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Changes Voted by Publishing House Constituency Meetings

From an Official Release, June 17, 2014

Update added at the end of the story on June 18

The biggest change in more than 150 years was voted by the two original publishing houses operated by the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in parallel constituency meetings today. The changes were necessary to avoid bankruptcy and it is hoped by denominational leaders will strengthen “the digital presence” of the Adventist faith in the United States, according to an official release written by Andrew McChesney, the recently arrived news editor of the Adventist Review. Mark Kellner, who has served in that role for a number of years, is now a reporter for The Deseret News daily newspaper in Salt Lake City (Utah).

Both meetings were held at the denomination’s headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland. The delegates to the constituency meeting of the Review & Herald Publishing Association (R&H), the original Adventist institution started by James White in 1861 before the denomination was organized, voted 153 to 66 to adopt changes that essentially end its existence. The delegates to the constituency meeting of the Pacific Press Publishing Association voted 42 to 1 to adopt changes that make it an institution of the denomination’s North American Division (NAD) instead of the General Conference (GC).

“I believe that God led the deliberations that took place today,” Pastor Daniel Jackson, NAD president, was quoted in the release. “We believe this is an opportunity for the Adventist Church in North America. This is God’s providence, and by His grace we will utilize it to His glory.”

Following the vote on the reorganization plan in each meeting, the constitution and bylaws of each corporation were amended to implement the changed structure. Each of these votes required at least a two-thirds majority, which was achieved. These were the final steps in a controversial plan that has been discussed for years. The goal is “to build Pacific Press into a market-sensitive publisher capable of holding its own” at a time when readers increasingly turn to the Internet and related mobile devices instead of traditional paper and ink products.

The GC governing body had previously approved the plan as had the boards of each of the institutions. The changes are necessary because R&H is essentially bankrupt after repeated efforts on the part of the GC to pump cash into it. It will “unwind operations” on its 80-acre campus built in Hagerstown, Maryland, in the early 1980s when Southern Publishing Association was closed down in Nashville (Tennessee) and folded into R&H.

Some employees and assets may be transferred to the Pacific Press in a suburb of Boise, Idaho. Pacific Press will become “the … major institution” of the NAD with its own printing facilities. Unneeded R&H equipment and property will be sold, with the proceeds going to Pacific Press to build the capacity for the printing operations to run multiple shifts, “making production more cost effective.” It also has a mandate to develop E-books, apps and other digital products.

“If we don’t invest in the digital world, we will be left in the same spot as Kodak, which invented the digital camera but refused to embrace changing realities and now is virtually gone,” said Robert Lemon, the GC treasurer who has served as a board member for both R&H and Pacific Press. Eastman Kodak, the century-long leader in photographic film, invented the digital camera in 1975 but failed to keep up with a rapid shift toward digital photography in the late 1990s. It filed for bankruptcy in 2012. “We believe there is a tremendous future for publishing, but not necessarily for
printing," Lemon was quoted in the official release.

No one disputes that people like to read. The question is how they read today compared to a decade ago, when books and magazines dominated the world just as they had done since the days when the Adventist movement began in the mid-19th century.

Rather than relying on a handful of weekly or monthly church publications delivered by the post office to stay informed, Adventists nowadays can get information instantly though various news web sites, including Adventist Today. There is also regular news on the denomination’s Hope Channel that has a global reach via satellites and cable television. There are also several independent television channels operated by Adventists and scores of radio stations around the world, including one in Washington DC that has the largest listening audience of any religious broadcaster in the U.S. capital.

“It’s the same with many other things,” Lemon said. “I get a hard copy of the Sabbath school study guide at home, but I use the app on my iPhone. I have all of Ellen White’s books in my library, but I seldom go to any of them for reading … I look up everything on my iPhone.”

Lemon is not alone. In one example cited in the official release by McChesney, who until recently worked for a secular news organization in Russia, the Moscow International Church recently canceled its annual subscription for English-language Sabbath school materials. The reason; class members took a poll and found that everyone was using downloaded lessons on their smart phones and computers.

The shift in technology and reading patterns has hurt the sales of Adventist publications, and denominational leaders feared that both Pacific Press and R&H would fold without major changes. R&H’s revenue dropped from $45.8 million in 1985 to $21.8 million last year, while its workforce shrank from 315 full-time employees to 112 today. At Pacific Press, revenue slid from $47.7 million in 1985 to $17 million last year, and its staff more than halved from 210 full-time employees in 1985 to 99 today.

But those figures reveal only a partial picture. Since 2000, R&H has posted a loss every year except in 2011 and 2012 when the GC purchased 46 acres of undeveloped land on its campus for $11.5 million. In 2013, however, R&H reported an operating loss of $1 million, and statements issued to the R&H board through April this year showed that losses had already come to $965,000 in 2014.

Pacific Press, meanwhile, has shown profits every year since 2000 except in 2008, when it lost investment income amid the U.S. financial crisis. The long-term performance stability of the publishing house has left it with $25 million in working capital today.

“The bottom line is that over the last 28 years both organizations have experienced multiple changes in leadership … and … the same challenges of declining sales and deteriorating distribution systems,” Lemon said. “But somehow with the corporate culture at the Pacific Press, they have managed to remain profitable, while the Review and Herald has had more years of loss than gains and especially during the last 10 years.” Lemon stressed, however, that even Pacific Press needs the restructuring because the publishing industry is “declining, declining, declining.”

The emergence of digital media also poses a challenge to distribution. Traditional methods of distributing Adventist publications through denominational book stores and Literature Evangelists are no longer viable, at least in the U.S., Lemon said. Book stores of all kinds are scrambling to survive, as evidenced by the financial struggles of major retailers like Borders and Barnes & Noble, while the distribution system for books has gotten so efficient that it has become impossible to earn a living selling books door-to-door, he pointed out. The average book published by an Adventist publisher in the U.S. sells only 4,000 to 5,000 copies over its lifespan, he said.
How many R&H employees may be offered jobs at Pacific Press and which product lines may be moved there are among the issues that the NAD will need to decide in the coming weeks. "I probably have more questions in my mind than I have answers," Dale Galusha, president of Pacific Press, told McChesney. He said Pacific Press would only decide which assets it might absorb and how many staff it might need once the NAD determined which product lines it wanted to support. Galusha vowed that Pacific Press would honor all R&H magazine contracts, including *Message*, *Insight*, and *Guide*. "We will make sure that promises are fulfilled," he said. What kind of digital strategy Pacific Press will pursue also remains in the early stages, but the company will be expected to add to its line-up some of the 30 to 40 book titles that R&H has published each year.

