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### Weekly Forum Started: Ask the Author of the Sabbath School Lesson
Oakwood University in Alabama is pioneering a new program to interview (on video) authors of Adventist Sabbath School materials.

### The Mantle Has Fallen!
Harry Banks was told in his youth that he was called to be a lifelong leader. The prediction came true, along with the realization that leadership, in the end, is really a pretty basic thing, despite the hype.

### Adventists Join in World Day Against Tobacco Use
Tomorrow, May 31, Adventists will participate in World Day Against Tobacco Use, advocating among other measures a modest increase in the tax imposed on tobacco products.

### Re-Claiming the Bible for a Non-Religious World
John Shelby Spong is seen by conservative Christians as perhaps the epitome of liberal anti-fundamentalism. Yet sometimes it pays to reconnoiter the thinking of the "enemy," as Andy Hanson points out in this book review.

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### ART & ESSAYS, FEATURE
Available to all logged-in subscribers; to apply for a free 30-day subscription, [click here](#).

**Oakwood Alumna Brandie Sutton to Play in Porgy and Bess:** Guest writer Nadya Scott shares exciting news about an Oakwood University alumna, Brandie Sutton, who is gaining increasing fame as a singer and actor, and has landed a role in Porgy and Bess.

**What Remains in Memory:** S M Chen writes about a very ill but grateful woman whose story deserves to be shared...such as the story of the woman with an alabaster box.

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Embezzlement Case Shocks the Walla Walla Adventist Community

By AT News Team, May 27, 2014

Dr. Dana G. Thompson taught economics at Walla Walla University (WWU) until last year. He has admitted stealing $819,761 from the dental practice of Dr. Dan Laizure where he has worked part time as business manager since 2000 and will be sentenced July 17 under a plea agreement in the United States Federal Court of the Eastern District of Washington state, according to assistant U.S. attorney Joe Harrington.

Thompson was a WWU faculty member from 1998 to 2013. He earned a master's degree in finance in 1976 from West Virginia University and a doctoral degree in education from Loma Linda University in 1989, according to the university's web site.

"I did it," Thompson told the Union-Bulletin, the daily newspaper in Walla Walla. He has agreed to plead guilty to one count of wire fraud, to serve 18 months in prison and begin to make restitution to Laizure. He has been forced to sell his home and turn over the profits, sign over his retirement benefits while he is in prison and turn over a coin collection worth $13,000, according to court documents. The court will order a further schedule of payments.

In 2008, the newspaper reported last Friday (May 23), Thompson began to write unauthorized checks to himself and pay off debts that he owed from the dental practice accounts that he managed. It was wire fraud, a Federal crime, because the checks were transferred electronically.

In 2009, Laizure had a heart attack, the newspaper stated, and last year decided to bring another dentist in as his partner in preparation for retirement. As part of the preparations for the partnership, an outside accountant was hired to audit the practice. He found that Thompson was being paid about $77,000 a year for work that took about ten hours a week, states the Union-Bulletin report. Laizure was unaware of this arrangement and discovered that his practice was in severe financial condition.

Laizure told the newspaper that he felt betrayed by Thompson. His retirement savings are gone and he has had to refinance his home to keep the dental practice going. "I esteemed him as my friend," he is quoted as saying.

Adventist Today could not find an Adventist spokesperson willing to comment on the case even off the record. Sources have stated that the case has had an emotional impact among the Adventists who live in this small town where there is an Adventist hospital, an Adventist university and several churches.
Adventist Health System Admits Violations of U.S. Federal Law

By Adventist Today News Team, May 29, 2014

Adventist Health System (AHS), the nonprofit health ministry affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in the United States, has admitted its financial arrangements with some physicians violated the Stark Law. The organization "is engaged in discussions and is fully cooperating with the [Federal] Department of Justice," a financial report states.

AHS operates hospitals in 44 locations across the southern and mid-western U.S., seven of them in central Florida. It is one of the largest nonprofit health care providers in the country.

The Stark Law prohibits agreements under which hospitals compensate physicians for referring patients for tests and procedures. The reason this is illegal is because it might tempt doctors to prescribe unneeded treatments that would both cause unnecessary cost to government programs like Medicare and health insurance plans and place patients at risk.

"Everything we are able to say about this is in our ... statement," Kevin Edgerton, an AHS vice president, told the Orlando Sentinel. The newspaper reported that AHS "did not disclose the amount of improper payments, nor the fines it expects to pay [but] the report implied that management had a number in mind which the system could afford." The AHS statement also noted that "assurance cannot be given that the resolution of these matters will not affect the financial condition or operations of the system."

"As the Federal government aggressively prosecutes health care fraud, more providers are making voluntary disclosures to avoid getting slapped with a large penalty," The Daytona Beach News-Journal quoted Jack Mayer, a health economist with Health Management Associates, a consulting and research firm that advised the newspaper and is not affiliated with AHS. The newspaper also cited two examples of other hospitals involved in similar situations.

Tuomey Healthcare System in South Carolina was ordered by a judge to pay $237 million in fines last fall in a case which has received a lot of attention among health care organizations across the country. Halifax Health, a public hospital in Florida, spent more than $22 million in legal fees since a whistleblower lawsuit was filed against it in 2009 and agreed earlier this year to pay $85 million in fines.

"Part of what is going on with this kind of thing is the convulsive change that is taking place in the American health care system," a retired nonprofit executive told Adventist Today. "The Federal government is pushing very hard to try to reduce the overall cost of health care in the nation. Because the Adventist denomination is a big player in health, it is probably impossible to avoid getting caught up in this."
The Seventh-day Adventist denomination has launched a united prayer campaign for the nearly 300 girls who were abducted by a militant group six weeks ago in Nigeria. Leaders are urging Adventists to use social networking media on the Internet as well as personal conversation and community contacts to pass on the hashtags and slogan #unitedinprayer for #nigeriagirls and join with Adventists in Nigeria in praying for the plight of the enslaved young women who have captured global media attention.

