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Day 6 of Annual Council: Vote Set on Ordination for Women: Twenty years ago a General Conference session resoundingly defeated a motion to allow Divisions of the General Conference to independently authorize women’s ordination. Now a similar proposal has been passed along to the 2015 Session in San Antonio. Will it fare differently? Some believe it will not.....

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Church Leaders Refuse to Lead

by J. David Newman, editor of *Adventist Today* and former editor of *Ministry* magazine, October 16, 2014

The debate on the ordination of women at the 2014 Annual Council of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination ended with a resounding whimper. If this sounds a little harsh, hold your pique until you have read this analysis of what happened on Tuesday, October 14, 2014.

It has been almost forty years since the General Conference Executive Committee at their April Spring Meeting, 1975 voted, “To request the President’s Executive Advisory to also arrange for further study of the election of women to local church offices which require ordination and that division committees exercise discretion in any special cases that may arise before a definitive position has been adopted.”[1]

Since then five divisions[2] have voted to allow unions and conferences to decide whether to ordain women as elders. The other eight divisions do not allow women elders. This decision to allow divisions to choose whether to ordain women elders has not caused dissension within the church. It did not divide the church.

The issue over women’s ordination is not even biblical. The office of pastor did not exist in the New Testament. The General Conference executive committee appointed the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) with representatives from all divisions. All points of view were represented on this committee. One of their first tasks was to develop a consensus on a theology of ordination, which they did. In that statement they agreed that “Aside from the unique role of the apostles, the New Testament identifies the following categories of ordained leaders: the elder/supervising elder (Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Tim 3:2-7; 4:14; 2 Tim 4:1-5; 1 Pet 5:1) and the deacon (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-10).”[3]

Those for and against women being ordained as pastors agreed that there were only two categories of ordained leaders in the New Testament—elders and deacons. The church has agreed that women can be ordained as elders so why is there conflict over women being ordained as pastors? It is clear that this issue is not theological, since pastors as we define them today did not exist in the New Testament. The issue is ecclesiological; that is, it is simply a matter of church order and reflects the prevailing culture. As culture changes, so can structure. The problem is that we have made a structural problem into a theological problem.

The TOSC could not arrive at a consensus on whether women who serve as pastors can be ordained. The Committee developed three options. In brief here are the three options. Option 1 argued against not only women being ordained but women serving as elders and pastors, based on what they called the Headship Principle. Starting from creation, before Adam and Eve sinned God ordained that man should take the spiritual leadership of the family and the church. Option 2 argued that women could be ordained as elders and pastors. They based their argument on a theology of spiritual gifts. God gives spiritual gifts to his people and there is no hint of any gender discrimination in the granting of these gifts (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-30; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Option 3 agreed that man is the head when it comes to spiritual matters but exceptions could be made as circumstances dictated, that under various circumstances women could be ordained as pastors. None of the three options produced a majority on the Committee although those favoring ordination of women were in the majority.

The leaders of the General Conference now faced a dilemma: What report would they bring to the Annual Council? Could they find a way to gain a consensus? If they brought the three options listed by the TOSC they would find the...
same differences of opinion.

So the General Conference Leaders brought to the Annual Council the following resolution. "Is it acceptable for division executive committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry? Yes or No."

The Annual Council was not asked to make a decision. It was not even asked to make a recommendation to the General Conference Session in San Antonio next year. The resolution simply asked that the delegates to the Session make the decision. Elder Ted Wilson, the president of the General Conference, stated that a whole day had been spent with the thirteen division officers in discussing the best way to proceed. This group (GCDO) is made up of the GC vice presidents, treasurers, and members of the secretariat. Along with the three officers from each division this made up a group of about seventy individuals. Wilson emphasized more than once that this recommendation to the Annual Council was unanimous. He also stated that a "sweet spirit" had prevailed throughout the discussion.

Here is what was not stated: It is clear that this group of officers could not agree on a recommendation concerning the ordination of women. It is clear that they were just as split as the TOSC. So they had to find a compromise. But instead of finding a compromise that they could agree on they shifted the decision to the delegates at the General Conference Session. They are wanting some 2,700 delegates to decide what they could not decide. If 70 people could not find agreement, why would they think almost 3,000 people would find agreement?

In 1995 the North American Division sent to the GC Officers a request that the divisions be allowed to decide on women's ordination. This request came to Annual Council but no decision was made by the Council. They simply passed this request on to the GC Session, where it was roundly defeated. Why would they expect it to be any different this time?

Since only five of the thirteen divisions ordain women as elders it seems clear that a majority of the delegates would vote No on ordaining women as pastors. The problem is that some unions have already begun to ordain women pastors. In 2012, the Columbia Union Conference in the North American Division overwhelmingly voted to allow conferences to ordain women pastors,[4] In the same year the Pacific Union Conference, one of the largest union conferences in North America, similarly voted to ordain women,[5] Since that time, women have been ordained and Southeastern California Conference elected the first woman to serve as a conference president.[6] Before the year was out, the Pacific Union Conference had approved fourteen women for ordination.[7]

Elder Wilson spoke at each of the union conference constituency meetings, pleading with the delegates not to go against church policy but they rejected his pleadings. Why did these unions go against church policy? It had become a moral issue. What do I mean?

At the 1990 General Conference in Indianapolis, the Session confirmed that women could serve as pastors, associates in pastoral care. Women pastors could perform essentially all the services that the male pastor could.[8] So here we have women pastors performing the same rites and services as the male pastor, going through the same commissioning service with the laying on of hands but not allowed to receive the ordination credential. This now becomes a matter of discrimination based on gender. If women cannot be ordained, then they should not serve as pastors or elders.

I was a member of the Columbia Union Ad Hoc Committee on women's ordination that brought a recommendation to the executive committee of the union. We spent several sessions discussing the issue until one member raised this challenge. He said that since it is clear that it is not function but gender that is preventing a woman from being ordained we now have a discrimination issue which is a moral issue. Moral issues always trump policy issues. Since the General Conference will not change its policy of discrimination, this Union Conference needs to take the high ground and ordain women based on the fact that the church has officially voted that they can serve as pastors.

At the 2014 Annual Council, Elder Wilson emphasized that the Holy Spirit would lead the delegates at the GC Session in 2015 to make the right decision. He failed to explain why the Holy Spirit did not lead the church leaders to
make the right decision. He did not explain why the Annual Council made up of all the world church leaders was not led by the Holy Spirit to make the right decision.

We have here the sheep leading the shepherd, the Holy Spirit bypassing the leaders to guide the flock. It is very likely, with no guidance from leaders, and with only five of the thirteen divisions ordaining women elders, that the delegates will again vote no, as they did in 1995 when the North American Division made its request to decide the issue locally. Only this time Unions will continue to ordain women pastors, which will now start a new set of questions, one of which is, what exactly is the authority of the General Conference in Session?


Day 2 of Annual Council: Fear and Loathing in Silver Spring

By AT News Team, October 10, 2014

Fear of losing control, what the Adventist News Network (ANN) called the "elephant in the room," seemed palpable at the Annual Council of the governing body of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination during its first full day, Friday (October 10). In a leadership development seminar church administrators openly discussed the fact that at least some of them will likely not be re-elected at the General Conference (GC) Session next summer and the fears expressed by many about possible reactions to a pending decision on gender equality in clergy ordination.

"It is clear that leadership feels great angst about what can happen in San Antonio next year," wrote Adventist Today editor J. David Newman, who is a press observer at the meeting. "The whole morning was devoted to what happens if you do not get elected, and what to do if the GC Session does not vote your way on women's ordination."

In no uncertain terms, the seminar prepared the more than 330 committee members, most of them church administrators, to face the reality that next year they might not be asked to return to their present job. Top leaders in the Adventist denomination are generally appointed to five-year terms of office and then must be re-elected based on review by a nominating committee and the vote of constituency delegates. Until recently re-election was common, and many leaders had long careers in what are defined in organizational bylaws as temporary positions.

Pastor Pardon Mwansa, a vice president of the GC, kicked off the workshop with a presentation entitled, "The Nominating Committee Decides to Make a Change." He discussed the need for humility "when you are not re-elected," wrote Newman. Invoking lessons from Old Testament characters Daniel and Samuel, Mwansa said that a person elected to a denominational office has replaced someone, and that it would also happen to them. "We are called to serve and minister, and not to an office or a position," Mwansa said.

Several denominational officials from various parts of the world offered case studies on how to prepare for a change in leadership, or in some situations, how to make a needed change at an administrative position. Several delegates said a change in leadership can both help the denomination and send a signal to the person being re-assigned.

There were frank case studies of "Pastor Upward Mobility" and "Pastor Superdose" led by key officials. "This was followed by a wonderful monologue given by Delbert Johnson," director of the denomination's retirement office. "He was seated at a desk with memorabilia from his conference president days and talked to his chair about how wonderful it was to be a leader and how sad it would be if he did not continue to be a leader."

Dr. G. T. Ng, the denomination's number two officer, gave "a delightful and humorous presentation [on] 'Appointment and Disappointment,' again dealing with the subject of not being re-elected." He emphasized "the need to be a humble leader." This was followed by two more case studies on the same subject. "It almost seemed to be overkill," wrote Newman from the meeting.

These presentations are unprecedented, a "taboo subject," according to ANN. Elections and leaders' hopes for re-election are typically not discussed openly. The fact that this item was on the agenda is evidence of concern that next July at least some in the auditorium might see their current position assigned to someone else.

"Change brings innovation. Change ensures that we keep focused, and we might step back if we do not change," said Maria Fraser, a lay member from the Southern Africa Union Conference. "There will be weaknesses in everyone, but
the secret is for the team to synergize all their attributes and energies so that we can have the best for the Church."