Mark Thomas, R&H president, is not thrilled with the imminent changes, including the loss of his position. "I see this as a plan worked out by people with reasonable business concerns. They see a way to increase efficiency by combining two underutilized printing operations at one facility," Thomas told McChesney. "I consider myself a businessman, and I understand that part of the plan."

He also expressed concerns that the consolidation of product development from the two publishers would "deeply wound" Adventist output. As an example, he noted that Pacific Press delighted readers by picking up the *Christmas in My Heart* book series after R&H stopped publishing it. Likewise, he said, R&H developed the "MagaBook" products which thousands of Adventist students sell to earn funds to pay for school after the concept was turned down by Pacific Press. "We and Pacific Press are like Apple and Samsung phones," Thomas said. "We give people a choice. We drive each other to do better work."

With the reorganization Pacific Press became an NAD institution while the GC retains the R&H whose scaled-down operations will move to the GC office in Silver Spring and operate as an in-house unit. The GC had allowed R&H and Pacific Press to operate as stand-alone businesses without direct financial assistance, while it has acted as an unofficial publishing house without its own presses for many years. The GC employs an editorial staff of 40 to 50 people who manage a variety of publications, including the *Adventist Review*, *Adventist World*, *KidsView*, *Ministry*, *Journal of Adventist Education*, *Elders’ Digest*, the Sabbath School study guides and materials from the Biblical Research Institute. Even though books by Ellen White, the denomination’s cofounder and most widely-read author, have been printed by both Pacific Press and R&H, their publisher is actually the Ellen G. White Estate, an entity closely associated with the GC.

Pastor Delbert Baker, chairman of the board for R&H and a GC vice president, underscored that R&H would continue its ministry, albeit at a different location, with a different focus and without printing presses. "A most encouraging reality is that the R&H will continue its historic publishing mission at the GC uninterrupted," he said. The "most painful aspect of this process is the phasing out of the Hagerstown facility and the impact it has had on the dedicated employees."

Baker said much thought and care was going into the plans to care for the employees scheduled to be paid off. "We can thank God and everyone involved for the committed effort that has been invested to make the transition for the [the] employees as manageable as possible," he said.

The restructuring was a long time in coming. Denominational leaders have discussed restructuring along the lines voted today for the past 15 years. Of the church’s 13 world divisions, NAD is the only one that does not have a publishing house among its institutions. The reason is history and the failure to quickly adapt in past years. The GC functioned in the role of the NAD from its establishment in 1863 until it formed an NAD organization in the 1980s. Today’s restructuring of the publishing houses is something of a Plan B for the denomination. A task force formed in the summer of 2013 to study a possible merger of the two publishing houses did not bring a recommendation because controversy broke out about recommendations made by Ellen White in the late 1800s. She had advocated against consolidating the two publishing houses, urging a diversity of views and materials. Church officials say the latest plan honors the principles of White’s counsel because it is a merger of the printing operations, not a merger of
the publishing or editorial operations. There are also scores of Adventist publishers today around the world and many independent Adventist publishers which did not exist a century ago.

Bill Knott, the editor-in-chief of both the *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World*, which together account for nearly 25 percent of R&H annual gross sales, expressed concern for the employees, even as he said he looked forward to a new era of Adventist publishing with the reorganization. “The sense of loss is palpable for all of us who have grown up with Review and Herald products, including the *Adventist Review*,” said Knott, who also is a member of the R&H board. “The editorial team … has enjoyed a very close working relationship with Review and Herald that goes back more than 150 years. The enormous contribution made by the men and women in that working relationship will never fully be known until we hear the fuller story some day in heaven.”

He said *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World* editors expect to work as closely with Pacific Press as they had with R&H. “At the end of the day, it’s our mission that we must focus on, and that mission reminds us that we must always adapt our methods to bring the three angel’s messages to the attention of the millions who don’t know Jesus,” he said.

**On June 18, the following additional statement was released by a denominational spokesman:**

The document describing the reorganization plan contains the following explanation of how the restructuring is in line with advice offered by Ellen White:

“In large measure the success of the publishing work in the Seventh-day Adventist Church has come from the inspired counsels and visionary advocacy of Ellen G. White. Though other publishing houses came into existence during her lifetime, she had extensive personal experience with, and provided specific counsels to, the two publishing houses in the United States—Review and Herald and Pacific Press. These publishing houses had enormous influence in the overall publishing ministry of the church. Many of her messages to these institutions came during a period marked by tension between the two. Less than cordial relations prevailed and there was talk of “take over” and “consolidation” of all publishing operations at Battle Creek, Michigan. Ellen G. White strongly objected to such plans and gave pointed messages about the danger of centralizing control of the denomination’s publishing work in one institution.

Ever since those days, Ellen G. White’s counsel (i.e. that there should be more than one publishing house) has informed subsequent discussions about the publishing ministry structure in North America. In addition to extremely valuable insights on the role of the publishing work in the mission of the church, Ellen G. White underscored principles that should inform the establishment and operation of publishing institutions serving the church. These include:

1. Large institutional concentrations in one locale are not the best way for the church to fulfill its mission. (Much of what she wrote on this subject was written prior to the major denominational reorganization in 1901 and can be more fully understood in the context of pre-1901 organizational realities and tensions.)

2. No single individual or small group of individuals should have sole determination of the content or expression of denominational beliefs and teachings. A single publishing house for the entire denomination was not to be seen as God’s plan.

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.”* Changed circumstances call for ‘common sense’ application of principles.

