000 members all together, with a presence in 120 countries, reported Dr. Idel Suarez, Jr., president of IMS. Although the early members were German former Adventists, this is no longer the case because the church has grown internationally.

While mainstream Seventh-day Adventists and the Reform Movement have had notable conflicts and accusations of being "Babylon" have gone both ways, members on both sides expressed appreciation for the positive tone of the dialog this week in Friedensau. In the context of the recent apology by German Adventist leaders regarding the treatment of pacifists during WW1, participants in the symposium called for continued dialogue and study. Adventist Today published a story about the statement on Monday (May 12).

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German Adventist Leaders Release Statement on "Guilt, Failure," War

From APD, May 12, 2014

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Germany has published a statement pertaining to actions it took in the context of the outbreak of World War I. The denomination's Southern and Northern German Union Conferences voted the statement on April and published it in German in the May edition of the Church magazine Adventisten heute under the title "Guilt and Failure."

The presidents of both union conferences, Pastors Johannes Naether and Günther Machel recall that many Adventists at the time saw the outbreak of World War I as "a sign of the end of the world." Before the war, a number of Adventists had served in the military but refused to carry out duties on Sabbath, risking potentially severe penalties. Others considered it part of their preparation for the imminent return of Jesus to refuse to carry weapons or to participate in the military.

However, shortly after the general mobilization on August 2, 1914, the leadership of the denomination's Central European Division in Hamburg issued an open letter recommending that enlisted Adventists "fulfill our military duties wholeheartedly and with joy," bear arms and also to serve on the Sabbath.

The statement and other publications provoked a complex protest in Adventist congregations, leading to tensions and divisions within the denomination. In 1915 this state of affairs led to the formation of a separate organization, the self-designated "Reform Movement," which accused its mother church, the "greater church" of a "Babylonian apostasy from the true Advent faith."

"Today we recognize and concede," said the two German leaders, "that during these disputes our fathers often did not act in the spirit of love and reconciliation demonstrated by Jesus." Out of concern for the survival of the denomination in Germany, advice contradicting the Word of God was given which led to division and profound hurt. The former Adventist leadership did not adequately fulfill their responsibility to the Church. They unjustly accused members who contradicted them of having "fallen" from the truth, and in individual cases went as far as having people pursued by the authorities.

During post-war negotiations with the Reform Movement on June 21 to 23, 1920, in Friedensau, Germany, Pastor Arthur G. Daniells, president of the denomination's General Conference (GC), objected to the position of the German church administrators regarding military service and emphasized, "We would not have made such a declaration." At a pastors meeting which took place immediately prior to the negotiations in Friedensau, those directly responsible for the documents had rescinded their statements as "erroneous" and on January 2, 1923, again expressed regret "that such documents had ever been released."

Today, Pastors Naether and Machel again apologized in the name of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. "Even though none of those directly involved are still alive, we ask their descendants and relatives along with the still existing groups of the Reform Movement for forgiveness for our failings. From these painful experiences we have learned that the children of God are called to be people of peace, and to reject every form of violence against the innocent. We believe that disciples of Jesus are truest to the statements of the Holy Scriptures when they act as ambassadors for peace and reconciliation."

The two Church Leaders recall the "Declaration of Peace" released by the GC in June 1985: "In a world full of fighting
and hatred, a world of ideological and military conflicts, Seventh-day Adventists want to be known as peacemakers, and want to advocate for global justice and peace under Christ as the head of a new humanity.”

The Adventist Reform Movement

In August 1914 as the First World War began and 3,000 of the 15,000 German Adventists were called up to military service, many came to different conclusions when considering how to behave in response to the crisis. While the majority followed the directives in the open letter circulated by denominational leaders in Germany and became fully-fledged military servicemen, critics of this decision clearly expressed their disapproval.

From amongst these critics, some of whom explained their opposition by their expectation of Jesus return in the early summer 1915, a group established itself over the course of the year. Some later found a place back in an established Adventist congregation, but the majority of the objectors remained part of the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement which rejected any form of military service altogether.

The withdrawal of the open letter and other post-war attempts at reconciliation failed. As a result, two Adventist denominations existed during the time of the Weimar Republic, the original Adventists and the newer Reformed denomination, which subsequently divided into a number of further smaller groups due to internal conflicts.

Most of the splinter groups had come to an end prior to the Nazi regime, and the remaining groups soon came to the attention of the new rulers, since they refused to participate in elections. In 1936 the Gestapo dissolved the Reform Movement. Most of the smaller groups were outlawed in the same year, the remainder in 1937 and 1942.

Today, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination is comprised of more than 18 million adult, baptized members around the world and perhaps as many as 30 million adherents. In Germany there are around 35,000 members. The Reform Movement experienced a schism in 1951, and since then exists as two groups, each with about 30,000 members worldwide. In Germany, the Seventh-day Adventist Church Reform Movement, International Missionary Society (IMS) reports 350 members. The Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement (SDARM) is slightly smaller with about 200 members in Germany. More information is available from several published and Internet sources about the Reformed Seventh-day Adventist denominations.