Pastor Don Livesay, president of the Lake Union Conference in the United States, urged his colleagues in the room to subject themselves to periodic evaluations. “We as administrators typically would rather have a root canal than be evaluated. Therefore, we don’t know where we’re hitting it right and missing it wrong,” Livesay said.

Livesay also called for evaluations to be formalized throughout the denomination, which would enhance accountability and balance in an administrator’s leadership and personal life. “If our life falls apart because we’re not re-elected, we verify not being re-elected,” he said.

Ng implored committee members, who include the officers of the 13 world divisions and the presidents of the 132 union conferences, to view their jobs through the lens of stewardship. “If you are elected to the same position, then you will become a steward of that new position.” He urged church administrators to follow his custom at the end of each term, bringing a moving box into his office and thanking his administrative assistant for the time they have worked together, visibly prepared to leave his job. Ng distributed a miniature box to the committee members as a reminder of this point.

Also on Friday, Pastor Mark Finley, the well-known evangelist, now retired, spoke for nearly an hour on “unity in the body of Christ.” He addressed how leaders on both sides of the women’s ordination debate would react if a potential vote next year at GC Session differed from their own convictions.

Finley said the issue went beyond women’s ordination and had implications on how the Adventist movement will work through other points of disagreement. He spent most of his time on three “flashpoints” from the book of Acts that threatened the unity of the early church. “Dissension deters you from mission. That’s the devil’s strategy,” he said.

Finley reviewed three New Testament stories in which the church had to make choices about customs and leaders, and what happens when church leaders, corporately, make the wrong choice. The first story was the selection of someone to replace Judas among the twelve apostles. They nominated two individuals and then cast lots to select Matthias. Finley imaged that there might have been two sides, one which nominated Joseph and the other which nominated Matthias. In the end they all had to come together after the choice was made.

The second story involved the selection of seven persons to handle the conflict over who got food in Acts 6. The Greek widows complained they were not receiving help, so seven Greek men were appointed. Since they were Greek, they would understand the needs of the Greek widows. Finley emphasized that much prayer preceded the decision.

Then came the argument over whether circumcision was a salvation issue. The local leaders in different places had different opinions on the matter, so a general council of Christian leaders was convened in Jerusalem. A larger body met and rendered its decision, which the local churches were asked to follow.

This set the stage for Finley’s third story, about Paul’s return to Jerusalem. The elders at Jerusalem, the church leaders, convinced Paul to shave his head, take vows, and perform certain ceremonies at the temple to show he was a good Jew. This backfired, and Paul was arrested. However, it provided an opportunity for Paul to extend his mission to Rome, where he had been wanting to go.

Finley said this was probably not God’s "plan A" but his ultimate purpose was still fulfilled: preaching the gospel in Rome. Adventist Today editor Newman summarized Finley’s point; "Even if we get it wrong at San Antonio regarding women’s ordination, God will still find a way for His ultimate will to be achieved."

The New Testament pattern for resolving differences, Finley said, included prayer, seeking biblical answers, discussing the issues, considering what is best for the church’s mission and then finally making a decision on the issue together. Addressing the pending decision on ordination, Finley said, "May I make a humble suggestion? When you’ve studied an issue for 40 years and discussed it and discussed it and discussed it, pretty soon people have
pretty well made up their minds on either side of the question. Continual discussion and debate only furthers division."

Finley said he hoped the Adventist Church, like the early church, could learn to live with the decision on a major issue because people on both sides of the debate "were committed to the same Jesus. Whatever decision is ultimately made on the ordination of women, and I pray that this church will make the right decision, but whatever decision is ultimately made, my prayer is that nothing but God’s unified and prophetic mission will be the central focus of our lives," Finley said.

"What Finley did not cover," Newman observed, "is when God does not make His ultimate will known, when He allows mistakes to continue. We could use King Saul as a good example. It took almost forty years before God made changes in the leadership of the nation."

Finley’s presentation was a preamble to next week, when the committee is expected to discuss the matter of women’s ordination, reported ANN. The committee must vote in order to set the topic as an agenda item for the 2015 GC Session.

The committee commissioned a study by Bible scholars on the theology of ordination two years ago to try to resolve a debate that has gone on since the early 1970s. At the 1990 GC Session in Indianapolis the denomination decided to authorize the ordination of women serving as local elders and to extend Commissioned Minister credentials to women hired as pastors, but not to permit ordination for women clergy because of concerns about "unity."
Day 3 of Annual Council: Wilson says Satan Trying to Destroy Church

From ANN, October 11, 2014

Pastor Ted Wilson, world leader of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, said Satan was using every means at his disposal to try to destroy the Adventist Church and neutralize its mission of proclaiming Jesus’ soon coming. In a sermon that serves as his annual world pastoral address, Wilson said the devil’s tactics include ecumenism, charismatic worship approaches, and attacks on biblical prophetic understanding, and he said he had felt the blows personally in recent weeks with the death of a prematurely born grandson and the discovery that two other grandsons suffer serious health problems.

But he urged the listening church leaders of the Annual Council, a major church business meeting, to join him in submitting to God and taking a unified stand for the distinctive, biblical beliefs of the Adventist denomination, regardless of whether the teachings might be derided as unpopular or politically incorrect. “In these perilous closing scenes of Earth’s history, remember that the devil is attempting to neutralize anything and everything we do—even at this Annual Council,” Wilson told the packed auditorium at the world church’s headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland. “Through God’s power, let us be entirely respectful, Christ-like, and loving in our discussions and exchanges during this Annual Council on whatever topic we may speak.”

The Annual Council has several key issues to discuss, including whether the world church should revise some of the wording of its 28 Fundamental Beliefs and extend ordination to women. The 338 members of the Annual Council will decide whether to send those issues for a final vote next July to the General Conference session, the top governing body of the world church.

Wilson expressed gratefulness to God for bringing about a “beautiful spirit” in pre-Annual Council meetings between world church leaders. He shared an appeal from General Conference and division officers to the Annual Council delegates, asking that they remain Christ-like even if differences of opinion emerged. “Our humble demeanor and attitudes, through God’s power, will speak volumes to those who are watching,” he said, reading the appeal. “We earnestly appeal that we do all in our power to strengthen the church and this precious Advent movement.”

Wilson said Revelation 13 outlines a two-pronged satanic plan to destroy God’s last-day people: an ideological war of lies and errors that challenge the truth, and outright persecution culminating in a death decree against those who obey God’s biblical laws. “Though large-scale persecution will certainly come, currently Satan is trying to work from the inside to weaken the church through dissension, discord, and conformity to the world,” Wilson said.

Wilson repeatedly pointed to the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen G. White, co-founder of the Adventist movement, as the way to discern God’s will during the 70-minute sermon, which was punctuated with frequent “amens.” At one point he urged Annual Council delegates to make sure that they weren’t reading the Bible upside-down. “When you read the Bible upside-down, you will get an upside-down understanding,” he said, citing an African saying that he heard on a recent trip.

He singled out the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation as undesirable, saying it clouded the themes and topics of the Bible. “As we seek to know God’s will through a study of His Word, we must not place strange interpretations and employ interpretive gymnastics to draw out conclusions that are not evident from a plain reading of the Word,” he said.
Wilson, who has made a call for “revival and reformation” a hallmark of his presidency, listed a number of other ways that he saw the devil seeking to destroy the Adventist Church, including: (1) Inspiring a belief that reformation within the church means giving up unique doctrines so that it is easier for people to become Adventists. (2) Using tradition and philosophy to destroy faith in the Bible. (3) Urging people to move independently of the main body of the church. (4) Advancing charismatic and Pentecostal music and worship approaches that focus on church members and those leading out in services rather than on the true worship of God. (5) Distracting people with secular activities such as competitive sports, the Internet, the media, financial deals, and materialism. (6) Encouraging poor health habits and a lack of respect for God's natural laws, thereby enfeebling the mind and benumbing the senses. (7) Stirring skepticism about the veracity of the scriptural record of the origin of life and early history. (8) Spreading spiritualism. (9) Promoting ecumenism, or cooperation and better understanding among Christian faiths with the unattainable goal of universal Christian unity.

Wilson strongly cautioned against associating with ecumenical groups. “Don’t succumb to the temptation to be so cozy with other religious organizations that you fall into the devil’s trap of neutralizing your own effectiveness through unbiblical ecumenical bonds,” he said. Adventists also should avoid inviting clergy from other faiths to preach to Adventist churches on Sabbaths, he said. But he stressed that it was important for Adventists to be friendly with people of all faiths, to be leaders in public affairs and religious liberty, and to share their love for Jesus with the public.

Making his message personal, Wilson, age 64, told of a series of hardships that have befallen his family and that he linked to Satan’s war against the church. Wilson and his wife, Nancy, have three married daughters and eight grandchildren.

Edward, the 2-year-old son of the Wilsons’ eldest daughter is suffering numerous neurological problems after eight months of cancer treatment left him cancer-free but with antibodies that are attacking his brain, Wilson said. “We thank God that Edward is showing some improvement with treatment, but the extent of his future recovery remains uncertain,” he said.

A second grandson, 15-month-old James, born to the Wilsons’ middle daughter, has been diagnosed with a rare genetic mutation that has only been detected in two other people in the world. Three weeks ago, the youngest daughter lost her third child. “After the premature delivery at four months, she held the perfectly formed little boy in her hand,” Wilson said. “When the Lord returns, Catherine’s little son will be placed in her arms, and he will grow up in heaven.”

He said, however, that the devil would not succeed in any efforts to neutralize his family’s witness. “In the last year or so, the devil has attempted to neutralize every one of our three precious daughters, their families and us as parents. But he will not succeed. God is in control. He will be victorious. The faith of my daughters and their families and all of us is strong in the Lord,” he said, drawing loud “amens” from the audience.