In this light, the proposal to restructure the relationship of these institutions should be viewed as fully respecting the counsel of Ellen G. White in regards to the publishing work and the obligation to apply reason and common sense in regard to time, place and circumstances. The restructuring that is now under consideration preserves two distinct
publishing houses, rearranges the actual printing and production operations for efficiency and economy, and provides more direct involvement of the North American Division in organizing the publishing ministry for mission objectives in its territory. (Ellen G White, *Selected Messages*, Volume 1, Chapter 4)
Retired General Conference President Reflects on Challenges

From APD, June 16, 2014

Dr. Jan Paulsen, retired president of the General Conference (GC) of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, spoke recently in Stuttgart, Germany, about the challenges faced by the Adventist movement. He stressed that the decision about women's ordination as pastors is one of the top priorities. A wide range of committees in the world church have tackled this question for the past 40 years. In 1990 the GC Session denied ordination to women serving as pastors. In 1995, when the denomination’s North American Division asked for permission to make a decision only within its area of responsibility, the majority of the world delegates meeting in Utrecht rejected the request. This very same question is again on the agenda for the GC in 2015.

Asked about fears that a decision to allow women to be ordained might divide the denomination, Paulsen replied, “Perhaps so. But equally, not to ordain women has the same probability to divide our church.” It is, therefore, important to find a solution which is acceptable to both parties. All arguments, whether for or against, have been presented and the problem cannot be postponed again.

The Church: An active part of life or irrelevant sect

According to Paulsen, there are, however, a number of other challenges for the Adventist denomination. Despite cultural differences and theological challenges it is necessary for the global church to preserve its unity and identity. A global community of faith faces the difficult task of integrating their spiritual values into the practical aspects of daily life in many different cultures. It is necessary to resist the easy solutions, to withdraw from people who have completely different values into what some think of as “their own perfect world.”

Paulsen cautioned, "Either the public accepts us as part of society and sees that we want to be an active part of life in the larger community, or the public considers us as an irrelevant sect which dissociates itself from all others. Our world may no longer be interested in God, but it is a world full of people whom we, under no circumstances, can leave to fend for themselves." Adventists should therefore live out their values, prepare people for the future, such as by way of education and act as peacemakers.

Inter-denominational relations

Turning to the topic of Adventist relationships with other Christian denominations and world religions, Paulsen posed the question, "are we having an open-minded attitude and a constructive dialogue? Do we explain to them who we are, what we believe and which duties we have? Or, do we seal ourselves off, withdraw and consider any communication with other faiths as dangerous?"

Either Adventists introduce themselves "or others will do it for us," Paulsen observed. “Then we will be most likely misrepresented or even ridiculed.” It is, of course, easier to only interact with like-minded people. However, the ‘Truth’ does not have to be afraid of scrutiny. It is the duty of Adventist church members, pastors, teachers and leaders to demonstrate how one's own convictions and the respect for other faiths co-exist.

Paulsen was born in northern Norway. After finishing his education, he served as a pastor, a professor and then dean...
at Adventist universities in Africa. He later taught at Newbold College in England, where he was appointed dean. He earned his doctorate in theology at the University of Tübingen (Germany) in 1972. In 1980 he was elected secretary and in 1983 president of the denomination in northern Europe. In 1999 he was elected GC president and served until the age of 75 in 2010. In 2012 the King of Norway decorated Paulsen “for his meritorious service to the welfare of mankind.” Paulsen is married to Kari and they have an adult daughter and son.

*APD is an official news service that serves the denomination in Europe from a base in Switzerland.*
Romanian-English Adventist Web Service Celebrates 17 Years

By AT News Team, June 17, 2014

Intercer started as the first Adventist web site in serving Romania 17 years ago this month. It has grown to become a network of Bible information and news web sites, the best known among Romanian Adventists and operating in both English and Romanian, with a monthly average of 60,000 unique readers.

Intercer started from zero in 1997 after founder Lucian Mihailescu served his local church the year before as local coordinator for Net’96 satellite seminars and used the It Is Written web site. At the time, dial-up access to the Internet was both expensive and slow, but he began to help friends to access it from home.

In the summer of 1997 he began the creation of the first Romanian Adventist web site, initially simply for the Adventist church in his home town of Slobozia, Romania. The idea of creating an Adventist web site came when he read an article entitled “Internet and the Gospel” by Octavian Lupu. The local church web page led to the creation of the Intercer nonprofit organization. “Intercer” is short for “Internet to Heaven.”

Intercer Romania is a nonprofit association composed of Adventists in Romania and abroad. Intercer Canada, legally named the International Christian Education and Relief Society, is the nonprofit partner group in North America. The purpose of both Intercer organizations is to promote a system of information and materials based on Christian humanitarian principles; contributing to programs of interest for children, youth and adults; and fighting for a culture of health, morality and understanding in society.

Intercer provides the Cornilescu Romanian Bible (text and audio) for mobile devices, various Bible study materials, the Ellen White writings in Romanian, and current Adventist news from Romania and around the world, video and audio materials, links to various relevant publications, training courses, a forum, chat room, classified ads, a mobile app, advertising services and more. It hosts and supports the internet presence of many Romanian Adventist websites. Mihailescu plans to publish soon the “lessons learned” from his experience.
100th School of Medicine Graduation at Loma Linda University

By AT News Team, June 19, 2014

The class of 2014 which graduated with medical degrees at Loma Linda University in California at the end of May is the 100th graduating class of physicians produced by the Adventist institution. A total of more than 10,000 medical doctors have come from LLU over the years; more than any other school, government or private, secular or faith-based, in the western United States.

That alone is a major contribution to America and humanity around the globe. The university has also been the source of ground-breaking research about how to prevent illness and treat disease, including cross-species heart transplants and proton accelerator radiation therapy for tumors and other problems.

The Seventh-day Adventist denomination decided in 1909 to launch the school after Dr. John H. Kellogg left the faith and took with him its American Medical Missionary College in Battle Creek, Michigan. He was the founder of the denomination’s health ministries and one of America’s most prolific innovators in the area of wellness.

It began with only five physicians on the faculty and the first graduating class consisted of just six new doctors. More significant, says Dr. Roger Hadley, dean of the LLU School of Medicine, is “we can accurately claim to have the same mission today as when our School of Medicine started. We unequivocally make that claim and are proud to continue that legacy.”

Many of the early trials and triumphs are well known. Both denominational and school leaders often agonized over the institution’s survival and the many issues around how it should relate to government, secular accrediting bodies, economic realities, scientific developments, and changing society. “Many times the future of Loma Linda was in jeopardy, when sheer determination and God’s intervention were all that kept it alive,” says Dr. Richard Hart, university president.