Bassey Udoh, president of the denomination's Eastern Nigeria Union Conference, called for prayer for the girls’ peaceful release, for their families, and wisdom for government officials negotiating with their captors. The militant Muslim group Boko Haram has claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of at least 276 girls from a public Girls Secondary School in Chibok area of Borno State on April 14. Media reports have said the girls were forcibly converted to Islam. “Boko Haram" translated from the Hausa language means “Western education is a sin.”

“These girls are being denied their right to education, which is what will help them to improve their lives and to be the best they can be,” said Heather-Dawn Small, director of Women's Ministries for the denomination's General Conference (GC). “The environment they're living now is one that's limiting who they are as women."

Dwayne Leslie, an associate director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty for the GC, said that Boko Haram’s recent media attention for the mass kidnapping is part of the group’s ongoing violation of religious freedom in the region. “This violent sect has been engaged in a long-running and systematic war against Christians and moderate Muslims in northern Nigeria. I'm deeply saddened by the gross violations of human rights and religious liberty and pray for the safe return of these young girls. It is my prayer that the residents of northern Nigeria will ultimately have their right to freedom of religion fully protected under the law."

A Church spokesman said members can continue using social media tools for other united prayer campaigns. “The hashtag #unitedinprayer will also be an ongoing way for us to call the Adventist Church to pray for specific issues,” said Garrett Caldwell, an associate communication director for the GC.

*The Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.*
National Biker Camp Meeting will Happen June 6-8 in Ohio

By AT News Team, May 26, 2014

The Adventist motorcyclists camp meeting for the United States is scheduled the first weekend in June. Individual bikers and motorcycle clubs are coming in from all over the country for the fourth year in a row since this event began.

The program begins Friday morning with biker games organized by Leroy Bennett, road captain for the Adventist Motorcycle Ministry. Friday afternoon participants who have brought their motorcycles will join a ride through Amish country and share dinner at an Amish restaurant. The speaker Friday night will be Paul Collins, the founder of a nondenominational biker church in Columbus, Ohio. His topic is "My Passion for Jesus."

Debbonnaire Kovacs, the author and retreat leader who serves part time as editor for feature stories and the arts section of Adventist Today, will lead worship at 10 a.m. on Sabbath morning and 9 a.m. on Sunday morning. Her topic Sabbath morning is "Backseat Bikers: The Issue is Trust," and on Sunday morning is "The Armor of God, Motorcycle Style."

The preacher Sabbath morning, Saturday night and Sunday morning will be Herb Orellana, the biker evangelist and singer. He will tell the story of his own conversion from a life of crime and substance abuse and talk about how to proclaim the gospel among bikers. He is heard regularly on the Three Angels Broadcasting Network and leads evangelism campaigns around the country and internationally.

Saturday night Pastor Tom Hughes, organizer of the Biker Camp Meeting and founder of Bible Biker Ministries, will present a concert. Sabbath afternoon there will be another ride for those with motorcycles at the event, ending at a Bible wax museum.

Sabbath dinner and a Sunday brunch are part of the package at no charge. Camping facilities and guest rooms are available at a special rate through Mount Vernon Academy (MVA). The event will be held on the MVA campus in Mount Vernon, Ohio, north of Columbus. Meal tickets can be reserved at www.ohioadventist.org/su_survey.php?survey=8 or by phone at (740) 397-4665, ext 111. To reserve camping sites or lodging, call (740) 485-5427 and leave a voicemail message or send an Email to Dean Rico Woolcock at campmeeting@mvacademy.org.
Weekly Forum Started: Ask the Author of the Sabbath School Lesson

By AT News Team, May 27, 2014

Each quarter the Seventh-day Adventist denomination publishes an adult Sabbath School study guide. The core materials are prepared a couple of years in advance by one of the Bible scholars or theologians at the denomination's colleges and universities around the world.

Sparked by the simple idea that often Sabbath School class leaders and other church members may want to ask questions of the scholar who prepared the lesson materials for that week, a new video series is being produced at Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama. It is named Ask the Author.

The first scholar to be questioned on the weekly series is Dr. Keith A. Burton, a faculty member in the School of Religion at OU. He is the primary writer for the current Sabbath School study guide for the second quarter of 2014.

Each program includes four people sitting around a table with their Bible, study materials and cups of water. The host is Joy Chikwekwe and the second person is the primary author of the current quarter's materials. The other two are different each week, typical church members there to ask the questions, including questions sent in via Email by viewers all over the world.

The fresh weekly segments can be seen on YouTube or Vimeo and downloaded in MP4 format to be screened at your Sabbath School class or Bible study group. The web addresses are:


DVDs and broadcast quality recordings are also available at modest cost.

The producer is Dwayne Cheddar, a faculty member in the television and media department at OU. If you have questions, you can contact him by Email at dcheddar@oakwood.edu or by phone at (256) 726-7189.
Adventists Join in World Day Against Tobacco Use

From ANN, May 28, 2014

The Seventh-day Adventist denomination will join many organizations, religious and secular, around the world in marking World No Tobacco Day this coming Sabbath (May 31). The denomination is supporting this year’s theme, “Raising Tobacco Taxes,” which is a core policy recommendation of its official statement on tobacco from 1996.

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that “a tax increase that increases tobacco prices by 10 percent decreases tobacco consumption by about 4 percent in high-income countries and by up to 8 percent in low- and middle-income countries.” WHO also points out that “tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death globally and is currently responsible for 10 percent of adult deaths worldwide.”

Dr. Peter Landless, health ministries director for the denomination’s General Conference (GC), said increasing taxes on tobacco is one of the most cost-effective ways to reduce the use of tobacco, especially among those who are young or poor. "While we respect freedom of business in the marketplace, we should also respect the freedom for citizens to establish policies that curb [a] cause of death," he said.

Adventists—long known for a promotion of healthful living—were on record against tobacco more than a decade before the denomination was officially established in 1863. As developed counties toughen their restrictions on smoking, tobacco companies increasingly focus on developing countries, where they face little regulation. Many of these countries also have relatively large numbers of Adventist adherents and major projects by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) attempting to increase both development and public health. Adventists are continuing anti-tobacco initiatives through the denomination’s worldwide network of churches, schools and hospitals.