Wilson cautioned that no one listening to the sermon in the main auditorium of the General Conference building was exempt from the devil’s attacks. “We are all in this together,” he said. “There are many in this room who are going through far worse situations.”

Looking beyond internal church issues, Wilson said Satan was attacking the church on other fronts as well, including the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and violence in Iraq, Syria, and Ukraine. Despite the difficulties, Wilson called on the delegates to boldly proclaim the distinctive message of the Adventist Church. “Stay away from anything that will undermine our message or cloud our distinctive beliefs,” he said. “Don’t be tempted by the devil to blend in with the crowd or be politically correct. Don’t proclaim a generic Christianity or a ‘cheap-grace Christ’ that does not point to the distinctive Biblical truths to be declared worldwide, the very reason for which the Seventh-day Adventist Church was organized.” The church leaders stood when Wilson concluded with an appeal to join him in submitting to God’s power and asking for protection from the devil’s attacks.

The Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.
Day 5 of Annual Council: Doctrinal Changes Voted

By AT News Team, October 14, 2014

After considerable debate, a majority vote of the governing body of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination adopted recommendations to change the wording of key doctrines. The language of paragraph 6 on the doctrine of creation was adjusted to emphasize that creation was a “recent” event that took place during “six literal days.” But, the changes in the denomination’s Statement of Fundamental Beliefs do not become official unless they are voted by the delegates to the General Conference (GC) Session next summer.

The doctrine on creation currently states, “In six days the Lord made ‘the heaven and the earth’ and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week.” The proposal for a revised doctrine reads: “In a recent six-day creation the Lord made ‘the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them’ and rested on the seventh day.”

Leaders of the denomination insisted on inserting the word “recent” to establish the biblical belief that creation occurred thousands of years ago, as opposed to the conflicting beliefs of evolutionists who say the earth is at least four billion years old. The phrase “six literal days” is significant to church leaders because it conveys that each day of creation is one literal day. The denominational leaders expressed concern that if Adventists adopt the position that creation was not an event of six literal days, they will abandon one of the denomination’s central beliefs, that the Sabbath is a 24-hour period of rest.

The vote was 179 to 15, with 5 abstentions, to adopt the revised language. The move to clarify the church’s position comes at a time when an increasing number of Adventists, including some in the denomination’s academic institutions, "are subscribing to theistic evolution, a view that acknowledges God and science are responsible for creation,” stated the Adventist News Network, the official news service of the denomination.

The denomination's top officer, Pastor Ted Wilson, president of the GC, has made it a priority to affirm the doctrine of a literal, six-day creation. He clearly expressed his viewpoint in a major speech to more than 400 Bible and science teachers, and other denominational employees, which met in Nevada two months ago. Quoting from the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White, a co-founder of the denomination in the 19th century, Wilson urged believers to “hold firmly to a literal, recent creation and absolutely reject theistic and general evolutionary theory.”

Wilson's position is supported by the denomination's Biblical Research Institute (BRI). Scholars there have maintained that the church’s identity will be at risk if the doctrine is not revised to give additional emphasis to the idea of a literal, six-day creation. Should theistic evolution become more widely accepted, scholars at the BRI stated in a paper, “we will be in danger of losing the biblical foundation for the Sabbath and our understanding of salvation.”

The process for revising the doctrinal statement began in 2010 in Atlanta, Georgia, when delegates to the 59th GC Session voted to request changes. A committee was appointed to review the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs and incorporate language from a 2004 statement affirming Creation as well as seek input from Bible scholars around the world. That committee is chaired by Dr. Artur Stele, a former seminary dean now a GC vice president and head of the BRI.

Relatively few of the 330 executive committee members at Monday's meeting commented on the proposal. Dr. David Trim, the denomination's official historian, cautioned that the proposed wording which states that the six literal days of
creation, together with the Sabbath, “constituted a week as we experience it today,” could be subject to a variety of interpretations.

Shirley Chang, a lay member from North America, said adding the word “recent” seemed out of context. Dr. Bertil Wiklander, who retired recently as president of the denomination’s Trans-European Division, took issue with the insertion of the word “historical” to describe the creation account. He said the church is better off with the original statement, because the revised belief “could take the meaning that the account belongs to history.”

The doctrine of creation was the most-discussed item among several revisions being proposed for the Fundamental Beliefs statement on Sunday and Monday. The denomination had no official doctrinal creed until 1980 when it voted a statement of 27 Fundamental Beliefs under the leadership of Pastor Neal Wilson, then GC president, who said revisions would be needed periodically. In 2005 a GC Session added the a 28th doctrine entitled “Growing in Christ.”

In an effort to introduce more inclusive language it had been proposed on Sunday to revise the first paragraph in the doctrinal statement as follows: “The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy persons of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit,” ... removing "holy men," the traditional language. On Monday some of the committee members still objected to "persons" instead of "men," but the proposed revisions were voted.

Later in the day Stele came back and said that Pastor Mark Finley, a well-known retired evangelist present at the meeting, had suggested some wording that might satisfy everyone. The change was presented verbally without even being shown on a slide, and despite the fact that some in the auditorium could not hear it, the new language was voted unanimously. It substituted the gender-neutral phrase "inspired authors" instead of either "men" or "persons."

In this week’s proposal, none of the doctrines were changed substantially. Language is proposed for the first time in the doctrine of marriage and the family acknowledging that single adults are valued too: God “embraces both single and married persons.” It is also proposed to replace “marriage partners” with “a man and a woman.” In the doctrine of Christian behavior it is proposed to replace language saying that godly people act in harmony “with the principles of heaven.” The new language reads that they act in harmony “with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life.” Most of the modifications were simple edits, such as deleting redundancies, adopting more inclusive language and fixing punctuation.

On Monday afternoon proposals for revising the Church Manual were presented. The Church Manual is a policy book for local congregations in the Adventist denomination.

"The largest amount of debate was for an amendment to the Reasons for Church Discipline," reported Adventist Today editor J. David Newman. Church Discipline is a policy that defines when a congregation may vote to kick out a member or suspend them from holding office as a lay leader.

The proposed revision was to language defining sexual misconduct as a reason to discipline a church member: “Any act of sexual intimacy outside of the marriage relationship and/or non-consensual acts of sexual intimacy within a marriage whether those acts are legal or illegal. Such acts include but are not limited to child sexual abuse, including sexual abuse of the vulnerable. Marriage is defined as a public, lawfully binding, monogamous, heterosexual relationship between one male and one female." This new language would replace this old statement: "Violation of the seventh commandment of the law of God as it relates to the marriage institution, the Christian home, and biblical standards of moral conduct."

"This brought much debate," Newman reported. Some committee members wanted the language about "violation of the seventh commandment" reinstated. "Finally, someone moved that this section be referred back to the Church Manual Committee. The vote was 94 for sending it back and 96 against, which brought gasps from the committee. The chair said that it should go back since it was so close. Someone reminded him that the whole document had been voted the previous day except for this item. This ended the debate in some confusion, although it is likely the Church Manual Committee will end up studying this item again."
Monday morning the GC Treasurer’s report was presented by Robert Lemon. He pointed out how thrifty the GC is. The membership of the denomination has more than doubled since 1995. Over the same period the organization has grown from 11 world division, 94 union conferences and 459 local conferences to 13 world divisions, 125 union conferences and 602 local conferences. At the same time the staff of the GC increased by only five individuals from 282 to 287.

Lemon also reminded the committee that the GC is learning to live with less income from North America. The GC used to receive 10 percent of all the Tithe given by members in North America, but beginning in 2012 the amount was reduced to 8 percent, and the percentage will be reduced a little each year until it gets to 6 percent in 2020. This means that the GC must rely more on the rest of the worldwide denomination for its funding.

Dr. Neils-Erik Andreasen was presented an Award of Excellence by the GC education department for his 20 years as president of Andrews University, the longest tenure of any president at the institution. "They did not say that in 2006 the chairman of the board for Andrews University [a GC officer] convinced Andreasen to resign by telling him that otherwise the board would fire him," recalled Adventist Today editor Newman. "Andreasen tendered his resignation, but when the board found out they refused to accept his resignation and Andreasen eventually withdrew his resignation. Eight years later he is still at the helm."
Day 6 of Annual Council: Vote Set on Ordination for Women

By AT News Team, October 15, 2014

At the end of the day Tuesday (October 14) the governing body of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination placed the ongoing debate about gender equality in clergy ordination in the same place that it was in 1995. Delegates to the top decision-making body which meets only once every five years will be asked next summer to permit continental units of the denomination to decide on their own about extending ordination to women serving as pastors.

The denomination's General Conference (GC) will convene in San Antonio, Texas, in July 2015 and the group's executive committee decided yesterday to put on the agenda an item very similar to one it faced in 1995 when it met in Utrecht, the Netherlands. After two decades of debate on an issue that has threatened to divide the Adventist movement, delegates will again be asked to allow a decision to be made on a regional basis rather than a once-for-all global decision.

Unlike most Protestant bodies, the Adventist denomination has a more centralized organization that includes the entire world. The issue of extending ordination to women in the Adventist clergy sets the more culturally conservative developing world against the more culturally progressive developed world. In recent decades the Adventist faith has grown at a rapid rate in Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia, while growth has slowed in North America, Europe, Australia and Japan.

Adventist judicatories called "union conferences" have already begun to ordain women employed as pastors in parts of the United States and have voted to do so in a number of countries in Europe. And Adventists in China, where the government prevents the denomination from exercising administrative control, have been ordaining women pastors since the 1980s.

Over the last two years Bible scholars have been engaged in a careful study on the topic commissioned by the GC. Although the majority of the denomination's scholars do not see any scriptural or theological reasons to prohibit the ordination of women clergy, the study committee presented a report describing three alternative positions instead of a single recommendation. The decision yesterday is to place "Position 3" before the delegates next July in the hopes that it will provide a middle ground where schism can be avoided.