“The commitment of our students through the years has been remarkable,” Hart continues. Those first six graduates showed up for their state board examinations without prior approval, and were finally granted the privilege of taking the tests. Later students voted to remain at Loma Linda when it had only a “C” rating from the AMA which meant they could be drafted into World War I. At least 10 percent of every class has served as medical missionaries, starting over 50 mission hospitals around the world. That is a record unmatched by any group, states Hart.

Because the San Bernardino-Riverside region where LLU is located was rural with a small population in the early 20th century, the institution operated a clinic and then built a hospital in an urban neighborhood in Los Angeles. This provided the clinical experience needed to train physicians. The hospital still serves East Los Angeles today as White Memorial Medical Center, named after Ellen G. White, a cofounder of the denomination who played a key role in starting LLU. Denominational leaders were reluctant to take on additional debt, so White took out a personal loan to contribute to the purchase of the original property and urged Pastor John Burden to go ahead despite a vote against it.

In 1967 the university consolidated its programs in Loma Linda and built the first medical center there to provide clinical experience and research opportunities. The campus has become a complex of six hospitals with more than...
1,000 beds. Dr. David Hinshaw, who played a key administrative role in the process of consolidation and campus development, was honored at the May graduation ceremonies.

In view of the struggles LLU had getting accreditation in the early years, Hart said, it is a “thankful irony … that two classmates from our class of 1974 are now in leadership positions in the two most significant medical accrediting organizations in this country. Dr. Don Melnick is president of the National Board of Medical Examiners, which sets standards and certifies individual physicians. And Dr. Roger Hadley serves on the board of the Liaison Committee on Medical Education, which certifies medical schools.”

When the early leaders of LLU decided to follow White’s advice to have “a school of the highest order” and seek accreditation, it set in motion a major change for the entire Adventist education system. When LLU made a commitment to meet those standards, then accreditation was also required of the colleges from which it accepted graduate students. Today the vast majority of people take it for granted that Adventist universities and colleges are fully accredited despite the fact that a small minority still think they should operate as unaccredited Bible colleges, as do a couple of very small, independent Adventist institutions.
The Games We Play

by Andy Hanson, June 19, 2014

This blog is based on ideas generated by the book, *Games People Play*, by Eric Berne, MD.* In it he offers the following definition of *game*: “A *game* is a series of complementary transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome. Descriptively it is a recurring set of transactions, often repetitious, superficially plausible, with a concealed motivation; or, more colloquially, a series of moves with a snare, or ‘gimmick’…. Every game is basically dishonest, and the outcome has a dramatic, as distinct from merely exciting, quality.”

The book lists the whole series of *games* that people play: life *games*, marital *games*, party *games*, sexual *games*, underworld *games*, and consulting room *games*. After reading the book I know for certain what I have suspected for most of my life: I’m not a good *game* player. My friends know that I am naïve, tend to accept at face value what people tell me, and I try to communicate what I think and feel in a straightforward way. One illustration follows.

I was 16, parked on the hill overlooking the city of Glendale, making out with my girlfriend. When we came up for air after a long kiss, she asked me if I loved her. Needless to say, I was torn. I wasn’t sure where a "yes" would lead, and the prospect was both terrifying and exciting. Upon reflection, however, I told the truth. I said "no."

When I came to Chico State, I tried to play the *game* of university professor. I assumed that university classes should be hard and reasonably unpleasant if students were to learn what was required of them. I was unsympathetic when students complained about the length of my assignments and about the specificity of the questions on my tests. Both my students and I were miserable, but I assumed that I would get used to our mutual discomfort, so long as I achieved tenure. I quit playing that *game* when one of my best students told me to stop playing *games* and just be myself.

I have always loved participating in and observing what Berne identifies as *pastimes*. *Pastimes*, by his definition are “candid; may involve contest, but not conflict, and the ending may be sensational, but not dramatic.” I take that to mean that *pastimes* have agreed-upon rules that willing participants or observers understand and agree to. *Pastimes* can be and often are exciting with unpredictable outcomes, but winning is accomplished within an agreed-upon set of rules.

I can remember playing Rook on Saturday night with my parents and friends when my hands were so small that I had to go into the kitchen to arrange the cards in my hand. I played games of Monopoly that could last for days. I played Battleship with my friend Gary in a tent that could only be reached by negotiating a steep cliff. My friend Roland, who lived across the street, taught me to play poker. Ken taught me how to play Booray. I played computer games with Jim late into the night, and tested my friendship with family and friends as we played Sorry.

I listened to Dodger games on my kit-built radio, and the Los Angeles Rams, featuring Roman Gabriel and the Fearsome Foursome, were my team. Over the years I developed an interest in golf. Arnold Palmer was my hero. I watched Mohammed Ali fight and the UCLA Bruins play basketball.

As a kid I played basketball, baseball, and flag football, but because I was two years younger than my classmates at Glendale Academy, I was often the last player chosen. I went on ski trips with my class, but I didn’t have the money to take lessons, and I never learned how to turn on steep slopes. I could, however, win consistently at horseshoes!
Today, I fish with my brother and play golf with my friends. I would love to play poker on a regular basis, but my university playing partners have either died or moved away.

Why is it that pastimes have been and are an important part of my life? What do they do for me that other experiences don’t? What needs do they satisfy? What do they indicate about me, my personality, the way I see the world, the way I want to live my life?

When I am involved with pastimes, the cares of my busy and often chaotic world disappear. Pastimes have rules, and when these rules are broken an agreed-upon penalty is assessed. The best player or team usually wins. Finally, pastimes can be played over and over again. In golf, if I don't break 100 one week, I can try again the next. If my team doesn't win the World Series or the Super Bowl, there is always next year. In short, when I am involved with sports, I am living in or imagining myself in a kind of utopia where virtue is rewarded, fairness is insisted upon, reasonable penalties are assessed for infractions of the rules, and hope need not be extinguished if I or my team does not live up to expectations.