The Adventist News Agency (APD) is operated from Basel, Switzerland, on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination’s organizations in Europe.
Adventist Today

News Briefs May 16, 2014

Adventist Today regularly provides a summary of stories that we have decided do not require in-depth reporting, but our readers may want to be aware of.

An Adventist named Miriam Alvarez is one of two women who represent trends in religion among Hispanics in the United States in a new research report from Pew Research Center that was released last week (May 7). Alvarez, "a devout Seventh-day Adventist," is typical of the large numbers of Hispanics and Latinos who are leaving the Catholic Church and becoming evangelical Protestants. She was paired in the news release announcing the research with Gloria Muniz who represents the other major trend; those who are leaving the Catholic Church to become religiously unaffiliated, one of the so-called "nones" or those who tell interviewers when asked about their preferred religion, "none."

The first Adventist from outside the country permitted to preach publicly in Vietnam since 1975 was Pastor Ted Wilson, president of the denomination's General Conference. He preached April 24-26 at the Phu Nhuan Adventist Church in Ho Chi Minh City, a municipality of eight million, according to a bulletin from the Adventist News Network. Adventist leaders in Vietnam are in hopes that this event will result in a new era of growth for the denomination in their country. It was given official permission to resume operations in 2008.

Sunday (May 11) marked the 120th year of Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas. A total of 140 students who received diplomas. The freshman class for the 2013-2014 school year was the largest since 1996 and total enrollment is up at the institution that began operations in 1893. Dr. Eric Anderson, the retiring president, was the commencement speaker. The new president is Dr. Kenneth Shaw, dean of the Panama City campus of Florida State University.

Takoma Regional Hospital in Greeneville, Tennessee, will return to the total ownership of the Adventist Health System (AHS), according to a report last weekend (May 10) in the Greeneville Sun. The 121-bed hospital had been jointly owned by AHS and Wellmont Health System since 2007. Wellmont and AHS will continue to collaborate in a number of programs, including cardiology care.

Jellico Community Hospital in Jellico, Tennessee, will leave the Adventist Health System as soon as new affiliation can be found it was announced last week in The News Journal. The 54-bed hospital is the only AHS institution in its region and that means AHS "is no longer the optimum partner ... in the changed environment" in American health care, Rich Reiner, CEO of the AHS multi-state division, told the newspaper. The facility is owned by the City of Jellico and AHS will assist civic leaders in finding a new affiliation to keep the hospital operating.

Proactive employer preventive health programs are becoming widely adopted and the Adventist Hospital in Bolingbrook, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, has joined a leading national network, EHE International. "EHE members will benefit from the expertise and experience of Adventist Bolingbrook Hospital doctors who have met our high professional standards," stated Deborah McKeever, president of EHE International.
A Review of the Movie The Record Keeper

By Jim Hamstra, May 13, 2014

I am a contemporary of Ted Wilson. I am a fourth-generation Adventist on my father’s side, son of a pastor and father of a pastor. I was born in an Adventist ghetto. I went to Adventist schools from first grade through college. I have taught Sabbath School classes for most of my adult life. I prefer pipe organs and choirs to guitars and drums. Not that I dislike guitars and drums; I took guitar lessons in my youth, and I was principal percussionist in a very good symphonic band with two records of our work. Still I prefer pipe organs to synthesizers and timpani to traps. I prefer to listen to Mozart or Bach or Vivaldi while I work at my computer. And given a choice between reading a book or watching a movie I will generally choose the book. Rarely will you will find me sitting through two or more hours of a movie; usually I am bored or even dozing long before that. But I can happily read all day.

So why did I spend an entire Sabbath afternoon in an office/warehouse building watching and then discussing what was presumably the final public preview of all episodes of the video series called The Record Keeper? And why would I solicit funds to buy this building in an industrial park behind a cinemaplex in Hillsboro? (That would be the Hillsboro where Intel, the largest private employer in Oregon, has sprawling campuses, where giant cranes are slowly assembling the multi-billion $$ semiconductor fab that will produce their next generation of chips.) Why was I sitting in my church, a church with neither pipe organ nor choir, but with guitars and drums, with its open worship center and classrooms arranged around a central fellowship hall that you could drive a semi through?

Why did our family choose Sunset Christian Fellowship over Sunnyside? We joined this church plant when we moved to Oregon because of its vision – not of our preferred style of worship but of being a place that would attract people of all ages and cultures who would not go to (or return to) a traditional church. This church is our suburban mission. It is a haven of refuge for those who do not trust churches or have been burnt by churches or are burnt-out on churches. And yes, we are a part of the Oregon Conference. And yes, the Oregon Conference fosters a variety of church plants in the greater Portland metro area, with varying goals and approaches, in addition to many conventional churches. Our church invited Jason Satterlund to air all eleven episodes of his “finished” video series in a single viewing. We invited people from all over the Northwest to watch, to offer comments and ask questions. The story of The Record Keeper project is covered in Adventist Today and other available sources, so I will try to avoid repeating what has already been written. Rather, I will review the content of the video series and my reactions and those of others who viewed it.