In the GC executive committee yesterday there were 243 votes in favor and 44 against placing this item on the agenda of the 2015 GC Session:

"Whereas, The unity for which Jesus prayed is vitally important to the witness of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and;

"Whereas, The Seventh-day Adventist Church seeks to engage every member in its worldwide mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ among people from every nation, culture and ethnicity, and;

"Whereas, Various groups appointed by the General Conference and its divisions have carefully studied the Bible and Ellen G. White writings with respect to the ordination of women and have not arrived at consensus as to whether ministerial ordination for women is unilaterally affirmed or denied, and;

"Whereas, The Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms that "God has ordained that the representatives of His Church
from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference Session, shall have authority” [quoting White]

"Therefore, The General Conference Executive Committee requests delegates in their sacred responsibility to God at the 2015 General Conference Session to respond to the following question:

"After your prayerful study on ordination from the Bible, the writings of Ellen G White, and the reports of the study commissions, and;

"After your careful consideration of what is best for the Church and the fulfillment of its mission,

"Is it acceptable for division executive committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry? Yes or No"[

If a simple majority of the delegates next summer vote Yes on this item, then leaders in each of the denomination’s 13 world divisions would be able to decide whether to ordain women serving as pastors in their territory. A release from the denomination's official news service stated that this plan "was brought ... as a recommendation from the Church's top officials and could be considered a creative way of dealing with a thorny issue by taking a neutral-leaning stance."

Some proponents of women’s ordination voted in favor of the motion but expressed strong concerns that it lacked a formal recommendation for or against ordination. These proponents fear the issue will carry less weight when the question comes up at the GC Session next July. "I think this body needs to give direction to the world church," said Pastor David Weigley, president of the Columbia Union Conference in North America. “We are missing a golden opportunity to give direction. Leaders lead, they give direction,” he said.

“Based on what I see from the history of this particular issue, it seems that [this body] has always played a very prominent role in what is passed on to the GC Session,” said Heather-Dawn Small, director of women’s ministries director for the GC. “I’ve seen from the past that what this [body] decides influences the GC Session.”

More than 20 people spoke on varying sides of the issue. Pastor Alberto C. Gulfan Jr., president of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, said he appreciates the contribution of female evangelists, but that his region’s constituency “is not ready to move towards the ordination of women pastors.” He added: “We are also supporting this recommendation to bring this to the General Conference in Session and let the world decide on the issue once and for all.”

Pastor Ted Wilson, the GC president who has opposed recent moves for women's ordination, did not express his opinion yesterday, but indicated before the discussion began that he would be willing to adjust his stance. “If this body accepts the recommendation to place a question before the General Conference Session and that Session ... votes something,” Wilson announced, “I pledge to you I will follow what the General Conference votes. I want to ask each of you to do the same.”

The discussion among Adventists of ordination for women clergy began more than 130 years ago and returned in the 1970s, especially in the United States, Europe and the South Pacific. The GC Sessions in 1990 voted to acknowledge that there was no agreement among the denomination’s Bible scholars that there were any barriers to the practice, but not to do so out of respect for “unity” in the movement. In 1995 it voted not to grant a request for the decision to be made by the “divisions.”

At the 2010 Session in Atlanta, Georgia, a delegate from the U.S. state of Pennsylvania asked denominational leaders, if women can’t be ordained as ministers, then what is the denomination’s theology on ordination? That question led to a commitment from GC leaders to open the discussion again and appoint a special study committee. The 106-member Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) was asked to conduct an in-depth analysis of ordination and provide information to help the denomination decide how to handle the matter. TOSC’s response was a 127-page report that was the basis for Tuesday’s discussion.

The report acknowledged that committee members—who hailed from around the world and met four times, for
several days each time—were unable to come to agreement on whether to support or oppose women’s ordination. Instead, it included three separate statements to summarize members’ viewpoints. Yesterday those positions were explained by three different scholars.

One position, labeled Statement No. 1, said that only men could be ordained throughout the world church. Statement No. 2 said that entities responsible for hiring pastors should be able to make their own decisions on whether to ordain female ministers. Statement No. 3 said the decision should be left to the leadership “at a proper level” to determine whether ordination “may be appropriate for their area or region.”

The leadership of the GC expressed the hope yesterday that a vote by the GC Session will settle the matter once and for all. But, the outcome is far from certain. The nearly 2,600 voting delegates may decide to adopt, reject, or amend the proposal approved yesterday. If the proposal is adopted, it will move the debate to different bodies within the denomination, but it will not end discussion. If the proposal is rejected, it will not end the need for some kind of gender equality in the Adventist clergy in North America, Europe and other developed nations. For example, Dr. J. David Newman, the editor of Adventist Today, has proposed that ordination be abandoned by Adventists and that the denomination use the Commissioned Minister option which was added to its policies in the 1990s. Others have expressed the fear that Adventists in some parts of the world may ignore the decisions of the GC or even separate from the denomination and organize an alternative body.
Day 7 of Annual Council: Oakwood University Joins North America

By AT News Team, October 16, 2014

In a final agenda item at the 2014 annual meeting of the governing body for the Adventist denomination, the group convened as the constituency of Oakwood University and voted to transfer its sponsorship from the denomination's General Conference (GC) to its North American Division (NAD). The group voted the change 129 to 1 before adjourning yesterday (October 15). A subsequent vote to amend the university’s bylaws passed 114 to 0. Neither vote had any abstentions.

Oakwood University is one of the historically African American institutions of higher education in the United States; the only one affiliated with the Adventist faith. It is located in Huntsville, Alabama.

The transfer was requested by an earlier vote of the university's board. Wednesday’s decision clears the way for a confirming vote by the NAD governing committee in a few weeks. “Welcome home to your home division,” Pastor Daniel R. Jackson, president of the NAD, told the meeting on Wednesday. The university had been linked directly to the world body of the Adventist movement since it was founded in 1896.

Dr. Leslie N. Pollard, president of the university, spoke of the influence of Ellen G. White, one of the denomination's co-founders in the 19th century, on Oakwood. “If there is anyone close to being a saint in the African-American community, it is Ellen White,” he said at the constituency meeting.

Dr. Ella Simmons, an educator and the GC vice president who has actively worked with the university on the transfer, stated prior to the vote that she believed White would have approved of the plan. She said she had a passage from one of the books that White authored entitled The Ministry of Healing that applied to the situation.

Reading a list of questions on what an engaged couple should ask before marriage, she said: “Let the questions be raised, ’Will this union help me heavenward? Will it increase my love for God? And will it enlarge my sphere of usefulness in this life?’ If these reflections present no drawback, then in the fear of God move forward” Healing (p. 356).

The transfer will downgrade the status of the university’s Ellen G. White Estate branch office, a depository of White documents and other historical materials. Denominational policy dictates that only GC institutions are allowed to have the higher status. This means that the Oakwood unit will be renamed a White Estate research center. Jackson said the only impact of the change would be the sign outside the center’s door. “Nothing is going to change—just the name,” he said in an interview with the Adventist News Network (ANN).

Jackson also said that the amount of the university’s subsidy would stay the same but would now come from the NAD instead of the GC. A total of $1.28 million has been budgeted by the GC for the university in 2015, a 2 percent increase from 2014, according to financial statements released at the meeting. The NAD will deduct that amount from the money that it sends to the GC and give it to the university, Jackson said.

Oakwood is in good financial health, said Pollard, who last month opened a university-owned franchise of Edible Arrangements in a bid to cut student tuition. Oakwood is the first Adventist school to own a retail franchise. Pollard said 10 percent of the university’s $50 million annual budget comes from NAD organizations.
Robert E. Lemon, treasurer of the GC, concurred with Pollard’s financial assessment. “Oakwood University is in a very, very good financial position,” he said.
Lincoln Adventists Support Iraqi Refugees

Seventh-day Adventists in Lincoln, NE, have hosted two events—a memorial service and a fundraiser—in support of Iraqis affected by ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria). First, Union College held an Interfaith Iraq Peacemaking and Memorial Service on September 28. Three hundred people attended the service, “which was dedicated to remembrances of Yazidis who have been killed and enslaved by ISIS,” reported Chris Heady for the Lincoln Journal Star.

Yazidis are Kurdish-speaking people who live primarily in northern Iraq. Lincoln has the largest population of Yazidis outside of Iraq, with more than 1,000 in the area. There are an estimated 10,000 Iraqi refugees living in Lincoln, including the Yazidis.

The ceremony featured speeches by Doug Hardt of the Union College Center for Interfaith Studies and Culture, Laila Khoudeida, who is a Yazidi, and Nizar Zhaiya, a practicing Muslim who was born in Iraq but is now a Lincoln resident. Khoudeida shared the story of a young woman who was abducted by ISIS, while Zhaiya described ISIS and explained that he cannot understand how the group is able to affiliate with other Muslims. The outdoor ceremony finished after sunset with a performance by the Union College Octet.

Doug Hardt and fellow Union College professor Chris Blake planned the event in conjunction with the Good Neighbor Community Center (GNCC) and the Interfaith Peacemaking Coalition. In August Hardt traveled to Arbil, Kurdistan, with Conrad Vine, Adventist Frontier Missions (AFM) president, to assess the situation. After seeing one million people displaced from their homes because of the violence, Hardt said he “wanted to do something to remember those who had died,” reported Heady.

The second event was a fundraiser by College View Academy (CVA) students, who hosted a benefit concert at College View Church. KLKN TV, the ABC affiliate in Lincoln, reported that hundreds attended the October 12 event, including Lincoln’s Mayor, Chris Beutler.