In the Southeast Asian country of Cambodia, where smoking rates are approximately 40 percent among men, ADRA has implemented anti-tobacco projects since 1995. Government health officials could once be seen smoking during meetings, which prompted ADRA to partner with other non-governmental organizations to help reduce the smoking rate which was 70 percent in the mid-1990s. "ADRA is currently working on more awareness education through its rural based development programs and partners where smoking rates have not reduced nearly as fast as in the urban centers," said Mark Schwisow, director for ADRA Cambodia.

In the eastern European country of Bulgaria, about 45 percent of people between the ages of 25 and 64 smoke, said Valerie Dufour, health ministries director for the denomination’s Inter-European Division. The Adventist Church in Bulgaria is one of several group advocating for the reinstatement of a ban on tobacco, which was rescinded by Parliament in 2010, Dufour said.

In the western European nation of Portugal, the Adventist Church has held smoking cessation programs since 1967, Dufour said. More than 4,000 programs have reached some 60,000 smokers in the country.

The Adventist Church first brought the world a smoking cessation program in the 1950s, the Five Day Plan to Stop Smoking which was later named Breathe Free. In July, the church will release an updated version of the program to include new research and methods. The new Breathe Free was revised in collaboration between the International Commission for the Prevention of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency and Loma Linda University.

“We pray that this will serve as an impetus to renewed energy in the Church’s efforts to make the difference in the
lives of many wishing to break the habit," said Landless. "My prayer is that we will answer this call. The need is clear and our duty defined."

_The Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination._
WHICH WAY NOW FOR THE THEOLOGY ORDINATION STUDY COMMITTEE?

by Eric Webster, May 28, 2014   The time has come for this important Committee to make its recommendations to the Annual Council for its consideration. Much time and effort and thousands of dollars have been invested in this enterprise. No doubt those responsible for framing the final statements have a clear sense of the importance of their work and are praying earnestly for the special guidance of the Holy Spirit as they bring their work to completion. I am sure that thousands of our members around the world are also praying for them. I thought I would endeavor to put myself in the place of the members of the TOSC, and ask myself what I would do if I were in their shoes. I sense that there are really only 3 basic ways to go. Those three are:

1. To maintain the status quo. This would mean retaining the practice of appointing women as local church elders where it is felt advisable and also maintaining the practice of appointing qualified women as commissioned pastors. However, as at present, the path to women’s ordination would remain closed.

2. To take a backward step and decree that no women would be appointed in the future as either local church elders or as commissioned pastors. This step would require an action of the General Conference in session to rescind the previous actions along these lines.

3. A forward move. The way would remain open for women to serve as local church elders where that is desired, and the way would also be opened for qualified women called clearly by the Holy Spirit to be ordained as church pastors where the local union conference deems it appropriate for the furtherance of the mission of the church in that particular area of the field.

Let us look more closely at each one of the three options.

1The Status Quo
- Quite clearly the status quo is not a viable or permanent solution for the church. It does not seem wise to have spent five years studying the subject and spending all the time and money on the effort to simply remain where we are. It is quite clear that there are forces pulling the church in different directions. Some want the church to step back; some wish the church to take a forward step.
- If I were a member of the TOSC, I would strongly advise against simply maintaining the status quo. I sense that the Seventh-day Adventist church is still the Great Advent Movement, and that some type of movement is called for. This is especially so in view of the times in which we are living and the winds of change blowing as a result of the mighty working of the Holy Spirit.

2. A Backward Move
- What would a backward move look like? Undoubtedly, there are gradations in the form that this backward step would take. Looking at Paul’s injunctions in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, as well as in 1 Timothy 2, some would insist on following Paul’s counsel that women in church cover their heads with hats or appropriate veils; very few would go all the way in following Paul’s counsel that women remain silent in Sabbath school and church
and only ask their questions of their husbands at home after the service.

- 1 Timothy 2:12 contains two injunctions, “I do not permit a woman:
  - a)  “to teach”
  - b)  “to have authority over a man”

Some want to follow a) and not allow a woman to teach the Word in a Sabbath school class or from the pulpit. Others are less radical and would allow women to teach the Word in the Sabbath school and even the pulpit. Some do not even object to a woman’s becoming an assistant pastor of a church, so long as she concentrates on women and children and does not become the senior pastor of the church. It would be somewhat similar to the following scenario in the medical field: It’s all right for a woman who has graduated from medical school to practice medicine in a hospital, as long as she concentrates on women and children, and provided she never becomes the senior doctor of the hospital and never received an official certificate indicating that she was a full-fledged medical doctor.

There is more uniformity as to what b) might mean. Most who favor a backward step see this injunction as forbidding a woman to be a local church elder or ordained pastor. They see these offices as opening the door for women to exercise authority over men, which is forbidden. Wouldn’t this stance logically call for its advocates to reexamine the composition of the church board? That’s where the real authority of the church lies, and women who serve on the board can be considered to be exercising authority over men.

A backward move would clearly call for:
- Rescinding the General Conference session vote to allow women to be appointed as local church elders.
- Rescinding the provision for women to become commissioned ministers. This provision appears to set the stage for women to desire the final step of full recognition to the gospel ministry, which should be discouraged. This provision would need to be rescinded at a General Conference session.
- Closing the door at all our colleges, universities and seminaries for women to take the theology course. The theology course simply arouses the interest of some women in entering the ministry. While the seminary should be closed to women, our colleges could provide a restructured course that would open the way for women to become Bible workers in the homes.

Taking this backward step might sound easy on paper. Many policies seem innocent and innocuous, and their consequences are only discovered when the policies are actually implemented.