On the other hand when I am involved with games, I find myself immersed in a chaotic world where rules can be broken and there are no agreed-upon penalties. I have to continually remind myself that virtue is not rewarded, fairness is a liability, penalties are only assessed for losing, and second chances can only be earned through cunning and a blatant disregard for the truth. For me gaming is soul-destroying, depressing, and joyless. For me this is the way of the world then, in the words of the hymn, “This world is not my home.” And I want with all my heart to be at home in this world. The people I love are here. That is why I attempt to live my life as if it were a pastime, while recognizing that life is neither a pastime nor a game.

Anyone, guru or preacher, who uses words that imply life is a pastime is a fool at best or a charlatan at worst. Life is simply life. Sadly, many religious people and institutions have found it beneficial to attempt to convince us that this isn’t so. They assume the role of sports analysts. They explain why bad things happen to good people and good things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to bad people. They assume that wise sayings or authoritative quotes are laws of existence. They choose to ignore the fact that a penny saved is not always a penny earned. A stitch in time does not always save nine. Bread cast on waters can fail to return. A friend in need is not always a friend indeed.

These sports analysts assume that biblical quotes always reflect reality, when in reality the prayers of the righteous do not always avail much. Faith does not move real mountains. Compassionate words do not always melt a hard heart. Ten thousand don’t always fall at your right hand, and destruction sometimes does “come nigh thee.” In this world the righteous folks seem to be treated just about the same as the unrighteous.

What concerns me here are the consequences of choosing to regard religion as a pastime. For the religious sports analysts, when bad things happen to good people, there has to be a reason. Tsunamis and hurricanes are sent to punish the wicked. Young people die in automobile accidents because parents or church congregations need to be shaken into a spiritual revival. The death of a teenage son is fortuitous because, should he have lived, he would have engaged in behavior as an adult that would have jeopardized his salvation. Children die as punishment for the sins of their parents.

If religious belief also includes the notion that a loving God will eventually punish the “wicked” by fire, rational thought must be discarded. The premise that someone who loves you will torture you in fire is nonsensical.

If Christians cannot rely upon experience and reason to explain the rules of religion as pastime, they must make a decision. They might simply reject belief in “the lake of fire,” or they might conclude that Christianity is a game, or that they are simply not intelligent enough or spiritual enough to understand how God operates in the world. These people may conclude that Christians must rely on people or institutions that have authoritative explanations for everything that happens in the world, i.e., game players.
Unsurprisingly, then, blind faith is highly valued in many Christian ministries.

However, blind faith alone cannot be relied upon to support individual or even institutional Christianity. Even in North Korea, a state that controls virtually every channel of information from the outside world, the demand for blind faith must still be accompanied by the brutal and pervasive punishment of critical thinking, as Kim Jong-un’s numerous prison camps attest. Religious leaders whose credibility depends on the blind faith of their believers must engender fear, overt or hinted at. The pastor of a mega-church in Texas decided not to play games with his parishioners when he told them that he no longer believed in hell. That admission cost him his congregation.

It is easy for me to understand why mega-churches meet in huge athletic stadiums. These settings support the notion that what is happening is a pastime rather than a game. Huge crowds can dispel critical thought and quiet the fear that always lurks when blind faith is a motivating force: fifteen thousand Christians can’t be wrong.

It’s really the same old story, isn’t it? Job discovered, much to his surprise and sorrow, that life isn’t a pastime. When he made that discovery, the four men who attempted to comfort him were no comfort at all. He discovered that the religion of his day was a game, "a recurring set of transactions, often repetitious, superficially plausible, with a concealed motivation; or, more colloquially, a series of moves with a snare, or 'gimmick'…. basically dishonest." *

As far as I am concerned, Christian fellowship must operate as neither pastime nor game. Communication should be candid and may involve contest but not conflict or fear of being "wrong."

An authority on church planting once advised me that those sentiments would inhibit church growth. I’m sure he was right. Perhaps that’s why Christ was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. His death is a reminder that religious game playing and blind faith can murder compassion and torture the innocent.

* Quotations are from Games People Play by Dr. Eric Berne. http://www.amazon.com/Games-People-Play-Psychology-Relationships-ebook/dp/B005C6E76U/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1401151229&sr=1-2&keywords=Games+People+Play
By Jack Hoehn, June 19, 2014

Walter T. Rea, Ellen White critic, was the pastor of the nearby Alhambra SDA church in my youth. When I knew him, Elder Rea was an expert in making collections of Ellen G. White quotations on many subjects, and had syllabi consisting of selected “quotations” from the “Spirit of Prophecy.” Others have published collections of key quotations of special interest to Adventists or to the world. I too have found it useful and interesting to type collections of “statements” on different religious or moral subjects I have been studying. I always find new insights and spiritual direction when I do so from the writings (or “pen”) of Ellen G. White.

Now, as an adult faced with issues where what Ellen White wrote and what I now believe to be true do not always agree, I have made a new compilation of her quotations that has helped me understand what to do in cases of conflict between what was written and what now seems to be true. All the following quotations are from the published works of Ellen G. White.

FIRST: INSPIRED WRITERS NOT “THE PEN OF INSPIRATION” “The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen.” 

SECOND: SOME SDA DOCTRINES ARE WRONG “We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and Heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed.”

MORE TRUTH TO BE REVEALED “There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error. The fact that certain doctrines have been held as truth for many years by our people is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation.”

NO HUMAN INFALLIBLE “God has given men brains to use, intellect to cultivate, to employ to His glory; and He would be the One to mold, control, and fashion the minds after His own impress. Men are only men whatever may be their work. The more responsible the position, the more important that the one who stands in this position have no more honor or exaltation given him than is for his good. In fact, people are ruined through praise and honor bestowed upon them as though they were infallible. While due respect should be given to those whom God has entrusted with more than ordinary talents, that man thus endowed needs to walk more humbly and closely with God as he advances.”

“I wish that self should be hid in Jesus. I wish self to be crucified. I do not claim infallibility, or even perfection of Christian character. I am not free from mistakes and errors in my life. Had I followed my Saviour more closely, I should not have to mourn so much my unlikeness to His dear image.”
LONG CHERISHED OPINIONS NOT INFALLIBLE “As we take up the study of God’s word, we should do so with humble hearts. All selfishness, all love of originality, should be laid aside. Long-cherished opinions must not be regarded as infallible. It was the unwillingness of the Jews to give up their long-established traditions that proved their ruin. They were determined not to see any flaw in their own opinions or in their expositions of the Scriptures; but however long men may have entertained certain views, if they are not clearly sustained by the written word, they should be discarded. Those who sincerely desire truth will not be reluctant to lay open their positions for investigation and criticism, and will not be annoyed if their opinions and ideas are crossed.” Counsels to Writers and Editors, p. 36.