The Record Keeper depicts various biblical “Great Controversy” events from the perspective of fallen and unfallen angels. To the best of my knowledge, no angels participated in development of the script and production of the videos. So Jason and his creative crew had to use their imaginations to try to capture our imaginations. Most of the episodes depict the angels' actions and reactions surrounding specific events on earth. The events themselves are not depicted, although I feel they are accurately characterized. Some of the episodes are primarily focused on the angels themselves. These are necessarily more speculative since the Bible says very little about angels apart from events on earth. It should be no surprise that these episodes are perhaps more problematic than the others. I found them to be entirely consistent with the teachings of the Bible and of Ellen White but others will doubtless differ.

Much of the filming was done at three different locations, loosely though not entirely corresponding to “heaven,” “earth” and “underworld." These are my own descriptive labels and not the lexicon of the script which largely avoids
conventional religious “angel talk.” In this context, “heaven” refers to the abode of the unfallen angels in the presence of God, and “underworld” to the abode of the fallen angels in the presence of Satan. It is somewhat ironic but perhaps appropriate that “heaven” and “underworld” were both filmed in Oregon, “heaven” being a century-old historic building with a vaulted ceiling, and “underworld” originally built but never used as a prison.

The angels wear clothes reminiscent of the last half of the 1800s. Male actors wear period male costumes and female actresses wear period female costumes. The technology depicted in the sets is from the first half of the 1900s: electro-mechanical museum pieces from the era before transistors, computers and personal electronics. The “retro” elements of this movie feel a bit quaint to this senior geek, but they work very effectively in the context of the story and the locations where it was filmed.

Most Adventists of my vintage or older will not appreciate the synthesized sound track. One person my age, upon hearing the sound track, chose not to watch the videos. It is not heavy metal rock but neither is it the “music of heaven.” In fact, it does not attempt to be sacred music. Its distinctive beat and timbre are more closely associated with NFL and NBA broadcasts than with church. But the sound track fits with the setting of the video, and it works very well.

The cast of “angels” comprises both genders and a broad range of ethnicities from several different continents—much like our own congregation. Although English is the primary language, the angels use at least a couple dozen common languages from different continents in their dialog. In other words, angels are not necessarily Caucasians, and English is not necessarily the language of heaven.

Although reasonable attempts are made to de-emphasize the gender of the characters in the story, nevertheless (and perhaps inevitably, given human cultural biases) the more “macho” roles are played by men, whereas the “softer” roles are played by women. However, if these stereotypes were reversed, the casting of roles would not have been as credible. Still, those who insist on reading gender into every part of the Bible would probably object to any women being cast in superior roles to men in this story. Presumably everyone could have worn genderless “angel robes” but that ploy would not have worked in this setting.

The lead character Raina (played by a woman) is given the mission of creating and preserving an accurate record of events ensuing from the Rebellion. Raina begins her task in a cerebral, determined yet somewhat detached manner (Star Trek fans might visualize an angelic Spock). Raina has “subpoena power” to compel truthful testimony from reluctant and even unwilling angelic witnesses. Eventually Raina becomes caught up in the emotions surrounding the murder of the Prince (like other earthly events, the crucifixion itself is not depicted; only the actions and reactions of fallen and unfallen angels). At this point she becomes an active participant and seeks to be relieved of her mission as Record Keeper.

Humans are not directly depicted in the series, although their actions are discussed. An ancient (or modern?) culture that is fascinated with death and violence is reminded that the blood of the dead cries out from the ground—one of the most effective parts of the sound track for me. The fallen angels derisively refer to humans as “aboriginals” because they have inferior abilities. Likewise, the Divine is not directly depicted, with the possible exception of one scene where a superior being (played by a woman), not identified as angelic or divine that I can recall, talks to Raina. Some have said this was a depiction of the Holy Spirit but that was not evident to me in the scene. And Satan is not directly portrayed, possibly excepting one scene where an unidentified commander of the fallen angels appears. The major subplot explores the relationship between Caden and Larus (played by men). These long-time friends choose opposite sides in the Rebellion. Each tries to “turn” the other to his chosen side. The classic issue of Liberty versus Responsibility is strongly portrayed. How the consequences of their respective choices play out is a central part of the drama.

So what was my reaction to this video series that clearly was not aimed at persons of my background and preferences? Despite its rather annoying (to my classically trained ear) sound track, I liked it! Not once was I bored or tempted to doze off or quietly slip away. Rather I found that it raised ideas and questions that are not often
discussed in Adventist circles (nor probably in other Christian circles). And it actually squared very well with my centrist-Adventist theological perspectives.

For those who are familiar with Ellen White’s writings, the plot line runs closer to Story of Redemption than to Great Controversy. I consider Story of Redemption to be the better read for those not steeped in the lore of the Protestant Reformation, so to me this is entirely appropriate.

The Record Keeper begins with a focus on the responses of fallen and unfallen angels to events on earth, but it quickly broadens to the central issues of the nature and consequences of good and evil. As with humans, so the angels cannot retain any further pretense of neutrality or cordiality when confronted with the murder of the Prince. The last two episodes play out the consequences of these choices and actions among the fallen and unfallen angels. I felt they were the weakest episodes — a definite cut below the quality of the previous nine. In the Q & A session one reason became apparent. Much of the filming of these episodes occurred at a different location. Not all of the scripted scenes could be filmed at this location because they were running low on money and therefore time. One wonders how these episodes would have developed given just one more day of filming.