- If we take these backward steps, these would be the results:
  1) Not only would no new women elders be appointed; hundreds of functioning women elders around the world would have to be defrocked. Only heaven knows how many hearts would be wounded, how many mission opportunities would be missed, and how many churches would be weakened.
     I know of women local elders who have served as efficiently and effectively as any male elders. And God has also added his blessing in the service of many of these women elders.
  2) Women would no longer serve the church as commissioned ministers; all functioning female pastors would be defrocked.
     Think what this would mean to our work in China, where ordained women have effectively pastored large congregations. All over the world, women serving as commissioned or ordained ministers would have to be defrocked.
     Again, such an action could only be written in tears, in broken hearts, in diminished mission outreach, and in resistance to the work of the Holy Spirit who has visited male and female servants with His special presence in these latter days (see Joel 2:28-32).
  3) Such a step would guarantee disunity in the church. Thousands of members around the world honestly believe that Scripture does not prohibit women from becoming local elders or church pastors. An action of this nature would not provide opportunity for such members to do what they now believe is a moral imperative. Because it is a moral issue to many, such actions will continue around the world, and the official church will look upon such events as rebellion.
  4) We would also have to seriously question the validity of our Religious Liberty Association. If the denomination
cannot provide religious liberty for members within its ranks who see this as a moral issue, why continue to fund such an Association?

3. The Forward Move

The Forward move would encompass:
1) Maintaining the present position on the opportunity for qualified and spiritual women to be appointed as local church elders. This would only be done where the pastor and the congregation involved are clear that this would be in harmony with the mission of the church and would have the support of the congregation. The beauty of the existing policy is that no minister or congregation is forced to take this step if they are not in harmony with it, or if it is felt that the church in question is not ready for this step. This is certainly the path of religious liberty for the pastor and the congregation.

2) Allowing unions to ordain, not commission, qualified women ministers who are recommended by their employing organization.

Arguments have been presented by our scholars on both sides of this topic. Each side should respect the other and acknowledge that capable and sincere men and women have taken their stand on opposite sides of the debate. It would probably take a very long time for all to take their stand on the same side. Should religious liberty, precious to Adventists, not allow both views to find expression within the church until the time comes when one view might prevail?

The forward move allows for this. When a duly appointed union session comes to a decision to open the door for women’s ordination, this opportunity is given to those conferences that are clear on the matter. No conference would be forced to move in this direction unless it is clear on the issue. For example, even though the Southeastern California Conference sponsors the ordination of qualified female pastors, other conferences within the Pacific Union do not at present ordain their female ministers.

There certainly is sufficient support for women’s ordination from significant segments of the world church, backed by a strong group of sincere Adventist scholarly input. This is not to say that there is not also a significant group of scholars on the other side of the ordination debate. It would be an act of Christian grace for those opposed, to allow Divisions the right to make their own decision either in favor of this step or against.

It would also be an act of Christian grace for a Division to make certain that their action is not blocking one or two unions within their territory from making a forward movement.

At present it seems that the following Divisions are ready for the forward movement:
- North American Division
- Trans-European Division
- South Pacific Division
- Northern Asia-Pacific Division
- Inter-European Division – in some sections of this Division, the mission of the church would be enhanced by allowing women’s ordination, while in other sections, it would not.

Some Divisions would either be willing to follow the action of the Church in plenary session on ordination of women or would allow other Divisions to follow this path, even though they might not yet be ready for such a step. They do not wish this topic to continue to disrupt the unity of the church. They sense that there can be true unity in diversity. These Divisions are:
- Inter-American Division
- Southern Asia Division
- Southern Asia-Pacific Division
- West Central African Division

The following Division does not appear clear on the issue and believes that more study is needed before a decision can be made:
- East-Central Africa Division
At present the Euro-Asia Division discourages the practice of ordaining women to the pastoral ministry. The South American Division believes that women should not be ordained to the pastoral ministry. The Southern Africa – Indian Ocean Division’s report has come out against women in pastoral ministry, and doesn’t think women should even be local elders.

The South African Union is an integral part of that Division, though, and it has serious questions about the report they put out. Questions have been raised as to how this report was put together and whether the various views of the Union were sufficiently canvassed. After all, this Union supports Helderberg College, where women are admitted to the theology course, and its female graduates are called and placed in evangelistic and pastoral fields.

The wisest course for the TOSC is to recommend to the Annual Council that the church move forward on this matter. If that is their advice it would certainly be unethical for the General Conference leadership to attempt to change the direction of that action.

**Conclusion**

The Backward move would lock everyone into one mold. Any departure from that position would be viewed as rebellion. This would be the surest recipe for disunity in the Seventh-day Adventist church.

It’s highly immature for anyone to think that it’s worthwhile to split the denomination over this issue. Of course, local congregations have already been split over smaller issues, such as whether to allow instrumental music in the church or not. And if we choose to split over this larger issue we are actually really splitting over whether we can kneel and pray and place hands on the head of a woman in dedication for service.

Ordination is simply a word; for Adventists, it certainly does not carry the same significance as in the Roman Catholic Church, which inducts men into the order of the priesthood. In the Adventist church there are no priests, whether men or women. There is only one Priest, and that is Jesus Christ. All members of the church are members of the priesthood, and some amongst them are set aside as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and/or teachers. All of those spiritual offices are open to men and women.

Ellen White spoke of women’s being paid from the tithe, and of laying hands on certain women. She stated that in some cases women are better equipped to be in charge of a church than are some men. She was speaking in the days before we had opened our theological courses to women. How much stronger would her words be today!

The Forward move would open the way for those who feel ready to embrace women in all aspects of gospel work to do this. Many parts of the world field would be blessed by this step. Yet there would be place for those who do not feel that women should be elders or pastors to express this view in their local church or Conference. No one would be forced to do what he or she feels is not in harmony with his or her beliefs. This would be the path of true religious liberty within the Adventist church.

If the church decides to move forward at the next General Conference session, there is no need to punish those unions who have already moved forward. Nor does action need to be taken against a Conference who appointed a woman as its President. Such actions would be small and petty. Sometimes the Holy Spirit moves the church membership in a certain direction and only later does the world church catch up in its policies to what the Lord has already been doing in the field.

In considering the Backward move or the Forward move, I cannot but help think of the 12 spies who returned with their report after surveying the promised land. Only two believed they could move forward; the other 10 were not prepared for such a move. As a result of rejecting the Forward move, the children of Israel spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness.