DON’T BE CONSERVATIVE ABOUT ADVANCED TRUTH “Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God’s word, and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative, and seek to avoid discussion.” Counsels to Writers and Editors, p. 38.

NATURE SHEDS LIGHT ON SCRIPTURE “To such a student, scientific research will open vast fields of thought and information. As he contemplates the things of nature, a new perception of truth comes to him. The book of nature and the written word shed light upon each other.” The Ministry of Healing, p. 462.

“The book of nature and the written word shed light upon each other. We are thus led to adore the Creator, and to have an intelligent trust in His word.” Counsels on Education, p. 196.

BIBLE DOES NOT TELL US HOW GOD CREATED “Just how God accomplished the work of creation, he has never revealed to men; human science cannot search out the secrets of the Most High.” Counsels on Education, p. 193.

WE NEED TO RECONCILE GEOLOGY WITH SCRIPTURE “Moses wrote under the guidance of the Spirit of God; and a correct theory of geology will never claim discoveries that cannot be reconciled with his statements. All truth, whether in nature or in revelation, is consistent with itself in all its manifestations.” Counsels on Education, p. 193.

REBUKE OF THE LORD ON “GUARDIANS OF DOCTRINE” “The rebuke of the Lord will be upon those who would be guardians of the doctrine, who would bar the way that greater light shall not come to the people.” Counsels to Writers and Editors, p. 37.

GOD NOT PLEASED “The present attitude of the church is not pleasing to God. There has come in a self-confidence that has led them to feel no necessity for more truth and greater light. We are living at a time when Satan is at work on the right hand and on the left, before and behind us; and yet as a people we are asleep. God wills that a voice shall be heard arousing His people to action.” Counsels to Writers and Editors, p. 41.

WE DIFFER IN UNDERSTANDING OF TRUTH “Every association of life calls for the exercise of self-control, forbearance, and sympathy. We differ so widely in disposition, habits, education, that our ways of looking at things vary. We judge differently. Our understanding of truth, our ideas in regard to the conduct of life, are not in all respects the same…. So frail, so ignorant, so liable to misconception is human nature, that each should be careful in the estimate he places upon another.” The Ministry of Healing, p. 485.

STORM OF WORDS “Under a storm of stinging, faultfinding words, keep the mind stayed upon the word of God. Let mind and heart be stored with God's promises. If you are ill-treated or wrongfully accused, instead of returning an angry answer, repeat to yourself the precious promises: ‘Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.’” The Ministry of Healing, p. 486.

Amen. “Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.”

Listen to what Nature tells us about the Bible and let Nature shine light on Revelation, even as Revelation shines light on our understanding of Nature.
I lived in Alhambra for a short time, and then longer in Temple City and San Gabriel, all nearby cities in Southern California during my youth. Elder Rea was not my pastor, but he pastored some of my friends. In those days one tended to think of him more as an Ellen White fanatic than an Ellen White critic! Perhaps there is some cautionary message in this?

Pen” is correct, Ellen White handwrote all her articles; she never used a typewriter or word processor. I’m not sure if she ever used a pencil, but suspect not.

I have previously been criticized as “attacking Ellen White.” I will reprint here my reply to that accusation.

“The 10 commandments tell me to not worship anything or anyone. I am attacking idolatry of Ellen White. I also attack the idolatry of Mary, the mother of Christ. However, I would love and revere Mary, and I do love and revere Ellen. But I am seriously attacking the immaculate and error-free-blasphemous-worship-in-disguise of my human older sisters. It is your beliefs about Ellen I am attacking, not Ellen White. To say that David was wrong, wrong, wrong, to kill Uriah and take Bathsheba, is not attacking David; it is saving David. To say that Peter was wrong, wrong, wrong to withdraw socially from Gentile Christians, is not discrediting Peter; it is saving Peter. To say that Ellen was wrong on the age of the earth and the length of creation is not discrediting Ellen; it is editing and improving Ellen, and will result in her writings’ being of continued use to this generation, instead of ending up on the trash-heap of uselessness. Being wrong, as she occasionally was, is not a sin, it is an error. But holding to a sweet error when the evidence has long since shown it is wrong, is the sin, perhaps unforgivable, of idolizing the writer, instead of loving and obeying the truth.

"Please, Adventists, back off on the adoration, glorification, veneration, idealization, romanticization, and near-deification of Sister Ellen. 'Let God be true, though every man a liar' (Romans 3:4, emphasis added). Let her be wrong when she was wrong; respect her when she was right, as she so often was. Sister White never claimed inerrancy or infallibility.

"Please read carefully the new Ellen White Encyclopedia article on 'Revelation and Inspiration,' and note her own words, 'Everything that is human is imperfect' (EGW Encyclopedia, page 1100). And for even clearer illustrations of that in her own life, please buy and read Ellen Harmon White from the Oxford University Press.

"Even though Dr. C.E. Stewart saw some of her errors, his children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren still use and value her ministry, and remain faithful Seventh-day Adventists. Those who idolize her instead of valuing her may live to regret it."

One quotation I would have liked to include, but have not because it came from Ellen’s son, W.C. White. Nevertheless, it has been a gem to me. Surely this wise advice from Ellen could apply to the chronology of the age of the earth and time of creation as well?

“Regarding Mother’s writings and their use as authority on points of history and chronology, Mother has never wished our brethren to treat them as authority regarding the details of history or historical dates. The great truths revealed to Mother regarding the controversy between good and evil, light and darkness, have been given to her in various ways, but chiefly as flashlight views of great events…” “In past years whenever definite proof has been found that the writers of our Adventist literature had come short of finding the exact proof regarding details, Mother has taken her position in favor of correcting those things that were clearly found to be in error.