The event initially raised more than $6,500, and Doug Hardt told Adventist Today that additional donations have raised the amount to $9,500. Most of these funds will go to an AFM project supporting refugees in the area[1]; however, all donations that are designated for Yazda[2], an organization specifically helping the Yazidis, are being directed to the nonprofit.

The idea for the concert grew out of the original memorial service. Lisette Deemer, the CVA music teacher,
approached Hardt after the event and asked what more could be done. Together they organized the academy fundraiser. Deemer has been active with previous issues, Hardt told Adventist Today. She has planned events raising money for disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, the earthquake in Haiti and the tsunami that hit Thailand.

GNCC, the Adventist community service agency where Hardt works part-time as the outreach coordinator, has a program that supports immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa—MENA HOPE Project[3]. This initiative is directed by Zainab Al-Baaj, a Muslim immigrant from Iraq. Hardt describes her as one of the most influential supporters of Iraqi immigrants in Lincoln.

No additional events are currently being planned by GNCC for the Lincoln community, though Hardt regularly visits churches, raising awareness and funds for the AFM refugee project.


Annual Council Votes the Intellectual Decline of the Corporate Adventist Church

by Ervin Taylor, October 16, 2014

The recent action of the General Conference Annual Council to endorse the change in Adventist “Fundamental” Belief Number 6 by stating that the Creation was “recent” and occurred in “six literal days” is further testimony that the present General Conference administration headed by Wilson II is determined to return the Adventist Church intellectually and theologically to where it was at its founding: a fundamentalist sect. The only difference will be that corporate Adventism is now what sociologists call an Institutionalized Sect. However, intellectually and theologically, under the rule of Wilson II and his allies in the Adventist Theological Society (ATS), the standing of Adventism among well-informed and educated individuals in the 21st Century will continue to decline. There is only one more step left in executing the long-term Adventist version of the Counter Reformation agenda of the ATS---to stop and then reverse the theological maturation of Adventism that began in the late 1950s. The next step is, of course, a “vote” during the General Conference session in San Antonio, Texas, in July 2015. Moderate and progressive Adventists should not be surprised as to what is going on. The retrogressive theological agenda of the ATS from its beginnings in the late 1980s has been public and available for all to read. Wilson II is simply carrying out their wishes. That this agenda is fundamentally detrimental to the long term intellectual viability of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the modern world appears to be of little or no interest to ATS leadership or Wilson II, who is functioning now, essentially, as a pawn in carrying out ATS's long-term plans. More than three decades ago, Dr. Raymond Cottrell, a long-serving associate editor of the Adventist Review and founding editor of Adventist Today, laid out in great detail the theological basis of the ATS agenda. In a future blog, we will review the insightful analysis Dr. Cottrell wrote 20 years ago in a paper entitled, “The Adventist Theological Society and its Biblical Hermeneutic.”
7 Important Questions About 1844

by Dan Appel, October 11, 2014

It has been said that there would be no Seventh-day Adventist Church without the doctrine of the Investigative Judgment. That is true. Our purpose, our mission, is to proclaim the judgment-centered messages of Revelation 14:8-12 within the larger context of the Gospel. It is our unique piece of the larger puzzle put together by the Christian church. Theologically, it is our bi-optic focus on the judgment, even as we center on the cross, that more than any other doctrine sets us apart from the rest of Christianity.

I am a Seventh-day Adventist pastor who loves and appreciates my church. I have spent years and countless hours studying the theme of the pre-advent judgment. I have lived through all of the controversy of the 70s and 80s which centered on this topic. I have spent countless hours in conversation and study on the subject with colleagues who love the church as I do. My library has a whole shelf filled with books dedicated to the subject. I have packed files with the results of my study in an ongoing quest to understand the truth about the judgment.

It has been a rich and very disconcerting experience. Rich, in that I have gained a greater appreciation for God, the plan of salvation, and my church every time I have studied the subject. Disconcerting because, hard as I have tried to rationalize certain aspects of our beliefs on the subject of judgment, there are nagging questions which I have never been able to find answers for; things which just make no sense to me theologically or philosophically.

My concerns circle around several basic questions that are not about the fundamental truths of the pre-advent judgment. They are rather about issues which I am increasingly convinced are peripheral and have sidetracked us from what really matters.

That said, there are certain things which are abundantly clear when one opens the Bible - things upon which we should all be able to agree.

1. The concept of a last judgment is foundational to everything else in the Bible - one finds it clearly stated from Genesis through Revelation. While, as I have shown in previous essays, that judgment is centered on God's judgment of Satan as the Great Controversy draws to a close, there are still elements of the judgment which involve us and our eternal destiny.

2. The idea of a pre-advent judgment makes sense logically and biblically. Unless one takes a universalist position and believes that all humanity is going to be saved no matter their choices vis-a-vis loyalty to the God of the Bible, then at some point God is going to have to decide — judge, in other words - who is going to be saved and who is going to be lost. We may argue over where, when and how that decision takes place, but it has to take place at some point. Since the Bible clearly states that God is going to bring our “reward” with Him when He returns to earth at the end, then that judgment has to be made prior to the advent. To state that the Bible assumes this is to state the obvious to any Bible student and is clearly logical.

3. It is clear that the Bible views the judgment as a process beginning at the Cross and ending with the Great White
Throne administration of justice found in the book of Revelation. At the same time, it is clear from Daniel 7 that a particular phase of that process begins sometime after the year 1798 and before Jesus returns to earth the second time.

4. The announcement of the end of this judgment process is an integral part of last day events as portrayed in Revelation - most notably in Revelation 14:8-10. It has been the most common theme in our self-identity since our inception - often eclipsing even, tragically, the Cross when it came to identifying ourselves to others. (Think back and compare the triads of angels which flew across church signs and traditionally graced our buildings, stationary and calling cards with the numbers of crosses that figured prominently on those same spaces.) As will be seen later, the announcement of the end of any human opportunity to choose sides in the war between good and evil is integral to the whole Day of Atonement theology of the Old Testament. Again, Seventh-day Adventists are on solid ground when we see ourselves as messengers of that close of human probation.

It has been said that “the devil is in the details.” It is in our understanding of some of the details of what occurs in that period after 1798 that we begin to stray from clear Bible teaching. Even among conservative Adventists there have often been questions which lurk at the edge of consciousness when ministers and laymen candidly discuss some details of certain of our beliefs concerning the judgment. (I am aware of a very conservative Bible scholar in one of our colleges who, during the foment over the Judgment in the 70s, told a relative who is a close friend of mine, “I have a whole file drawer full of material on the subject that I don’t know what to do with and for which I would probably be fired if it became common knowledge that I had it!” He subsequently, not long before his death, burned it all.)

What are some of those questions that concern me?

1. Even assuming for a minute that the whole 1844 experience is important, how important is it relative to other important subjects in the Bible?

The specific 1844 initiation of a pre-advent judgment takes up just one verse in one book of the Bible. Compared with other subjects, it just doesn't merit that much attention in Scripture - even when you include the other 26 surrounding verses of the context of Daniel 8. We skewer our Mormon friends for basing their whole doctrine of baptism for the dead on one Pauline passage, yet choose to do the same with one verse in Daniel for our position on the beginning of the “investigative” phase of the Judgment. Important subjects receive repeated, extensive treatment in Scripture, and really important topics appear everywhere. They recur, they are emphasized. re-emphasized and stated in different ways from different perspectives. For instance, the whole idea of Sabbath is a thread that is woven through both the Old and New Testaments, as is the state of humanity in death. The 1260-day prophecy of Daniel occurs several times in the book of Daniel, then receives additional treatment in Revelation. If whatever happened on October 22, 1844, was really that important, wouldn’t one expect it to be repeated in Daniel and the Revelation in concept and specifics? Again, we are not talking about the concept of a pre-advent judgment, but of a starting point in 1844. Even within Daniel it receives scarce billing. If a single mention merits great importance, would not the 1290 days and the 1335 days of Daniel 12:11,12 be equally important? In the grand scheme of things, from a biblical perspective, October 22, 1844 as a starting date for the pre-advent judgment is a minor bump in the road at best - if that is even the point of Daniel 8:14. 2. If the happenings of 1844 are so important, why are they so difficult to understand, prove and explain?

It has been said that a theologian is often a person committed to finding meaning in the Bible’s structure who ends up needlessly structuring its meaning in order to give meaning to the theologian. Excessive complexity is often a red flag when it comes to definitions of scriptural truth. It generally points to an attempt to make something seem more important than it actually is. Issues which are important to God are relatively easy to understand in the Bible. Granted, the details can engender considerable discussion, but the basics are simply stated. While there are undoubtedly those who find the arcane calculations necessary to understand and establish the beginning and ending points of the 2300 days of Daniel 8:14 easy to fathom, it is beyond the ken of most. When the summer 2006 quarter’s Sabbath School lessons which focused on this subject were finished and the quarterlies were filed carefully away for