Today there are many more than two spies out of 13 (Divisions) who are prepared to move forward in faith. If the church does not move forward on this issue of spiritual gifts, I am afraid that the church (like Israel of old) will spend another 40 years wandering in the wilderness.

Let us move forward, prayerfully granting religious liberty to all members and giving the opportunity for all, both men and women, to use their gifts for the finishing of the work and the establishment of God’s kingdom of glory.
"A Death Like No Other"

by Lawrence G. Downing, May 28, 2014

“A Celebration of Life” - This phrase is above the photo of a smiling young man with pulled-back hair parted in the middle, wearing dark-framed glasses. He is shown wearing a moderately-heavy jacket over a white tee shirt. A closer look leads the eye to note the small, oblong-shaped earring that hangs a quarter of an inch below his left earlobe. His sideburns are cut sharply off at a point some half inch above the lowest portion of the ring. He is smooth shaven save for a small “tickler” under his lower lip. The first impression is that this is a warm, friendly open guy who enjoys life. If one read no further, that is the way it would be. The words printed under the picture change everything.

Mark Christian Ashworth
August 28, 1967 - April 10, 2014
Pacific Union College Church
Angwin, California
Sunday, April 27, 2014

April 10, 2014, is the day Mark took his life. [1]

Suicide is the ultimate statement one can make that he or she is dissatisfied with some aspect of his or her life. Suicide is the last desperate attempt to make a statement that when done ends debate. Those who survive are left to deal with the remorse, the loss, the questions.

For a parent, family members and others close to the one who has chosen to end life by suicide, the act defies one’s ability to comprehend. Logic fails. The deepest stirrings of the soul are violated, and we are left to struggle with a closure that will not close. The mind will not allow a final placement; a border that will hold the event in check. Our inclination is to push back, repress, ignore and talk around. “It was a sudden, unexpected death.” Mark’s memorial service did not fall within this tradition. The family made it clear: their son; their brother; their friend took his life. They made it clear to us that they wished to acknowledge the reality of this act and the life-choices that had a powerful effect on Mark’s life. (Disclosure: Carolyn Ashworth, Mark’s mother, is my wife’s cousin. I did not know Mark. When he was a pre-teen, we may have casually met on one or two occasions. Warren Ashworth, Mark’s father, was for many years a member of the PUC religion faculty.)

The family members recognized that for Mark, their return to the United States from Argentina, where the parents had been in mission service, was traumatic. Mark became less willing to fit into anyone’s mold. He was a free spirit. He enjoyed music, art, and dance. He had his core of friends, but this core did not always include family.

At some point in his high school years, Mark began to experiment with various mind-altering substances. In his early twenties, he broke away from his roots and set out on a journey that would take him and a “soul mate” about the United States in a VW squareback decorated with technicolored art and unique statements. His life-journey would eventually take him to Talkeetna, Alaska. Here he found a community that accepted him as he was and allowed him to struggle with his demons. His substance abuse became more pronounced, his estrangement from family more
pronounced. He stayed in Alaska most of 19 years. In August of 2013 Mark called his parents and asked if he could come home. The family welcomed him, so grateful to have him home. It soon became apparent to the family that Mark was struggling with a deepening depression. Consultations with medical professionals informed the parents that Mark’s frontal lobe was not working well and many of his neurotransmitters were destroyed. Perhaps in two to four years, the medical personnel opined, he might see things more clearly. Until that time, the remedies of choice were prescribed medications combined with acceptance, patience, support and love. And so it was, until the day Mark’s sister found him in his parent’s home.

The family might well have done as others who have known the shock and embarrassment of a child or family member who has chosen suicide. The Ashworths chose an alternate. They asked an Adventist minister, Pastor O. Kris Widmer, to conduct the memorial service. The family knew that he had addressed suicide in a Sabbath sermon. They requested that he share his personal and biblical insights on the subject of suicide and that he describe what people should look for that indicates a person may be considering suicide. In his homily, Pastor Widmer addressed questions that are raised when suicide occurs: Is suicide the one unpardonable sin? No, said the pastor. He gave powerful expression to the biblical hope that is essential to the Christian faith and gave assurance, based on St. Paul’s statements, that nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from the love of God. And “nothing” includes suicide.

The following statements were printed as an insert in the Memorial Service program under the heading:

Assessing and Accessing God’s Comfort for “A Death Like None Other”

Suicide
1. A Death Like None Other
2. The Silence and the Stigma
3. It is growing in frequency
4. It affects all ages
5. It touches us all
6. It touches us regularly

The Hopeless View
1. The Verb: “Commit”
2. Doctrine: “Immortal Soul” and “Immediate Heaven” doctrines requires all suicides be deemed “lost”
3. 6th Commandment (Thou shalt not kill—my inclusion)
4. (Judges 9:52-54—Abimelech)
5. I Samuel 31:4—Saul
6. I Samuel 17:23—Ahithophel
7. I Kings 16:15-20—Zimri
8. Matthew 27:3-5—Judas

The Hope-Filled and Hopeful View
1. The Verb: “Died by – ”
2. Doctrine: Death as Sleep – “you’re not going to glory now anyway, so keep living!”
4. Ephesians 2:4-9 - Saved by Grace!
5. Titus 3:4, 5 - Saved by kindness and mercy of God
6. Psalms 87:6 - The Lord shall count where you were born
7. I Samuel 31:5 - Armor Bearer;
8. Judges 13-16: Samson;
a. Hebrews 11:32
9. John 8:21-24 - Jesus
To Anyone Contemplating Suicide:

“If you think suicide will keep you out of the Kingdom and this thought keeps you alive - just keep thinking this!”

“This too shall pass.”
“It gets better.”
“Do yourself no harm; we are all here!”
There is help. Get that help.
We want you here with us!
You are a unique creation: 1:500,000,000 chance of existing.
Ecclesiastes 1:24; 2:12,13; 5:18; 9:7-10; 11:7-10 - Enjoy life!
Come; let’s get some ice-cream!
Please stay with us!
Semicolon! [...] Indicates something that could have ended; but didn’t.