“It seems to me there is danger of placing altogether too much stress upon chronology. If it had been essential to the salvation of man that he should have a clear and harmonious understanding of the chronology of the world, the Lord would not have permitted the disagreements and discrepancies which we find in the writings of the Bible historians, and it seems to me that in these last days there ought not to be so much controversy regarding dates.”
“It seems to me... that there is great possibility of our weakening our influence by closing our eyes to the fact that we are all as little children learning from day to day from the great Teacher, and that it is our privilege to advance in knowledge and understanding. It seems to me that it is much wiser for us to convince the world that God has been leading us, and that He is leading us by presenting from time to time, unanswerable evidences regarding the soundness of our position by a clear presentation of the correspondence of prophecy and history through the use of historical data which the world cannot question, than by any efforts that we shall make to prove that the positions we held last year or ten years ago or twenty years ago or thirty years ago were infallible and unchangeable" (W.C. White, in Selected Messages, book 3, p. 449).

2 Chronicles 20:20

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I have had it. I have absolutely HAD IT!

I am stomping through the desert, and believe me, it is really hard to stomp in desert sands. But I'm just about at the end of my rope. Clouds of dust are rising with every angry step, and my son is keeping a safe distance, striding along like the young man he has become. Now they kick us out? Now?

I tried to leave, years ago, when I first got pregnant, but no, God said go back. And submit! Submit to the mistress who decided I was to be the vessel (worthless in myself, but with a working womb) through whom would come her son. I had already submitted to the master in a way I never wanted to.

My steps slow a little. I am getting dizzy and lightheaded. I drink a little of the water and give some to Ishmael. It's getting low. I'm trying to make it last, but we still have miles to go.

I remember that day, the other time I left. The Holy One, blessed be He, spoke to me! Called me by name! And made me promises…amazing promises for a slave woman from Egypt.

So I went back. I thought things would be different, and in a way they were. I did produce a son for he master. He, at least, was overjoyed, and I tried my best to be patient and humble with the mistress, even though she was so jealous she could hardly speak to me. Supposedly, Ishmael was hers, the son she couldn't have. But of course I had to nurse him, and naturally he came to look on me as mother, not her. As he grew older, I taught him to submit to both of them, but I also taught him that Abram was his father and that someday all that Abram possessed would be his. It is no more than the truth, after all. Ishmael is his eldest son. His firstborn. The birth of the second son, Isaac, which made the whole camp happy (yes, me too) shouldn't have changed that. A man should have many sons. But there's only one firstborn.

I know Ishmael didn't mean anything by what he said to her spoiled son. Certainly it shouldn't have been grounds for kicking us out to fend for ourselves, with a little food and water!

Which is gone now. I haven't been able to stomp for some hours. Ishmael is staggering, and he is strong, not like my old, worn-out body. I fall, but drag myself up again. Then he falls, too, and lies still.

We are going to die, my boy and I. The son Abram—sorry, Abraham—was so proud of, so excited about. We're going to die now. I crawl to my son and manage to get him under one of the scarewly bushes nearby, but there is nothing worth the name of shade, and without water…

Well, this is it. He is moaning a little through cracked lips. I can't watch. I move away, turning my back, hoping he will die quickly. Hoping I will live until after he goes, then die, too. I put my dry, burning face on my knees and I begin to cry. There are no tears, but my mouth stretches out of shape and my voice lifts in wails of despair.
A sudden sound makes my breath stop for a moment. “What is the matter with you, Hagar?”

A gulp and a sob come out of me. He has seen me again? He is speaking to me again? My heart pounds, making me feel a little sick. I was already weak and throbbing. Maybe it’s a hallucination.

“Do not fear, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” That’s what He said last time—a great nation. I assumed it was about the promise we all knew God had made to the master, but then when they kicked us out—God must mean our descendants, not just Abraham’s!

Or it’s a hallucination.

I lift my wavering head and peer through the haze that darkens my eyes. What is that? I think—can’t be—no, it is! A well!! Panting, seeing spots before my eyes, I creep over to it and refill the water skin, sip some so that I can see a little better, and drag it back over to Ishmael under the bush. I hold his head so he can drink.

It’s amazing how water can make you feel alive again. I sit with my son under the puny shade of the bush and watch the shadows grow long. We’ll move on when it gets a little cooler.

Nothing has really changed. We are still outcasts. We still have miles to go, and not much welcome to be met at the end of it.

But He sees me. He hears me. He knows my name, and my boy’s name. We can go on now.
Adventist Creates World's Largest Bible Trivia Game


by Debbnonaire Kovacs
submitted June 18, 2014

The Great Bible Race, www.greatbiblerace.com a video game billed as “the world’s largest Bible trivia game,” with over 17,000 questions and three different ways to play, was created by a team led by Seventh-day Adventist Melvin Claxton.

Melvin Claxton is something of a study in contrasts. He was raised in a home with a Pentecostal father and Seventh-day Adventist mother, a combination about which he said, “It might be an unusual combination, but they had a wonderful marriage!” (This is a tribute in any culture or subculture.) Claxton worked in journalism for years, reporting for the Chicago Tribune and the Detroit Times, winning a Pulitzer Prize in 1995 and then being a finalist again in 2003.

Yet, three years ago, he walked away to do something entirely different, and he says it’s been even more rewarding. He gathered a small team and created a company called Premier 3-D Animation, with the mission of creating educational video games. They do apps as well—they entered a White House competition to create an app that would help interest young women in politics, and won at the world level. Claxton says they have plans in the works for games on geography, biology, and other subjects, but there was one thing they wanted to do first—the “world’s largest Bible trivia game.”

Claxton said, “This has been by far the most rewarding experience of my life. I take great pride in my Pulitzer—I worked hard for it! I have books and articles I’ve written that I’m proud of, but this has been the most rewarding thing of all.” He added, "While there were many people who contributed to this game, my two sons, Jason and Brandon, were my right and left hand on this project. Both are expert programmers and played critical roles throughout the development of the game. Jason is Vice President of Technology and Brandon is Vice President of Game Development."

“The Bible is so important to us,” Claxton said, speaking of people in general. “We grew up with it, we love it, we know its questions.” His team did a Facebook competition, with new questions every 30 minutes, and higher points for answering more quickly, and he said one woman told them she was so excited about the possibility of winning that her hands were sweaty. “It matters so much to us!” he said.