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http://www.printfriendly.com/print?url=http://www.atodayarchive.org/art...
reference, I would wager that most Adventist members, and even most Adventist pastors, still could not give a clear, easy to fathom, presentation of Daniel 8 to an adult, much less to a child. Most evangelistic presentations on the subject are convoluted at best. People leave thinking, "This must be true. The speaker seems very intelligent and informed and said it is. I don't understand a word he just said, but it must be true if he says it is." The very complexity of the whole 2300-day schema belies its importance. If the 2300-day prophecy portion of the pre-advent judgment doctrine were as vital as we wish to make it, don't you think that God could have stated it clearly and succinctly, the way He did with every other one of our doctrines? If it is not important, why do we cling to it so tenaciously? There are several reasons. The first is all of the emotional baggage which accompanies this concept. We have a love/hate relationship with 1844 for precisely the same reasons we have warm fuzzy feelings in the United States for Thanksgiving Day. The original "thanksgiving" did not occur on the last Thursday in November. The participants most probably did not eat turkey but rather venison and "wild fowl," and the rest of the meal was apparently dried corn and fruit. The pilgrims didn't wear black and starched white and it is likely that most who ate, Indian and Pilgrim, consumed their food with their fingers rather than the tableware pictured in most of our paintings. Much of the Thanksgiving myth is just that, a warm fuzzy story that we love because it shows something positive and warm about what was in actuality a horrible and often tragic year for the Pilgrims. It is about our beginnings, and we are glad that we began and that there were good things that grew out of the difficult times, so we hold on to the legends because it feels right - even when most of the details we learned in elementary school are not true. The same can be said of our memories of the experience surrounding 1844. Whether it was a mistake on William Miller's part or not, God used what happened in 1844 as a means to shake people out of their spiritual complacency and to move them to become passionate about the second coming of Jesus. The story of the gentleman farmer preaching about his understanding of a very difficult passage of scripture that predicted the soon coming of Jesus, and the persecution of the preacher’s followers for their beliefs, has a heroic quality that draws us even when we don't want to be drawn. The men and women who sacrificed everything in their passion for Jesus’ return, the ascension robes and the potatoes rotting in the fields, the expulsion from their churches, the "vision in a cornfield" and a thousand and one other bits and pieces of the story all resonate in our spirits. Listening to the old church family stories, we viscerally know that we are here for a reason, that God intervened in human history and birthed a movement that is transforming society in many good and wonderful ways, and that we are a part of that movement. The second reason we are loathe to let go of the 1844 part of the investigative judgment might be a matter of pride. Is it remotely possible that we love Daniel 8:14 so much because we are proud that we understand something no one else can comprehend, and that makes us feel important and special and gives some kind of meaning to our existence? Are we guilty of a 20th-century form of subtle gnosticism where we know the secret arcane truths that no one else can know unless we initiate them into the inside information? Other people are the "speaking in tongues people," or the "mass people," or the "holy-living people," but we are the prophecy people, and there is one prophecy that only we understand.

While that view feeds our egos, we must ask whether in the long term it serves to enhance our ability to accomplish our mission or detracts from it. Or, to ask the question a different way, is the return we get really worth the price we pay in isolating ourselves from the very people we wish to reach by our stubborn insistence on holding on to a belief that is very difficult, if not impossible, to substantiate biblically?

Let's admit it, it's hard for any of us to admit we have been wrong. The more energy and time we have invested in trying to defend something, the harder it is to admit our mistake. Our pride makes it very difficult to admit to our critics or ourselves that we may have been in error. But there are times when we must admit our mistakes, put them behind us, and get on with life. Admission and confession can be a renewing and invigorating experience when it frees us and others to go forward.

But, there is always the issue of the slippery slope. Once you admit you were in error in one point, there is the fear that you may discover other mistakes and that our whole system of belief will be determined to be a house of cards and will come crashing down around us. The Seventh-day Adventist system of beliefs is too well-grounded in scriptures for that to happen. Discovering a rotten board or two in a well-built house does not mean that the whole house will fall apart - unless the rotten boards are ignored and the problem is allowed to fester and grow.
Finally, we want, we need the 1844 date to be true! When we compare our often mundane spiritual lives with the stories of the Acts of the Apostles or the Exodus we all secretly cry: “God, why don’t you work in the same concrete, dramatic ways today?” We all have a desperate need to believe that God is alive and well and working in modern times, that He is injecting Himself into human history today in the same way that He did 2,000 or 4,000 years ago. So, a prophecy whose specific fulfillment falls in modern times gives us hope and lends credibility to our dreams. It assures us that the God who acted in the past acts today - that supernatural events are not the stuff of myth and legend, that they are reality. The 1844 experience bolsters our faith and gives us renewed reason to believe.

Unfortunately, the very things that initially sustain our faith can undermine and destroy it if we are not careful. If, after discovering that some small aspect of our belief system is not built on solid ground, we continue to defend it, we undermine confidence in the rest of our beliefs in the eyes of others and, subtly, often in ourselves. We become inwardly cynical and outwardly hypocritical, and it destroys both our witness in the eyes of thinking observers and our inner conviction in what we ourselves believe.

In the words of the old country-western song, “You’ve got to know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em.” Maybe it’s time to fold on what does not bear the scrutiny of careful Bible study and get on with what we have been called to accomplish as a church.

3. Why can we not persuade any other Christians to accept our interpretation of Daniel 8?

While it can be disastrous to our faith to judge the merits of our beliefs by their acceptance by others not of our religious persuasion, it is smart to at least listen carefully to the objections of others and to ask why they cannot see things as we do. Every other doctrine of Adventism finds its proponents among other conservative Bible students. Martin Luther espoused the same position we do on the state of humans in death in his small, or shorter, catechism. So does Tony Campolo. People may not like what we believe happens at death; they may even reject it; but at least they can understand how we got there Biblically. Many New Testament Christians celebrate the Sabbath. Baptism by immersion is practiced widely in conservative Christianity. More and more followers of Christ are becoming convicted, based on the message of the Bible, that their bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, deserving care and preservation. There are many believers in spiritual gifts who acknowledge that prophecy is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit promised to Christians - even if they choose not to believe that Ellen White is one who exercised that gift. The same thing could be said for every one of our doctrinal positions - except for our belief that the pre-advent judgment began in 1844. No current, credible non-Adventist scholar accepts this idea! It would seem that almost 170 years of persuasion would have convinced someone that we are right about 1844.

4. Is an appreciation of the 1844 date necessary for an appreciation of either the types of the Old Testament sanctuary services or the antitypical events in the stream of earth-time that they point to?

One of the things most students of the Old Testament sanctuary economy appreciate is the way God used simple “sandbox” illustrations to powerfully demonstrate the plan of salvation to His people. A child could participate in the various celebrations and gain a grasp of God’s love for His people. Today, many New Testament Christians enjoy celebrating the Old Testament holy days, even when they do not believe that they are required of Christians, because of the multi-sensory approach they use to teaching eternal truths.

The Old Testament sanctuary economy has much it can teach us. Seventh-day Adventists have correctly pointed out the correlation between New Testament era events and the various festivals of the Old Testament. But, we have erred in believing and teaching that the major point of the message of the biblical Day of Atonement for Old Testament followers of God was an A.D. 19th-century date.

The ten “Days of Awe" between Rosh Hashanah, the first day of the Jewish year, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, were a time of deep soul-searching introspection and repentance, when committed citizens of God’s kingdom asked themselves if their hearts and lives were truly committed to God.
Yom Kippur, the Jewish festival at the end of the Days of Awe, pictured the time when the records are “sealed” at the very close of human probation. It provided a final quick chance to repent. The times of soul-searching were over, and the persons whose hearts and actions were holy would remain so, as would the person who was in rebellion against God. This day portrayed a last appeal from a loving God, a last chance to change the judgment, to demonstrate your repentance and make amends before your fate was forever set. Yom Kippur theology fits perfectly with Revelation 14:8-12 theology, where a final call goes out to humanity to repent and give glory to God while there is still a chance. That is the meaning of the type - there is a deadline. Human probation does close. When it does, there will be no more chances. It is also the reality of the antitype! This final call to repentance is not a long drawn-out one, but rather a final quick appeal. Yom Kippur is a festival of imminence! While the 170 years spanning from 1844 to the present are short in comparison to the 6,000+ years of human existence, they are far too long for what is pictured in the Biblical Day of Atonement. It is the end, not the beginning of the end.

5. Is a belief in the 2300-day prophecy's fulfillment in 1844 necessary to be considered a committed, orthodox, Seventh-day Adventist? And, as a corollary to that question, is a belief in the 1844 experience as a fulfillment of Daniel 8:14 necessary to believe in a pre-advent judgment which commences at some point prior to Jesus’ return to earth?

I don't think so - in fact a forced marriage between the two is not necessarily a natural or a Biblical one. A pre-advent judgment is as one of the defining principles which undergird our faith along with the Sabbath, the unconscious state of man in death, baptism by immersion, and righteousness by faith alone. But the point of the Day of Atonement is not the date; it's the activity, the process. If the calendar is the issue then it has failed, miserably, because time has dragged on - whether because of God's hesitance or our lack of diligence - for over 170 years. If, on the other hand, the issue is imminence, what is happening and will happen as we near the end, then the message is always contemporary. Perhaps it's time to recognize that our focus on the dates we have traditionally believed surround the pre-advent judgment has kept us so involved trying to prove their validity that we have not accomplished the very thing we were placed on earth to carry out – namely, to announce to the world the very good news that Satan's kingdom of darkness has been weighed in the balances of God's justice and found wanting, and that it shortly is going to come to an end! Maybe we need to finally admit to ourselves that it is the date setting and not the concept of a pre-advent judgment that bothers many of those who most energetically reject our position on the judgment and prevents them from hearing the important things we have to say.

The 1844 fiasco looms so large when they look at the whole subject, that they cannot see the real point. And that point, after all, is our mission in life. Focusing on the minutiae of the dates has robbed us of our credibility and sapped us of our passion. In all of the senseless urgency to defend the time periods associated with Daniel 8, we have taken our eyes off of the most important thing. The countless days and dollars we have squandered on commissions and debates has robbed us of the creative energies of the very people who should have been leading us in energetically fulfilling our destiny. Maybe it is time to remove the stumbling block so that we all can carefully focus on just what is about to happen as human probation draws to a close.

6. So, was the whole 1844 experience a Satanic delusion? or just a very disappointed mistake?

We will probably not be able to answer that question until we reach heaven. But that is not the important question. If we stop there, we would miss a very important point. God was able to turn what happened in those very disappointing days to His glory. The God who promises to make all things, even the bitterly disappointing ones, work for good for those who love Him kept His promise. Out of the mire of the Millerite catastrophe of October 22, 1844, God was able to grow roses. October 22, 1844, and the depressing days which followed it were the gestation period of a very special people with a heavenly mandate to tell the world that Jesus was coming soon in triumph back to planet earth.