Those who understand the last judgment primarily in terms of God’s rewarding the saved and punishing the lost may not be happy with the final episodes of this series. But I found their content to be in harmony with the many sayings of Jesus regarding judgment in the gospel of John, including his final remarks to Nicodemus in chapter 3. For me, the judgment teachings of Jesus are fundamental, and I suggest you not try to understand what Paul says in Romans (a favorite of theologians and preachers) until you have first understood what Jesus says in John.

The other speculative episode occurs in the middle of the series. Filmed in “underworld,” it depicts fallen angels torturing one of their fellow fallen angels into submission. Although no such story occurs in the Bible, it is reasonable to conclude that if Satan will physically and mentally abuse humans who have fallen under his control, he would do the same to angels who have fallen under his control. In this episode the illusion that the Rebellion is about preserving liberty is totally shattered. The demons are themselves possessed and obsessed by demonic forces. This is a necessary part of the story. And in my opinion it is an essential principle to understand, especially for a post-modern information-overloaded agnostic society, a society that seems to have forgotten or prefers to ignore the destructive consequences of “alternative choices.”

The extent to which Satan’s torment of his followers is spiritual versus physical is speculative. The scene depicts both mental and physical abuse. The physical violence is not gratuitous by the standards of the entertainment industry. The scene is definitely less graphic than some web blurbs would suggest. Not being a fan of physical violence, I would have preferred a somewhat less graphic scene. I recognize the artistic tradeoff between not being offensive and not being convincing, so I am willing to cut Jason some slack. Ellen White herself describes the countenances of Satan and his angels as being visibly marred by years of rebellion. Arguably this episode is faithful to Ellen White even as it reaches beyond the Bible.

I have no theological issues with the content of The Record Keeper, given its target audience and the differences between video portrayal and prose portrayal of a story. On balance I would say that the consequences of evil are more convincingly portrayed than the consequences of good. This is perhaps the strongest criticism that can be leveled against the series. Whether I would reach the same conclusion given the fully-scripted final episodes I may never know. If one pauses the Bible narrative with Christ in the grave one might well reach the very same conclusion. Despite many victories of good over evil in the Old Testament, the death of Christ leaves us at a point of infinite loss that is not recouped until the sequel of the New Testament. As Paul wrote, if there is no resurrection of the dead we believers are to be pitied above all. Like the Bible narrative, this series cries out for the intended sequel where good ultimately triumphs and evil is eradicated.

Would I release The Record Keeper? To answer this question I need to consider the target audience rather than myself.

I have lived my adult life beyond the boundaries of the Christian church in the world of high technology. Beyond
North America I have spent quality time in the technologically advanced regions of Europe and Asia. My colleagues have included the best and brightest of generations from the Baby Boom through their children. We hail from different religious backgrounds (Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jew, Buddhist, agnostic, skeptic, atheist), sexual orientation and life style. We have worked together and shared our lives with each other. Only a minority of those from conventional religious backgrounds could be considered devout practitioners. For most, religion is a part of their culture but not of their everyday lives. In the technological meritocracy you are judged by your accomplishments; others may be interested in your personal life but your career defines you.

According to the gospel of John, the Comforter works to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. The post-modern society of success where I work desperately needs this. It does no good to present a Savior to people who do not know that they are lost. These are not people who care to listen to what the Christian church has to say. Christianity may be an interesting cultural artifact but it is irrelevant to their everyday lives.

Almost all Adventist outreach activities focus on one of two things: learning the truth and/or bettering your lives. Neither of these has much impact in the world where I work. Of everything I have seen produced by the Adventist church, The Record Keeper would be the first thing I would like my secular friends and colleagues to see. It is sufficiently neutral, yet meaningful to people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. It raises a level of discomfort and deeper spiritual questions for thinking people from any background (including Adventist) that in my opinion is sorely needed. It effectively confronts the secular mind with issues of sin and righteousness and judgment and introduces the Prince as a Savior. “His death was the pardon” may not be an ideal theological formalism but it speaks clearly to the intended audience.

I would complete the filming of the final episodes and re-edit them. Meanwhile I would incrementally release the earlier episodes. And I would press forward with planning for the sequel.

Raised in Michigan, Jim Hamstra attended Adventist schools from 1957 to 1971. He is the founder of StanaTek, an electronics technology consultancy. He has spent more than 40 years leading technology initiatives in the computer and communications industry. He has 28 issued US patents. For most of his adult life Jim has held various church offices and has spent far too much time serving on church and conference boards and committees. Currently he leads a Sabbath School class and the Finance Team at Sunset Christian Fellowship. Jim lives in Oregon with his wife Renae, who teaches Kindergarten at an Adventist school. They have three married sons and four grandchildren.
Long Ago - by Kathie Bartholomew

After Jack blogged on the Grand Canyon, Kathie Bartholomew who says she is a long earth creationist, shared her poem with him. We reprint it here with her permission. She records how natural history shows us clues into both the life of a tree and the life of the earth.