To any family grieving “A Death Like No Other”

The Armor Bearer, Samson, Jesus
Suicide is NOT the unpardonable sin. Not even close!
Psalms 139:13-18 - We are not hidden from God when we are formed. God has our days written down before there is even one of them.
Psalms 139:23, 24 - Know my heart! Know my anxious thoughts!
Job 14:5 - Our days and months are determined with God. There is a limit that none of us shall pass.
Job 14:13-17 - Oh...hide me in the Grave! My sin is sealed in a bag, My iniquity is glued together.
God knows the limit of our lives...and the limit of our deaths (Job 14:13)
Frankly...the angels are amazed that we hold up in this world as long as we do! We were not designed to cope with the troubles of this fallen earth. We were supposed to live in perfection.
Romans 8:35:-39 - NOTHING can separate us from the love of God.

Embrace the semicolon;
“The author is you; the sentence is your life;
Your “story” isn’t over;”

One could add to some of the statements in an attempt to explain what the reader believes the writer intended. That will not be done! The words stand on their own. Some may debate whether certain of the statements do not fit the situation, or take an oblique position, or suggest that it is better to ignore the negative and center on the positive. These options the family rejected. Parents, siblings and others close to Mark were united in the decision that it is important to accept reality and not gloss over a significant and traumatic loss and how that loss impacts their lives. Eric, Mark’s younger brother by five years, gave powerful expression to this decision in his emotional and insightful eulogy. The good news for the family and friends is that Mark, in his final seven months of life, was a changed man. He had begun his return to the faith of his childhood.

The memorial service was streamed live around the world. More than 250 people took advantage of the
opportunity to attend the actual service. The Pacific Union College church has archived the service on their web site. This service, I believe, will prove a support and encouragement to any whose life has been impacted by a suicide.

Mark's Memorial Service can be accessed online at PUCCHURCH.ORG. Click on “Livestream” in the lower middle part of the page. Then click on “Mark Ashworth Memorial Service.”

[1] The Ashworth family has read and given their approval to the contents of this article. LGD
It's been almost six weeks, and I think maybe I'm starting to regain some normal intelligence. I do believe it was a week after the astonishing resurrection before I stopped crying, and another week beyond that before I could speak in full sentences.

I was there, you see. I wept along the way as my Lord dragged his cross, uncomplaining. I was horrified and sick at the sight of his bloody, torn body. I saw them…nail him…

Can't think too much about that or the ordeal that followed.

I didn't sleep for three days—none of us women did. We did our best to comfort the two Marys, although his mother seemed more resigned and less frantically distraught than Magdalene. I helped gather the burial spices, and waited through the dark Sabbath, and—

I will always wish I'd gone with Magdalene in the dark predawn hours on First Day, but then, I don't begrudge her the extra encouragement. She needed it, and it's been the settling of her, I think. I was one of the first women to the tomb, anyway.

I saw angels!

I've been present many of the times that Jesus has appeared in the past few weeks. It's so different. We used to press around him, pester him, try to get him to do what we wanted, and scold him when he didn't…I'm embarrassed about it now. At first, we were so respectful and on our best behavior that it was uncomfortable, but Jesus soon set us at ease again, as he always has. Now, we press around him in a different way, trying to soak in his presence while we have it.

And today, we're walking to Bethany. There's quite a group of us. I'm trying to hear what he's saying.

Somebody's asked, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

I smile and shake my head. These men. Don't they get that Jesus is not about political power?

"It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority," Jesus replies, and I press forward to hear more clearly. Does that mean he will remove the Romans and restore Israel eventually?

But he seems to have changed the subject. "I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you, which you have heard of from me. John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

He has told us several times that he is sending “the Spirit” or “the comforter” to us. I know I, for one, will need a lot of comforting if Jesus goes away. I can hardly bear to think of it! But he does seem to be preparing us for a separation...and come to think of it, he’s told us the Spirit will teach us all the things he hasn’t taught us yet, so maybe we’ll understand about the restoration of the kingdom in time, too.

Jesus has stopped at the top of the hill and turned to face us all. He is smiling that smile only Jesus has, the one that makes me feel taller, and safer, and able to do anything he wants. “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.”

Oh, no!! I gasp and then hold my breath as my head begins to tip back on my neck. Jesus is rising in the air! I stare until my eyes burn, losing all sense of the crowd around me. I must never, never forget that smile! I must bear it with me always. I choke up a little as I hear his last audible words:

“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

I have a hand over my mouth, and tears are pouring down my face. I can’t see him anymore. Will I ever see him again? I become aware that hundreds of others surround me, all faces gazing up, all breaths suspended.

I am startled to hear a voice, and my head snaps around to look at two strange men, clothed in white. They look—could they be—? "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?"

Well, I—where else can I look? My Lord has left!

The men smile, and it’s almost like looking at Jesus. “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

I breathe again. He’s coming back! That’s right, he always did say he was coming back. Slowly, reluctantly, we turn away from the hill to walk back to Jerusalem. I notice that many of the crowd are streaming off in different directions.

By the time we reach Jerusalem, there are only 120 of the 500 we had with us on Olivet. Almost automatically, we go back to the upper room, and we start to pray…
The Mantle Has Fallen!

by Harry Banks, May 29, 2014  

In the summer of 1969 I took a discussion class from Gladys “Elaine” Giddings, who was the chair of the Andrews University Communications Department. The topic for the discussion class was leadership. At the time I thought it should have been a required class for everyone, but it was optional, and only seven of us gathered around the table that first day of class. Elaine entered the room, stood and looked directly at each of us in silence and announced sternly, “Gentlemen, the mantle has fallen.” As a young inexperienced seminarian I was stunned. How could she be so certain? Did she have any idea how inexperienced we were? She began to explain. . . . We were preparing to take on positions of leadership. We learned that no matter where we were, or what positions we held or were assigned, we would in fact be leaders. Leadership would be a function of what we did, questions we asked, how we said things, and what we said. The titles held, the appointments received, were not really how leadership was achieved; what mattered was what we did. With the skills we were learning in the class, no matter where we went, we would be leaders. On the church payroll, and off the church payroll, I have learned that Elaine was right! She was symbolically referring to the mantle that fell from Elijah to his protégé, Elisha, when Elijah was taken up in his chariot of fire. And, like it or not. . . . whether good or bad, I did end up leading in some form or another. And just in case you thought you were out of the conversation about E leadership: Don’t forget that 1 Peter says that we are all spiritual stones, a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:5). Soo . . . you too, whether you like it or not, . . . are a leader. . . . The mantle has fallen. . . . Just sayin’.  