Seventh-day Adventists are not the only Christians in the world - as many of us thought throughout much of our
history. Neither are we the only church which God is using in powerful ways in this world. But, we are a people with a purpose, raised up by God at the most crucial period in earth’s history for a specific reason before Jesus returns.

The world is coming to an end. The day is approaching when the promise of Yom Kippur will find its fulfillment and each individual’s eternal destiny will be set once and for all. The Day of Atonement final call to the world to repent and become loyal citizens of God’s kingdom of light must go forth - and Seventh-day Adventists were raised up by God in the wake of the 1844 experience and have been given the privilege of leading the charge. God used what turned out to be a horrible, disappointing mistake by a very sincere man to raise up a people of destiny. That is the blessing of 1844. The date setting may have been faulty or a delusion, but what grew out of it is not!

I find myself as a Seventh-day Adventist on a continuum between two extremes. There are those who see the inconsistencies in some details of our understanding of the judgment and its timing, and in knee-jerk fashion wish to throw the proverbial baby out with the bath-water. On the other hand, there are some who refuse to even consider that we might have been mistaken in certain details of our understanding of the pre-advent judgment.. Both, I believe are terribly wrong.

I would submit that neither blind faith nor reactionary disbelief in the end will satisfy, and either will ultimately lead us away from an understanding of God’s will. Both will result in loss of faith in the long run. Instead, we need to continue to prayerfully study God's Word and to affirm and celebrate those areas of our belief in the pre-advent judgment that can be supported by scripture while honestly admitting that in some details we have been wrong. Maybe it is time to acknowledge the elephant in the living room that we have all been trying to ignore, to boot him out of the room, and to get on with the mission God has given us.
It has been said that there would be no Seventh-day Adventist Church without the doctrine of the Investigative Judgment. That is true. Our purpose, our mission, is to proclaim the judgment-centered messages of Revelation 14:8-12 within the larger context of the Gospel. It is our unique piece of the larger puzzle put together by the Christian church. Theologically, it is our bi-optic focus on the judgment, even as we center on the cross, that more than any other doctrine sets us apart from the rest of Christianity.

I am a Seventh-day Adventist pastor who loves and appreciates my church. I have spent years and countless hours studying the theme of the pre-advent judgment. I have lived through all of the controversy of the 70s and 80s which centered on this topic. I have spent countless hours in conversation and study on the subject with colleagues who love the church as I do. My library has a whole shelf filled with books dedicated to the subject. I have packed files with the results of my study in an ongoing quest to understand the truth about the judgment.

It has been a rich and very disconcerting experience. Rich, in that I have gained a greater appreciation for God, the plan of salvation, and my church every time I have studied the subject. Disconcerting because, hard as I have tried to rationalize certain aspects of our beliefs on the subject of judgment, there are nagging questions which I have never been able to find answers for; things which just make no sense to me theologically or philosophically.

My concerns circle around several basic questions that are not about the fundamental truths of the pre-advent judgment. They are rather about issues which I am increasingly convinced are peripheral and have sidetracked us from what really matters.

That said, there are certain things which are abundantly clear when one opens the Bible - things upon which we should all be able to agree.

1. The concept of a last judgment is foundational to everything else in the Bible - one finds it clearly stated from Genesis through Revelation. While, as I have shown in previous essays, that judgment is centered on God’s judgment of Satan as the Great Controversy draws to a close, there are still elements of the judgment which involve us and our eternal destiny.

2. The idea of a pre-advent judgment makes sense logically and biblically. Unless one takes a universalist position and believes that all humanity is going to be saved no matter their choices vis-a-vis loyalty to the God of the Bible, then at some point God is going to have to decide – judge, in other words - who is going to be saved and who is going to be lost. We may argue over where, when and how that decision takes place, but it has to take place at some point. Since the Bible clearly states that God is going to bring our “reward” with Him when He returns to earth at the end, then that judgment has to be made prior to the advent. To state that the Bible assumes this is to state the obvious to any Bible student and is clearly logical.

3. It is clear that the Bible views the judgment as a process beginning at the Cross and ending with the Great White
Throne administration of justice found in the book of Revelation. At the same time, it is clear from Daniel 7 that a particular phase of that process begins sometime after the year 1798 and before Jesus returns to earth the second time.

4. The announcement of the end of this judgment process is an integral part of last day events as portrayed in Revelation - most notably in Revelation 14:8-10. It has been the most common theme in our self-identity since our inception - often eclipsing even, tragically, the Cross when it came to identifying ourselves to others. (Think back and compare the triads of angels which flew across church signs and traditionally graced our buildings, stationary and calling cards with the numbers of crosses that figured prominently on those same spaces.) As will be seen later, the announcement of the end of any human opportunity to choose sides in the war between good and evil is integral to the whole Day of Atonement theology of the Old Testament. Again, Seventh-day Adventists are on solid ground when we see ourselves as messengers of that close of human probation.

It has been said that “the devil is in the details.” It is in our understanding of some of the details of what occurs in that period after 1798 that we begin to stray from clear Bible teaching. Even among conservative Adventists there have often been questions which lurk at the edge of consciousness when ministers and laymen candidly discuss some details of certain of our beliefs concerning the judgment. (I am aware of a very conservative Bible scholar in one of our colleges who, during the foment over the Judgment in the 70s, told a relative who is a close friend of mine, “I have a whole file drawer full of material on the subject that I don’t know what to do with and for which I would probably be fired if it became common knowledge that I had it!” He subsequently, not long before his death, burned it all.)

What are some of those questions that concern me?

1. **Even assuming for a minute that the whole 1844 experience is important, how important is it relative to other important subjects in the Bible?**

The specific 1844 initiation of a pre-advent judgment takes up just one verse in one book of the Bible. Compared with other subjects, it just doesn't merit that much attention in Scripture - even when you include the other 26 surrounding verses of the context of Daniel 8. We skewer our Mormon friends for basing their whole doctrine of baptism for the dead on one Pauline passage, yet choose to do the same with one verse in Daniel for our position on the beginning of the “investigative” phase of the Judgment. Important subjects receive repeated, extensive treatment in Scripture, and really important topics appear everywhere. They recur, they are emphasized. re-emphasized and stated in different ways from different perspectives. For instance, the whole idea of Sabbath is a thread that is woven through both the Old and New Testaments, as is the state of humanity in death. The 1260-day prophecy of Daniel occurs several times in the book of Daniel, then receives additional treatment in Revelation. If whatever happened on October 22, 1844, was really that important, wouldn't one expect it to be repeated in Daniel and the Revelation in concept and specifics? Again, we are not talking about the concept of a pre-advent judgment, but of a starting point in 1844. Even within Daniel it receives scarce billing. If a single mention merits great importance, would not the 1290 days and the 1335 days of Daniel 12:11,12 be equally important? In the grand scheme of things, from a biblical perspective, October 22, 1844 as a starting date for the pre-advent judgment is a minor bump in the road at best - if that is even the point of Daniel 8:14. 2. **If the happenings of 1844 are so important, why are they so difficult to understand, prove and explain?**

It has been said that a theologian is often a person committed to finding meaning in the Bible's structure who ends up needlessly structuring its meaning in order to give meaning to the theologian. Excessive complexity is often a red flag when it comes to definitions of scriptural truth. It generally points to an attempt to make something seem more important than it actually is. Issues which are important to God are relatively easy to understand in the Bible. Granted, the details can engender considerable discussion, but the basics are simply stated. While there are undoubtedly those who find the arcane calculations necessary to understand and establish the beginning and ending points of the 2300 days of Daniel 8:14 easy to fathom, it is beyond the ken of most. When the summer 2006 quarter's Sabbath School lessons which focused on this subject were finished and the quarterlies were filed carefully away for...
reference, I would wager that most Adventist members, and even most Adventist pastors, still could not give a clear, easy to fathom, presentation of Daniel 8 to an adult, much less to a child. Most evangelistic presentations on the subject are convoluted at best. People leave thinking, “This must be true. The speaker seems very intelligent and informed and said it is. I don't understand a word he just said, but it must be true if he says it is.” The very complexity of the whole 2300-day schema belies its importance. If the 2300-day prophecy portion of the pre-advent judgment doctrine were as vital as we wish to make it, don't you think that God could have stated it clearly and succinctly, the way He did with every other one of our doctrines? If it is not important, why do we cling to it so tenaciously? There are several reasons. The first is all of the emotional baggage which accompanies this concept. We have a love/hate relationship with 1844 for precisely the same reasons we have warm fuzzy feelings in the United States for Thanksgiving Day. The original "thanksgiving" did not occur on the last Thursday in November. The participants most probably did not eat turkey but rather venison and "wild fowl," and the rest of the meal was apparently dried corn and fruit. The pilgrims didn't wear black and starched white and it is likely that most who ate, Indian and Pilgrim, consumed their food with their fingers rather than the tableware pictured in most of our paintings. Much of the Thanksgiving myth is just that, a warm fuzzy story that we love because it shows something positive and warm about what was in actuality a horrible and often tragic year for the Pilgrims. It is about our beginnings, and we are glad that we began and that there were good things that grew out of the difficult times, so we hold on to the legends because it feels right - even when most of the details we learned in elementary school are not true. The same can be said of our memories of the experience surrounding 1844. Whether it was a mistake on William Miller's part or not, God used what happened in 1844 as a means to shake people out of their spiritual complacency and to move them to become passionate about the second coming of Jesus. The story of the gentleman farmer preaching about his understanding of a very difficult passage of scripture that predicted the soon coming of Jesus, and the persecution of the preacher’s followers for their beliefs, has a heroic quality that draws us even when we don't want to be drawn. The men and women who sacrificed everything in their passion for Jesus’ return, the ascension robes and the potatoes rotting in the fields, the expulsion from their churches, the "vision in a cornfield" and a thousand and one other bits and pieces of the story all resonate in our spirits. Listening to the old church family stories, we viscerally know that we are here for a reason, that God intervened in human history and birthed a movement that is transforming society in many good and wonderful ways, and that we are a part of that movement. The second reason we are loathe to let go of the 1844 part of the investigative judgment might be a matter of pride. Is it remotely possible that we love Daniel 8:14 so much because we are proud that we understand something no one else can comprehend, and that makes us feel important and special and gives some kind of meaning to our existence? Are we guilty of a 20th-century form of subtle gnosticism where we know the secret arcane truths that no one else can know unless we initiate them into the inside information? Other people are the “speaking in tongues people,” or the “mass people,” or the “holy-living people,” but we are the prophecy people, and there is one prophecy that only we understand.