Long Ago

by Kathie Bartholomew

said the tree, the mighty tree, look at me, look at me
from my hist'ry you may learn, from my wood you may discern
    learn of drought and learn of rain
    I did flourish, I had pain
my rings will tell of bygone years, joyous times--and many tears

said the coral in the bay, look at me, and see my way
my layers all the years can tell, my growth rings number days as well
    each rotation leaves a mark
    I need no wooden rings or bark
my rings while I am still alive, record three hundred sixty-five

said the ancient fossil shell, look at me, my wisdom tell
fossil rings show in a year--400 days! recorded here
    faster did the earth spin round,
    before friction slowed it down
every day had hours few, slightly less than twenty-two

said the earth just watch me spin, I do move slower now than then
every year I slower go, not that you would ever know
    but if you can calculate,
    you can estimate the rate
know how many, and just when--days within a year back then

uranium calls us all to see--check a half-life, look at me
from my history discern, from my decay look and learn
three-eighty-million years have passed,  
since the fossil breathed its last  
that was when--the growth rings show--coral lived, so long ago

**Half-life, and geology**, all invite our inquiry  
and their stories all agree, with the coral in the sea  
nature records history,  
we discern antiquity  
lovely coral, mighty tree all say come and look at me

**said the canyon great and grand**, come and see to understand  
ancient wisdom written here, all recorded tier by tier  
without voice small creatures talk  
silent witness in the rock  
eons past, a history book--read my walls, just take a look

**Look again, just look at me--shouts the distant galaxy**  
God in wisdom left a trace—light years, red shift, time & space  
evidence to see and know  
He birthed cosmos long ago  
from the canyon to the sky, God's creation doesn't lie.
John 6:1-15

I’m running. My bag is bumping against my side and I’m getting a little out of breath, but I don’t care. I want to be in the front, where I can see. There’s a jillion people! More people than I’ve ever seen in one place before, even when Abba took me to Jerusalem for the Feast. Seems like the world is made up of legs and elbows and walking sticks. But I’m small, and I can duck under and dash around and wiggle between, and pretty soon—here I am!

That’s more like it. There’s Jesus and those men who always surround him wherever he goes. He’s sitting down! Shh! Hurry up and be quiet, everybody! He’s sitting down like the teachers do, and I bet he’s gonna say something awesome!

Hours and hours have passed. Jesus’ stories are way cool, but I’m starved. Guess it’s a good thing, after all, that Mom made me bring this bag of food.

What? Me? Oh! Jesus is saying the people are hungry and they need food. Well, I guess I could share. One of the men, I heard Jesus call him Andrew, points to me. I stand up respectfully and bob my head. “Five, sir, and two salt fish, also.”

He smiled! He smiled right at me! Did you see that? I’m not so hungry. There are people hungrier, I guess. Mom will make more.

Jesus holds up my bread, like Abba does when he’s going to say the blessing. I bow my head and whisper it with him. Baruch Ata, Adonai Eloheinu, melech ha’olam, hamotzi lechem min ha’aretz.

When I open my eyes, I close them again, and rub them, and blink a few times, but the men are still passing out my bread. My bread, that Mom made this morning. I watched her do it, and it was the same old ordinary flour and oil and salt and a little water! Bread and bread and more bread! Fish, too! There were only two, I swear!

Hands all around me, reaching. I’m standing here with my mouth open and forgetting to get any, so I grab some on the way by, but I just stare at it, at first. Then I taste it cautiously. It just tastes like Mom’s bread. Good. Maybe fresher, not like it rode around in my bag all day. And still Jesus and his friends are passing it around. I can’t believe it!

Leftovers. Can you believe it? Twelve baskets of leftovers, big ones, too! I’m taking some home to Mom. She’ll never believe this!

But here’s the weirdest thing of all. Everybody got so excited, they were going to make Jesus king. I would love that! Don’t you think he’d make the most awesome king ever? And not just because he could magically make food to feed armies, either. I heard some men talking about that. Dumb. He’d be a cool king because... well, just because! I never met a real king, but I don’t think there’s ever been one as good as Jesus would be.

But... he ran away. I don’t get it. Just kind of disappeared. I waited and waited, but his friends finally got in their boat and left.

Why did he run away? Doesn’t he want to be king?

Why?
God Bless you Debonnaire. I've been preaching a sermon I call, "Searching for a Free Lunch" and I've asked that question every time. After all, Jesus started it! He asks Philip in John 6 where they might buy bread to feed so many, as the multitude was gathering, and then the text says, "knowing what He was going to do." So later, when He feed them, they recognized Him as "that prophet" (Deut 18:15) and went to lay hands on Him to make Him king. Jesus throws the bait out there, knowing they would respond like they did and then He ducks into the surrounding hills...makes no sense...on the surface. Here's a clue for those who are joining the conversation. Remember why Jesus taught in parables? See the parables of the sower (Matt 13:18ff) and then look at verse 36.

Rudy Good

One way to think of it is that Jesus provoked the response so that for the true seekers there would be a moment of teachability. Some time needed to pass, but that moment came and John 6:26-27 was the seed he planted. Some of what followed was more than most of them could deal with and the crowd drifted away. But, probably many of them remembered his message which is very reminiscent of what he said to the woman at the well.