The team didn’t want to just create a trivia game, though. “We wanted to do something different—go further than how many miles to something or how many bridesmaids. We wanted questions about values, teachings, what Jesus or the apostle Paul said about some topic.” They wanted it to be teachable and to lead to more discussion.
How did they do this? They took a Bible, opened it to Genesis 1:1, and asked of every single verse (there are around 30,000, Claxton says), “Can we make a question about this verse?”

Over 17,000 questions later, The Great Bible Race now contains three games plus a complete, digitized Bible (King James Version), which includes 30 3-D images of some of the most iconic scenes. The three games are The Great Bible Race, which is the main trivia game, the Amazing Bible Study, which allows the player to choose the person, place, topic, event, or book of the Bible they wish to answer questions on, and the Ultimate Quiz challenge, with 20 levels of increasingly difficult questions and features like 50-50 buttons, “sudden death”, and the ever-present ticking clock. All draw from the huge question database and all appear to be wildly popular. There are over 6300 likes on the games’ Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/Greatbiblerace and it has received a statement of endorsement from the presiding bishop of Pentecostal Assemblies of the World.

The game allows churches and denominations to personalize it with specific questions relating to their own particular doctrines and history, and two denominations, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World and African Methodist Episcopals, have taken advantage of that and created their own versions. Claxton would like to see an Adventist version created, but that’s not something he can do—each body has to get its own leaders to create and/or sign off on its questions.

Besides fun, education, and spiritual growth, there are many ways this game can be used. Claxton said there was a Christian singles event in Detroit recently where each table was competing (there can be up to six persons) and the tables were also competing against each other. He says churches often use it as a fundraiser, and he has also offered a free copy to the Pathfinders for the upcoming camporee in Oshkosh, WI, but had not heard back at the time of this writing.

The game can lead to some interesting situations. Once in Michigan, a young girl about thirteen came to Claxton and said, “I think there’s something wrong with your game!” He went to see what her problem was. She had come to a question that asked what Jesus said we should do if someone slaps our cheek. The girl had chosen “Slap back,” but the game said to turn the other cheek. “That can’t be right!” protested the girl.

This brings up the interesting and thorny subject of interpretation. The girl could have thought this meant that Jesus (or the game’s creators) wanted us to be passive in the face of abuse—a teaching we do not want our children to walk away with! Whose job is it to help this girl and others like her understand what they read?

The team made the decision early on that they would make no attempt at interpretation. They simply asked questions based precisely on what the Bible says; churches and families must struggle with what it means, or why the Bible says that, for themselves. They trust that the Holy Spirit will be there to guide, and that at least their game will lead to more factual knowledge of what is in the Bible.

“This project,” Claxton said, “was a great leap of faith, stepping out without one of the big game companies behind us. The churches who use it for fundraising make more money than we do. We do okay. But the idea is that we have created this wonderful, wonderful tool for people to become engaged with the Bible, and we have formed wonderful partnerships with denominations who are doing great things with this game.

“It’s really about teaching God’s love. Every law comes down to loving God and loving fellow man. You can’t love God if you don’t love your fellow man. What we [Adventists] have to do is not be so arrogant as if we have the only truth. We have to engage people, engage young people, get them back to reading God’s word—the word has its own power. Ultimately this is our job here [on earth]—to bring ourselves closer to who God is, to help spread gospel. That’s why we did this first before we created any other games.”

Next week for the first time, The Great Bible Race will be at the International Christian Retail Show in Atlanta, GA, from June 22-26. www.christianretailshow.com
Of the numerous parables of Christ, the one that I have found most profound and moving is that of the Prodigal Son.

When I was a rebellious teenager, and having difficulty interacting with my parents, particularly my father, I related most to the prodigal son. At another point in my life, when I was hypercritical of a brother who went through his own phase of teenage waywardness, I could identify with the brother of the Prodigal. In both instances, this realization occurred after the fact. Upon the recognition of how truly I exemplified what André Malraux called *La Condition Humaine*, all I could do was bow my head, go to my knees and hope for grace.

I was blessed to have a father who was very much like the benevolent father depicted in the parable of the Prodigal. In the years since he passed I have realized how fortunate I was.

In pondering the parable, it isn’t difficult to discover how the Prodigal found unmerited favor/grace upon his return home. What is more difficult to understand is the why—and therein lies the beauty of Christ’s revolutionary message of God’s unconditional love for man.

But what about the older brother? His part of the tale is necessary, cautionary, and for our edification. We do not know what happened to the family after the end of the parable. One can only speculate.

Despite the humanly understandable unloving, self-justifying attitude of the Prodigal’s brother, could there yet be hope for him? And, if so, how might it come about?

I looked to another of Christ’s parables to find an answer.

And, when I read that of the Good Samaritan, this came to me.

We are told (*Desire of Ages*, p. 499) that this parable was based on an actual incident, and that the priest and Levite were among those who heard Christ relate the parable. Were their consciences pricked, and did their hearts burn within them?

What is not divulged is the identity of the traveler.

The setting of the parable of the Prodigal Son is not given, perhaps deliberately so. Regardless, given the comparatively small geographic area of Christ’s ministry, I find it not
inconceivable that the traveler from Jerusalem to Jericho could have been the older brother of the Prodigal.

Perhaps the traveler was on business, maybe for his father. It matters not.

After the ordeal of being set upon by bandits, stripped of his possessions and clothing, and left for dead, then ignored by two of the very people (religious leaders, no less) he expected would come to his aid, he was the recipient of grace when a man who was not only a stranger, but despised by the Jews, demonstrated such kindness and generosity as defied reason.

These acts of grace might well have given him a better understanding as to why his father, without hesitation or question, would welcome his younger brother, the Prodigal, home with open arms and heart, and remonstrate with him when he was not only disinclined to rejoice over his brother’s return, but critical of what he considered his father’s unseemly behavior.

A part of me would like to think that, upon arriving home, his wounds largely healed, his heart no less so, the older brother would look upon his father with renewed respect and devotion, and upon his younger brother with compassion and forbearance, for he, too, had been the firsthand recipient of grace.

Perhaps Pierre Teilhard de Chardin put it best: “Someday... we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.”
Two Sparrows

http://www.atoday.org/article/2553/poetry-the-arts/visual-arts/two-sparrows

photo by S M Chen

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on
the ground without your Father. Matthew 10:29.