While that view feeds our egos, we must ask whether in the long term it serves to enhance our ability to accomplish our mission or detracts from it. Or, to ask the question a different way, is the return we get really worth the price we pay in isolating ourselves from the very people we wish to reach by our stubborn insistence on holding on to a belief that is very difficult, if not impossible, to substantiate biblically?

Let's admit it, it's hard for any of us to admit we have been wrong. The more energy and time we have invested in trying to defend something, the harder it is to admit our mistake. Our pride makes it very difficult to admit to our critics or ourselves that we may have been in error. But there are times when we must admit our mistakes, put them behind us, and get on with life. Admission and confession can be a renewing and invigorating experience when it frees us and others to go forward.

But, there is always the issue of the slippery slope. Once you admit you were in error in one point, there is the fear that you may discover other mistakes and that our whole system of belief will be determined to be a house of cards and will come crashing down around us. The Seventh-day Adventist system of beliefs is too well-grounded in scriptures for that to happen. Discovering a rotten board or two in a well-built house does not mean that the whole house will fall apart - unless the rotten boards are ignored and the problem is allowed to fester and grow.
Finally, we want, we need the 1844 date to be true! When we compare our often mundane spiritual lives with the stories of the Acts of the Apostles or the Exodus we all secretly cry: “God, why don't you work in the same concrete, dramatic ways today?” We all have a desperate need to believe that God is alive and well and working in modern times, that He is injecting Himself into human history today in the same way that He did 2,000 or 4,000 years ago. So, a prophecy whose specific fulfillment falls in modern times gives us hope and lends credibility to our dreams. It assures us that the God who acted in the past acts today - that supernatural events are not the stuff of myth and legend, that they are reality. The 1844 experience bolsters our faith and gives us renewed reason to believe.

Unfortunately, the very things that initially sustain our faith can undermine and destroy it if we are not careful. If, after discovering that some small aspect of our belief system is not built on solid ground, we continue to defend it, we undermine confidence in the rest of our beliefs in the eyes of others and, subtly, often in ourselves. We become inwardly cynical and outwardly hypocritical, and it destroys both our witness in the eyes of thinking observers and our inner conviction in what we ourselves believe.

In the words of the old country-western song, “You've got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em.” Maybe it's time to fold on what does not bear the scrutiny of careful Bible study and get on with what we have been called to accomplish as a church.

3. Why can we not persuade any other Christians to accept our interpretation of Daniel 8?

While it can be disastrous to our faith to judge the merits of our beliefs by their acceptance by others not of our religious persuasion, it is smart to at least listen carefully to the objections of others and to ask why they cannot see things as we do. Every other doctrine of Adventism finds its proponents among other conservative Bible students. Martin Luther espoused the same position we do on the state of humans in death in his small, or shorter, catechism. So does Tony Campolo. People may not like what we believe happens at death; they may even reject it; but at least they can understand how we got there Biblically. Many New Testament Christians celebrate the Sabbath. Baptism by immersion is practiced widely in conservative Christianity. More and more followers of Christ are becoming convicted, based on the message of the Bible, that their bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, deserving care and preservation. There are many believers in spiritual gifts who acknowledge that prophecy is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit promised to Christians - even if they choose not to believe that Ellen White is one who exercised that gift. The same thing could be said for every one of our doctrinal positions - except for our belief that the pre-advent judgment began in 1844. No current, credible non-Adventist scholar accepts this idea! It would seem that almost 170 years of persuasion would have convinced someone that we are right about 1844.

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The Back of God

by Debbonnaire Kovacs
Submitted October 15, 2014

Moses said, "Show me your glory, I pray." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The LORD'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live." And the LORD continued, "See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen." Ex. 33:18-23

I've heard this story my whole life. Only recently have I realized, I was there. In that place, I mean. Quite a few times, actually. It usually happened something like this:

Me: (in desperation and tears) Show yourself to me!

Bible, church, songs, etc.: God is great, God is good! God is glorious, God is merciful, God is trustworthy!

Me: I believe all that! I truly do! But I can't hear you. Are you really there?

Interim: I'd get stuck in a hard place. Sometimes really stuck in a really hard place. I would struggle and cry and try not to panic, and keep choosing to praise, and try to breathe…but the hard place was always narrow and felt deadly. I wouldn't be able to see God's face (or hear God's voice or feel God's hand…)

But I would stand on the Rock that I knew was always, always under my feet, even if it felt like one of those amusement park rides where you are stuck to the wall like a squished fly and the floor is long gone.

And afterward—this is the amazing part—after God had passed by, and the trauma had passed, and I could breathe again, somehow, almost always, I could see the back of God.

And I realized: YHWH was standing guard! Like a bodyguard or a bank security guard, like Secret Service around a head of state, God's back was to me because God was on watch. And so I was safe, all along. I would sing, "God is great, God is good, God is gracious and merciful and long-suffering," and I would be relieved and happy.

Until the next time.

But I do have to report: Each time I believed it a little more strongly. Each time, it was a little easier to believe, to trust, to sing even when I couldn't breathe. I pray that is the same for you. God is there. Honest. Always. You'll see your Guard's back…pretty soon.

Here's to the day when we see face to face—may it be soon!!
The Honorable Mr. Mumuni and the Adventists

http://www.atodayarchive.org/article/2738/features/articles/the-honorable_mr_mumuni_and_the_adventists

by Debbonaire Kovacs
Submitted October 15, 2014

The Honorable Mr. Alhassan Mumuni was elected to his present seat in Ghana’s Parliament in 2012. He serves the area known as Salaga North, in the Northern region. As a first-timer, he expressed deep gratitude to his country and to God for allowing him to serve in this way:

“I want to first and foremost thank the Almighty Allah for seeing us through the December polls and yet another successful election,” he told the Ghana News Agency in an interview. “I will like to thank the chiefs and people of Salaga North and to thank especially the NDC executives…and the rank and file of the party for the confidence reposed in me by voting massively for me and President Mahama.”

Mr. Mumuni, like all politicians, made a list of promises, too. He “pledged to focus on and support his constituents in the field of education, health and agriculture, called on the government under President Mahama to consider adding a Senior High School to his area, which had none, and also promised to support communities that did not yet have power through the National Electricity Grid.

http://vibeghana.com/2013/01/15/member-of-parliament-for-salaga-north-extends-gratitude-to-constituents/

How has he done? (And why would he be featured in Adventist Today?) The answer to question #1 is, quite well. Any quick search of Mr. Mumuni’s name will show that he has done praiseworthy work in helping to improve the lives of his constituents, from visiting project sites and helping to allocate funds for bridges that serve local schools and communities, to giving four motor bicycles, helmets, and money for fuel to help the Education Directorate in his region more effectively supervise and improve failing schools.

As for question #2, AT has uncovered a previously unknown story which is connected to one we did last year on the 125th anniversary of the Accra Seventh-day Adventist church.


In that article, we reported that the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in that area “now runs 675 basic schools, fourteen senior high schools, one college of education, three levels of nursing training education, and one university with two major campuses.” He [Dr. Larmie, conference president] added that the church has 25 hospitals and clinics, and that over the past 30 years,
through the agency of ADRA, the church has been involved in several social interventions across the country. “ADRA has provided school buildings, health education, and have been present at places where natural disasters struck to provide relief for the affected people.”

It seems that at that time, the MP for Nkoranza North, Derek Oduro, also made a statement to commemorate this anniversary. But he made his on the floor of the House. He said that Adventists had served Ghanaians for years in areas such as character development, youth training, provision of holistic education from the basic to tertiary level, and the provision of compassionate and affordable healthcare in rural and urban areas, among others.

It was at this point that Mr. Mumuni surprised the members of Parliament by announcing that he himself “was still alive because of the Adventists.” In November 2012, he said, he had fallen sick but had not been able to receive care at a local hospital which was undergoing construction and expansion.

“Mr. Speaker, when I was not admitted by the Tamale Teaching Hospital, I was rushed to the SDA Community Hospital, and I can say today, that I am still alive because of SDA,’ he said. “He, therefore, called on the law makers to continue supporting the good work of religious institutions.

“He hinted that his Eminence Sheikh Usmanu Nuhu Sharubutu had, in a way, supported deprived Moslems communities in building schools and other infrastructure, initiated a fund raising project through MTN, and called for Ghanaians, especially MPs, to contribute to it.”

This is a wonderful example of the relationships we need to develop with the world around us. May the friendships grow!
Biblical Haiku

http://www.atodayarchive.org/article/2740/poetry-the-arts/visual-arts/biblical-haiku

Photo by Debbonnaire Kovacs
Submitted October 15, 2014

Taken at Baddeck River, Nova Scotia, 2013

My mother found this haiku in the KJV version of Psalm 46:

There is a river
The streams whereof make glad
The city of God.