Francis Chan and In His Steps

Each Sabbath I meet with the In His Steps Community Fellowship, a gathering which includes former atheists, Baptists, Methodists, Adventists and nondenominational seekers. How we all came together for Sabbath morning Bible study is another story. A few weeks ago we were studying Francis Chan’s “Crazy Love” session 9, “Who Really Lives That Way?” Chan calls attention to James 5:17: “Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 5:18, Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops” (NIV). He notes the unbelievable line. . . “Elijah was a man just like us. . . .” 

Hmmm. . . . You gotta be kidding. . . . Really? What was James thinking? So this has gotten me thinking about E(lijah) Leadership. Since so many things these days start with “e”, like e-mail, I’m going to use E as a symbol of the Elijah person spoken of in scripture. The first obvious question that popped up was, if E was a man just like us, how come we aren’t like E? Huh? Huh? Of course, that is our Western syllogistic sort of construction, which frequently does not make sense, but we tend to play with it and ask that kind of questions anyway. It does allow us to look at things from a different perspective.

Over the years I’ve had opportunity to fellowship with several different brands of Christian faith, and serve on several pastoral search committees. It seems that no matter which brand of faith one might deal with, at the administrative level nearly all governing bodies have similar concerns. Are the leaders stable? Do they avoid alienating the local or national government? Do they foster good relationships within the congregation? Will they take direction from their superiors?

So I have often wondered if there is any administrative level of church government that would hire E? He alienates the highest levels of government. He causes a national crisis by praying for a drought. Just to name a few items on his resume. . . .

But we are not done yet. . . . There is more. . . .
Turn the Hearts of Fathers to the Children

What about that passage in Malachi 4:5: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 6 And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (NIV).

Is anybody out there turning the hearts of the children to their fathers? What would such a person be doing that would lead to that kind of reformation and healing?

Has Anybody Seen E Lately?

So I’m still wondering: has anybody seen Elijah out there lately? Seems like he should be showing up one of these days. . . . If we take a hint from James, very likely he will be just like one of us. . . . He may or may not be on an official payroll. . . . but he will have such influence that the very basics of family integrity will be restored.

Have you ever noticed that most of the time the standard expectations of society are seldom where God chooses to work? His Son as a babe from unremarkable parents. His society was looking for a king.

Moses out of a river, a murder and a wilderness. . . . Who would have thought?

Are we looking for E in denominational employment? Or would E be independent? If E was independent how would we relate to E if it really was E? Would E be young? Old? Male? Female? North American? Asian? How would you recognize E when you saw E?

So where will E come from? Are you E? Has the mantle fallen on you? Elijah is a man as we are. Are you a person like Elijah? What’s keeping you? What are you praying for?
Re-Claiming the Bible for a Non-Religious World

by John Shelby Spong

Reviewed by Andy Hanson

Let me preface this review with the following caution: If yours is an unshakable belief that the Bible is literally the word of God, read no further. If it's your belief that you are putting your soul in jeopardy by reading "heresy," as defined by the 28 fundamental doctrines of the Adventist church, read no further. If you believe that Ellen White's biblical commentary will resolve any questions that might occur to you as you read the stories and history and poetry and wisdom literature and drama and prophecies and apocalyptic chapters in the biblical record, read no further.

If you believe that only the Adventist Church is capable of correctly determining "right" beliefs and behavior, read no further. If you believe that reading this book might force you to decide between godless evolution and Christian faith, read no further. And finally, if you believe that I am under the influence of demonic powers for suggesting that you open your Bible and read along with Spong's Bible commentary, read no further.

If you're still with me, I have provided a Publisher’s Weekly review of the book. Following the review, there are two links: One will allow you to browse a significant portion of the book without charge; the other connects you to a YouTube interview with the author.

For most Adventists, an intellectual engagement with Spong's ideas becomes a debate with a very skillful disputant. I believe that you will find the contest exhilarating and your faith enlivened.

"Episcopal bishop Spong, author of more than 20 books, may be retired, but he hasn’t stopped. His newest grows from a series of summer lectures that clue the people in the pews on the kinds of topics biblical scholars discuss among themselves: for example, biblical characters such as Judas and Joseph, Jesus’ earthly dad, appear to be literary creations.

“Everybody who hasn’t abruptly left the room on hearing it suggested that the Bible may not be literally true is in for a wonderful ride as Spong tours Christianity’s sacred text, leaving little unexamined and demythologized as he urges Christians to grow up and take the Bible seriously—just not literally. Spong’s arguments aren’t new, but he has the gift and motivation for making biblical scholarship accessible; he writes with charity and clarity. His fans will want this for Bible study groups; his detractors may simply decide that Spong, still unwelcome, is being his heretical self once again.”


Browse Inside Re-Claiming the Bible for a Non-Religious World
http://www.amazon.com/Re-Claiming-Bible-Non-Religious-World-Shelby/dp/0062011286/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1331879384&sr=1-1#reader_0062011286

A Spong YouTube Interview
Bishop Spong deplores the way the Bible has been used to justify most of the world's evils; from gender inequality, homosexuality and child abuse, to capital punishment, destruction of the environment, and the evils of birth control. In the interview, he discusses the rise of Muslim Fundamentalism and laments that congregations at mainstream churches are in freefall. ( Originally aired May 2005)
Though I may not share Spong's views on the historocity of the Bible, I totally agree that most of us are far more concerned in proving it to be literally true than we are with what the stories mean. We can lose sight of their real truth when we become obsessed with proving they actually happened as stated in every detail.

Spong is no more objective than the rest of us, and has a personal belief system to share since he has given his life to his study. It's interesting that the Bible is felt to be less reliable by certain scholars than other ancient histories.