Jean Corbeau

Interesting fairy tale. Or was it from a version of the Bible with which I'm not familiar? Or maybe one of the apocryphal gospels?

Rudy Good

Jean,

I think the audience here understands this is a speculative expansion of the story. It is a common tool used to bring familiar Bible stories to life. I have heard this technique used in hundreds of sermons even by very conservative Adventist preachers. I am sure the technique could be used inappropriately if the speculations changed the message, but I see absolutely no harm in this expansion.

Personally I think it is very good for us to imagine ourselves in Jesus' audience in very realistic ways. There is a reason Jesus taught in stories instead of theological lectures. Maybe you could set aside your sarcastic attitude and tell us what you think the harm is in the story. That would be a much more appropriate way to share your opinion. And we would respect you more if you seemed to understand that is all any of us have to share.

Jean Corbeau

I question the use of fictional embellishments to the gospel stories, particularly with children. They have a harder time discerning between fact and fiction. It's one thing to simplify the stories for children, or people not familiar with Scripture, but I'm not sure it's wise to weave in various imagined scenarios. If the Bible isn't interesting enough on its own, the problem isn't with the Bible, it's with the reader.

Elaine Nelson
Jean,

I don't think you're familiar with that story. It's a different genre than the literal reading of the Bible. Imagination and fiction are sinful so better not go there.

Joe Erwin

It seems to me that there is value in this essay because it takes a situation with which all Bible readers and adventist children are familiar, and expresses in contemporary language, the imagined perspective of a different individual than that with which we are familiar. Developing the ability to imagine how a situation may look from someone else's viewpoint is quite important in the developing cognitive capacity for moral awareness--as in giving due consideration to others and treating others as we wish to be treated.

Stephen Ferguson

"I question the use of fictional embellishments to the gospel stories, particularly with children. They have a harder time discerning between fact and fiction."

Yes, just like that devlish author C. S. Lewis, who wrote that truly evil and dangerous series of books the Narnia Series - you might have heard of them? Or how about Vegie Tales, a popular children's cartoon, where they tell Bible stories with talking vegetables. Or how about the Uncle Author children's Bible stories, which I recall are indeed fictional embellishments of Bible stories, not verbatim renditions. Or how about Jesus Christ Himself, who frequently used fictional parables to get points across.

Please Jean, your attitude is everything that is wrong with much of Christianity. How do you think Jesus would approach such an attitude? The story in John 12 and Luke 7 might give us a glimpse.

Jean, I am not trying to be harsh, but your own thoughtless and insensitive words to Debbonnaire are the sorts of things that really hurt people, and make people lose their faith. I have seen it happen many times before, as I assume many others have. I suggest you have a read in James 3, as I assume you have not written it for a while.

Jean Corbeau

I have no problem with parables, stories that illustrate Biblical truth, and so on. But the Biblical narratives are complete in themselves. They may need explaining at times, but they don't need embellishments. All the embellishments and addendum that we may offer only detract from the story--in my humble opinion.

I wasn't trying to insult anyone. I didn't even know who wrote it (no name at the top). I wasn't criticizing her or attacking her character. I just disagree with the approach. Does that make me insensitive? How about the insensitivity of those who continually ridicule those of us who refuse to cave into the evolutionary fairy tale promoted by most of those who post here? If I were that bothered by it, I wouldn't bother to read or post here. If disagreement is interpreted as insensitivity, and one's faith is dependent upon never having to be disagreed with, one has to wonder in what that faith has been placed.
Whether or not the Chronicles of Narnia have value, or not, they were written to illustrate (if only in a crude sort of way) the gospel; they made no pretense of being the story. It wasn't Jesus and the 12 disciples who went through the wardrobe and defeated the White Witch. In fact, someone unfamiliar with the Scriptures (like maybe a Buddhist), upon reading the stories, would certainly get a sense of the difference between good and evil, but I'm not sure he'd associate it with the Bible.

Rudy Good
Reply
about a year ago

Jean,

There is a difference in defending a different or alternative point of view and always insisting you are right and everybody is not only wrong, but damnable. As I said as plainly as I could, your objection stated with your reasoning would be welcome. But, what you offer doesn't usually sound like what most people would call "humble opinions". I can't read your mind, but when I analyze what you say it doesn't seem you give much respect for other people's opinions and don't pay very much attention to the reasoning they share that is the basis of those opinions.

Opinions can be little more than opinions or they can reflect one's best effort to reason out the truth. What I think we ought to be doing here is sharing our best effort at discovering and knowing truth. Your sarcastic, judgmental, and harsh statements appear to scream what is wrong with all you stupid people." You don't need to be timid or lack conviction, just willing to truly weigh the evidence and honestly accept someone may have a better grasp on the truth than you.

Stephen Ferguson
Reply
about a year ago

From Uncle Arthur Maxwell’s Bible Stories, Vol 8, page 41, that bastion of Adventist Christian education, describing the same Gospel story:

‘One morning Ben had been down to the lake with his fishing pole and caught two little fish.

“Look, Mother!” he cried as he rushed into the kitchen, “See what I caught!”

Mother looked and smiled. “They’re not very big, are they?” she said. “What are you going to do with them?”

… “Oh, I going to listen to Jesus again. He’s wonderful. You should go and hear Him too. Could I have three or four of the little barely loves, Mother?”

… Hour after hour slipped by, and still He talked. And still the people listened. They were so interested that they forgot all about eating. Ben even forgot to eat his lunch.

… Ben heard them talking and wondered what it was all about. It could that Jesus was hungry; and no wonder, after talking all day. Then he thought about his lunch.

… And now Ben was handling his lunch to Jesus; and Jesus was smiling at him and saying, “Thank you Ben; thank you very much.”

Jean, you got a problem with Uncle Arthur Maxwell’s Bible Stories for children? It is likewise clearly an embellishment, because I certainly don’t see any reference to a child called Ben in the Gospel, do you? If you do have a problem with Uncle Arthur’s stories, then, well, that probably says exactly what type of person you are.
Jean Corbeau

Reply
about a year ago

His books contain a lot of good stories, but Uncle Arthur isn't my example; Jesus is. I've never read the story you referenced, but I had been the editor of the book, I would have left it out. So I guess that says exactly what type of person I am. I keep my horns hidden, though.

Stephen Ferguson

Reply
about a year ago

Jean if you were the editor of this stallwart R&H Adventist publication, it appears there wouldn't be any stories, because they are all like the one about 'Ben' and Jesus - embellishments of Bible stories for children. You must be a bundle of joy to be around, not even allowing Uncle Arthur! I know people in the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement, who are like the Sevy-Taliban, and even they know and love Uncle Arthur - it about the only form of fiction they do allow for their children.

Joe Erwin

Reply
about a year ago

"Uncle Arthur" was quite a guy. He had a good sense of humor. Not everyone does. Too bad.

Ervin Taylor

Reply
about a year ago

"Uncle Arthur" was also first Adventist (other than EGW) to make a lot money from his books. There is some reason to think that he grossed over a $1 million US ons them--when a million dollars was a lot of money. I, for one, do not think that there is any problem with that, but it is helpful to contrast that with what Adventist publishing houses pay other people for writing for them -- even today.

Joe Erwin

Reply
about a year ago

Ervin, I'm sure you remember the 1959 Cadillacs. Ginormous fins. Others will remember these too. How well I remember when Uncle Arthur drove into the "College Service" Chevron station in Angwin, driving his taupe colored '59 Caddy sedan. I was nearly speechless as I went to the window to ask how I might serve him--not because I was so star-struck over him, as because, there in the passenger side was Graham's lovely daughter, Lorna! Anyway, Uncle Arthur quickly put me at ease by requesting "Give me some of your most holy gas for my most holy car!" Of course, that huge and luxurious vehicle required the highest of high-test fuel....

I never really held this against Uncle Arthur. He could afford the car, and I was actually pretty used to SDA physicians driving such cars--and had often received rides in them. I had grown up on the Bedtime Stories, which were quite good, and had then sold The Bible Story door-to-door (at the same time as Little Richard was doing so). The place where it felt a little strange was when we were authorized to accept a book of Green Stamps as a down payment on a set of books to ensure that they got into the hands of people who could not afford to make the payments on the books--while putting the hard sell on the people by suggesting that buying the books might well keep their children from burning in hell.

Debbonnaire Kovacs
Oh, my, I had no idea this whole discussion was going on! I thought I was supposed to get email notifications when there are comments on my posts! I thank all those who enjoyed the story and found a blessing in it, and I humbly submit that the disagreements might have been more kindly handled. We can all agree to disagree, so long as we don't disagree that Jesus loves us.

For the record, this is not a children's story--it was written for this forum and for my devotional blog. It's simply from the point of view of the child in the story, because I think it would be valuable for us to consider what our small contributions might be to the work of Christ. And because I think the question at the end is worth pondering, too. Why didn't Jesus want to be king? Of course, we know why, 2,000 years later, but what would you have thought if you'd been there?

Debbonnaire Kovacs

Reply
about a year ago

By the way: I have no idea why my name was not at the top. It should always be. I write all the devotional blogs.

Anonymous
1. Educate yourself

First, it is important to have a clear definition of what constitutes abuse. The official definition, used by government agencies as well as our church and others, is the *systematic pattern of behaviors in a relationship that are used to gain and/or maintain power and control over another*. Notice that it doesn’t have to do with anger. It’s all about power and control. This includes:

- **Physical**: Hitting, pushing, biting, punching, choking...
- **Emotional**: cursing, swearing, attacks on self-esteem, blaming, criticizing your thoughts and feelings...
- **Psychological**: Threatening, throwing, smashing, breaking things, punching walls, hiding things...
- **Sexual**: any non-consenting sexual act or behavior (For children under 16, this is *ALL* sexual acts, exposure, or innuendo.)