But he is right if he is saying we put the literal above the meaning and interpret it out of its context.

Anonymous
Oakwood Alumna Brandie Sutton to Play in Porgy and Bess

[Link to article](http://www.atoday.org/article/2516/features/articles/oakwood-alumna-brandie-sutton-to-play-in-porgy-and-bess)

by Nadya Scott
submitted May 29, 2014

The upcoming Princeton (NJ) Opera Festival’s June presentation of George Gershwin’s “Porgy and Bess” will feature globetrotting *wunderkind* and Oakwood alumna Miss Brandie Sutton, performing as “Clara.”

Sutton will begin month-long Porgy and Bess rehearsals on Friday, May 23rd, and the performances will start at the end of June.

A Huntsville, Alabama native and 2005 Oakwood graduate with a bachelor’s in music/voice concentration, Sutton returned in early May to her alma mater for her “Clara-prep” with Dr. Julie Moore Foster, her vocal coach since 2002. “Brandi’s breathtaking vocals, coupled with her intense training and teachable spirit, have led her to secure multiple main role performances since her graduation,” remarked Foster, an Oakwood University vocal pedagogy assistant professor.

Sutton performed recently at:

- The annual New Year’s Eve Concert in Copenhagen, Denmark, with the Royal Danish Symphony Orchestra;
- A 10-day tour in Russia in March 2014, with the Opera Noire of New York; and
- Solo recitals at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, and at the Lincoln Center’s Merkin Concert Hall in New York City.
She has also had several performances at The Catholic University of America’s Benjamin T. Rome School of Music, where she obtained her master’s degree in vocal performance.

Sutton prepares for a performance by first studying and picking apart the music for the performance. “If the piece is in a foreign language – such as my performance as Cleopatra in Handel’s “Giulio Cesare” – I will first translate the piece, to make sure I fully understand what I’m singing!” she explained with a chuckle, pianissimo. Then for fine-tuning, she attends voice-training sessions with her vocal coach. Right before her performance, however, Sutton makes sure to pray and spend time with God before going on-stage.

Brandie praises God for her upcoming performance as Clara in “Porgy and Bess.” She says, “A lot of Black opera singers do ‘Porgy and Bess,’ and get pigeonholed or typecast in the role; but I’m grateful and glad to have this opportunity.”

Sutton confides that she won the role for Clara after rushing to audition for it during a lunch break from a rehearsal in preparation for a three-week, 15-city tour with The Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, led by trumpet legend Wynton Marsalis!
Upon completion of a two year overseas assignment, I returned Stateside to begin a radiology residency at Stanford. The residency was a combined one, the first six months of which were spent in radiation therapy, the remainder in diagnostic radiology.

At that time, Stanford was a renowned center for radiation therapy (or radiation oncology), headed by Dr. Henry S. Kaplan, whose main contribution to medicine was his development of potentially curative treatment of Hodgkin disease and other lymphomas by high dose external beam radiation, delivered at that time by a linear accelerator. Many other kinds of solid malignancies were also treated.

Accordingly, patients of all ages and walks of life came from all over the world to have consultations and treatment at the Mecca of the West.

One was a member of a family that owned a successful furniture store in the Bay Area. Recently diagnosed with a type of lymphoma, he was cooperative but very much matter of fact and all business. Which is not to say that he was unpleasant. I’ll call him Mr. B.

Another patient was a pleasant, attractive woman in her 30s with breast cancer which had been recently discovered to be metastatic. She came to see if we could provide some relief from the discomfort of a number of subcutaneous masses she had developed. I’ll call her Ms. M.

To function effectively in such a setting, where one knows that many patients will not be cured, but (hopefully) at least palliated, and some will endure the multitude of unpleasant side effects of radiation without necessarily having their lives prolonged, requires a delicate balance between compassion and sangfroid.

We residents-in-training saw patients in consultation before they were selected to have treatment, and continued to see them during their therapy, which usually consisted of sessions several times a week for at least several weeks. Actual treatments were administered by a technologist familiar with the operation of the sophisticated equipment.

So, out of the myriad of other patients for whom I was responsible, why do Mr. B and Ms. M have a special place in memory?

Mr. B I remember because he typified the patient we preferred to have. Seemingly otherwise
healthy, he showed up for his treatments quietly and on time, did not develop any unanticipated side effects, and, to my knowledge, was cured of the disease which, for reasons unknown, came to him in his 40s.

Ms. M appeared to be of a lower socioeconomic class, was less healthy when I first saw her, and did not respond as well to her treatments. Although some of her subcutaneous masses shrank, they did not all disappear. And she visibly weakened during her course of treatment. But she was always cheerful. I did not sense the depth of her gratitude until she brought me an unexpected gift near the completion of her treatments. I was touched by the gesture of appreciation, thanked her, and wished her well. But dread filled my heart, and it surprised me not at all to learn that, not long thereafter, she succumbed to the disease that, without reason or relent, took her in her prime.

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In contemplating the past in order to become a more perspicacious person in the present (only the self-examined life is worth living - Socrates), several incidents from Holy Writ come to mind.

I recognize the lack of perfect parallelism in each of these incidents with the stories of Mr. B and Ms. M, and some may argue that it’s a stretch to even attempt to connect them.

Regardless, I’m reminded of the widow’s mite (Mark 12:42-44), in that the person who was less able to gift (Ms. M) was the one who did so. In addition (and the irony doesn’t escape me) she was the one we helped the least, because her cancer had progressed beyond the point of cure. Yet she was the most appreciative.

I also think of the woman who, as a gesture of appreciation, poured precious ointment of spikenard from a box of alabaster on the head of Jesus at the house of Simon (Mark 14:3-6).

And, lastly, I’m reminded of the ten lepers Jesus healed, and of the one (the only one, a Samaritan, no less), who returned to thank Him (Luke 17:12-19), so great was his appreciation.

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I know nothing of Ms. M beyond what I have related here. But I feel, despite it having happened decades ago, her little story deserves to be told, and perhaps remembered.

I would also like to think that there is a special place for people like her somewhere in the Kingdom.