The first presenter at the End It Now! Summit on Abuse, at General Conference Headquarters, May 1-4, 2014, was Katia Garcia Reinert, who, we were informed, was preparing to defend her doctoral thesis on family violence in one week! She displayed long lists of the long-term costs of early abuse. Here are just a few:

- Hidden problem (global)
  - Affects all levels of society
  - All faiths
  - High health care costs
  - Leads to disability and death

- Deeper unseen scars
  - Spiritual wounds
  - Public health issue
  - Physical and psychological health outcomes

- Unintended pregnancies
  - Abortions
  - Adverse pregnancies – whole list of issues for mother and unborn child
Chronic health problems—weight, substance abuse, depression and addictions, links to diabetes and heart disease, because of the stress the abuse brings.

I know that many of us reading (and writing) this article can attest to much of this from personal experience, and that’s what’s got to stop now!

Because this is *Adventist Today*, I feel reasonably safe in adding that some forms of emotional abuse are regularly used by far too many in this denomination. Blaming and criticizing, attacking thoughts and feelings (or denying emotions entirely), coercive Bible study tactics—these are abusive, though they may often be unintentional, and therefore not fit the definition of systematic, deliberate abuse.

2. Help to educate others

We were told of two systems of training—there are others. One was the Christian Abuse Response Education, a seven-hour course many of us were certified in that weekend. It prepares a person or group of people (better) to create an abuse response team at their church. If you would like to have this training at your church or organization, contact Southern Adventist University Care Project at (423) 236-2629.

Another training system is called **Shield the Vulnerable** training, available online at [www.shieldthevulnerable.org](http://www.shieldthevulnerable.org). According to their website, they are “dedicated to raising the awareness and prevention of the mistreatment of the vulnerable. We work hard to accomplish this goal by training young people and adults about abuse, neglect, predators, bullying, boundaries, respect, and the perils of cyberspace.” It is important to note that the reason they use the word “vulnerable” is because they don’t just mean children, or even wives, but also people who are disabled in any way, elders, and others. In my personal opinion, one of the main jobs God gives every human is to look out for the weaker ones. That means the above categories, yes, but it also means any human being at one time or another. The fact is, *all of us are vulnerable at some point*, including strong adults and including the largest and most powerful men. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers.

3. Supervise!

Our last presenter on Sunday morning was William Chunestudy, who works in Adventist Risk Management, developing resources and getting them into the hands that need them. ARM are the ones who are called when an abuse allegation concerns a church worker or church worker’s child, or is alleged to have taken place on Adventist property or at an Adventist function. He went through the case files on over 500 cases in the past 20 years, and presented some lessons they’ve learned. This was one of the most important: **we need to supervise our children more carefully, with special attention to 11-14-year-olds**. These tweens and earliteens are going through huge hormonal changes, and can be walking time bombs for themselves and others, especially if they are or have been abused and we don’t know it. We need windows in our classroom doors, two adults or one older teenager and one adult with children, and so on. This is not because we mistrust the adults. It’s for the safety of the workers as well as of the children. For example, he said if you are unexpectedly left alone with a kid whose parent hasn’t come to
pick them up yet, go outside or somewhere visible to wait with the child, call the parent, and then call someone else to wait with you. Perhaps this sounds alarmist, pessimistic, or over-reacting, but it really is better to be safe than sorry. This principle is bound up with the next one:

4. Screen your workers
At one point, someone (perhaps Mr. Chunestudy, but I’ve forgotten) asked, “How did these people get to be Sabbath School teachers and child care workers in our church?” I called out, “They said yes!” It got a laugh, but it’s sadly true. I have learned that other churches do background checks, references, criminal checks, and special training on appropriate boundaries before they have someone work with children or other vulnerable people. I have to admit, I feel overwhelmed just thinking about how much work that would be, especially in a small church. But if it saves a child, isn’t it worth it? Or, for that matter, if it saves a worker from a false allegation? These are rare, but they do happen.

5. Safe sanctuaries
The word “sanctuary” means “place of safety.” If our churches and schools are faithful about all of the above, and if all adults keep a watchful and loving eye on all the children and other vulnerable people; if we get to know the people who share pews with us, not so they’ll share their secrets, but at least it’s possible if they need to; we will not just drastically reduce incidents, we will be more like the loving, Edenic communities of faith we long to be. Since we live in a sinful world which is rapidly nearing its lowest point (which will rapidly be followed by its high point—a new beginning!) we will never prevent all abusive incidents. Therefore, we also need to know what to do if something does happen. Stay tuned. Next week: Five Ways You Can Respond Appropriately if Abuse Occurs.
Be Beautiful

http://www.AToday.org/article/2498/poetry-the-arts/poetry-prose/be-beautiful

by Keeley Jones
submitted May 15, 2014

Kenny--charcoal, by Keeley Jones

I strongly believe that if you have a kind heart, and are beautiful on the inside, you will be beautiful on the outside. It shines through.

You see kindness in people's eyes. Joy and love in people's smiles. Laugh lines. Wrinkles permanently by the eyes from smiling so much.
That, to me, is true beauty.

It doesn't matter if you only have a pretty face now, because how pretty will that face be 20 years from now? If you focus on beauty that is more than skin deep, beauty that comes from within, I promise you that it will shine through.

Focus on what really matters. Be kind, always. Love. Laugh, and be beautiful.