NEWS

New Method for Votes to be Introduced at 2015 General Conference Session: A new, electronic voting system for use at the GC Session in July is pushing some members' buttons the wrong way while others say it's a step forward....

Adventist Pastor in Ghana Arrested for Sexual Abuse of a Child: An Adventist minister is being held in connection with a report by a 14-year-old girl that she engaged in sexual activity with the minister while living with the minister and his wife.....

Adventists Organize First Multi-Faith Religious Rights Group in Jamaica: Though the denomination began in the 1800s, emphasizing the soon return of Jesus, it has solidified a strong world standing by advocating publicly for religious liberty, as it did recently in Jamaica....

Church Administrators Listen to Young Adult Panel Discussion: Among young adults 21-37 years of age this year,
representation in the Church is about half what it demographically should be in North America. Where has the Church gone wrong? Where is this generation headed? And what are the young adults themselves saying to Church leaders?...

**In India, Spicer University Marks 100 Years of Education:** The university whose name hints at Eastern and exotic condiments and cuisine traces its history back to the year of Ellen White's death and now celebrates its centennial with admonitions from denominational leader Ted Wilson to pursue a pathway of humility in reviewing God's leading....

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**OPINION**

**A Question to Paul of Tarsus: Why the Delay?:** The Adventist Church throughout its history has concentrated heavily on deciphering and proclaiming the Lord's timetable. Ervin Taylor wonders if in doing so we have done harm to our culture, calling, and viability as a denomination....

**Strings & Angelic Hosts:** Cosmology infuses every atom of the Adventist Christian tradition, teaching that a grand struggle at the universal level vies for the soul of creation. God inhabits the universe, we believe, and Jesus ascended into the heavens. Lawrence Downing looks at the impressive gains in cosmological science in the 20th and 21st centuries and wonders aloud how String Theory and other concepts illuminate what we believe....

**My Take: Pluralism:** Raj Attiken says the Church, in growing large and integrating cultures from throughout the world, must accept the reality that there will be innate differences in belief and expression that cannot be totally resolved. Better to understand that pluralism denotes our current state and that we have always been a diverse Church of highly creative, highly independent thinkers....

**God of All the Earth (DEVOTIONAL):** Isaiah 40 poignantly presents God as watching over "the circle of the earth" from his...
throne, and Debonnaire Kovacs marvels that mankind just doesn't seem to "get it...."

**The Inspired Expired-2**: Jack Hoehn again unsheathes his scalpel to probe beneath the surface of the Adventist prophetic tradition, looking particularly at the changes that occurred in the final decades of Ellen White's life and pondering questions raised by her death 100 years ago, including the prospect of an accelerated resurrection for both her and husband James....

**FEATURE & ART**

**Welcome Home... Maybe? Part One (FEATURE):** Sometimes it can take a near-death experience to straighten the pathway to a God who seems to be totally lost in space.... (Available to all logged-in subscribers; to apply for a free, 30-day subscription, click here)

**No Trace of Earth Serves God through Music (MUSIC REVIEW):** Lincoln, Nebraska, may not be an epicenter of Christian contemporary music, but "No Trace of Earth" continues to thrive after their debut in 2011........

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New Method for Votes to be Introduced at 2015 General Conference Session

By AT News Team, Feb. 5, 2015: Delegates to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination’s General Conference (GC) Session in July won’t hold up yellow cards to vote as they did five years ago at the last meeting. Instead, for the first time, delegates will vote by pressing a button on an electronic device.

The new method will tally votes immediately and display the results in a bar chart on a screen. The technology will provide greater accuracy and assure a secret ballot, perhaps relieving the concern that some delegates may be pressured to vote a certain way.

At the 1990 and 1995 GC sessions observers reported that some entire delegations all voted the same way and rumors circulated that delegates had been told they must support a specific view. The same controversial issues about ordination and the role of women in the church will be on the agenda again this year.

The GC Session is the top governing body in the denomination. It meets once every five years to elect the top denominational officials, as well as consider amendments to the three most important documents in the organization; the bylaws, the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs and the Church Manual. It does not make policy or financial decisions, but other issues can be placed before the delegates by vote of the GC executive committee.

“Technology impacts our lives in many ways, and we’re continually looking for ways in which technology can improve our systems,” the Adventist News Network (ANN) quoted Pastor Myron Iseminger, undersecretary of the denomination.

Iseminger, who has worked as a church administrator in several regions of the world, told ANN the electronic system will also help people from cultures who face tension between following their convictions and following their regional leader. “I think in many cultures delegates are caught in a difficult spot because, on one hand, we encourage them to prayerfully vote their conscience, but on the other hand, showing respect to their local leader sitting nearby is also very important,” Iseminger said. “We hope that particular pressure will be removed this time. We want to be transparent and fair, and I think this is a great step forward.”

Denominational officials will rent several thousand remote voting devices from a company that will also administer the process. The denomination’s Inter-American Division, based in Miami and including the Caribbean basin, is acquiring its own voting system. The annual meeting of the GC executive committee has used electronic voting for a number of years which has given the denomination’s Secretariat some experience with this type of technology. Some conference constituency meetings have also used electronic voting.

Pastor Max Torkelsen, president of the North Pacific Union Conference in the United States, told ANN that he has been involved in denominational meetings where electronic voting was used since the late 1990s. The transition away from voting cards and voice votes led to more “credibility” of the process he said, particularly for people who voted against an item that passed. “They know their vote was counted. It raises people’s level of confidence [about] the vote,” he said.

All of the sources that Adventist Today contacted declined to speculate about the possibility that technology could be used to hijack the vote on a particularly controversial and important item. Some individuals and independent groups have expressed very strong feelings about the question on ordination that has been referred to the 2015 GC Session, although most of these will not have delegate credentials and some are not members of the denomination.
The upcoming session begins July 2 and runs through July 11 in San Antonio, Texas. About 2,600 voting delegates will attend as well as perhaps as many as 50,000 observers. Adventist Today will publish a special issue of its magazine in advance of the session with background information on the various issues on the agenda, the procedures used in handling denominational business, etc.
Adventist Pastor in Ghana Arrested for Sexual Abuse of a Child

By AT News Team, Feb. 3, 2015: Pastor Joseph W. Mensah of Ekumfi Eyisam, Ghana, was arrested in late January according to an official statement of the Ghana National Police and reports in the news media in the country. Adventist Today could not confirm that he was employed by the denomination because the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook no longer lists licensed ministers and therefore leaves a significant segment of denominational employees unidentified in the reference work.

Police Inspector Samuel Amoaka told the court that he took a 14-year-old girl to Saltpond Government Hospital. He stated that the girl had lived with the pastor and his wife since October, 2014, at the request of her mother. The pastor's wife, he said, was the girl's teacher.

The hearing was in secret under Judge Kofi S. Ametewee on January 20 in the Cape Coast Circuit Court. The defense attorney ask for bail and the judge refused, but did not require a pleading from the defendant.

The police inspector testified that Mensah told him that the girl had told him that someone had attempted to have sexual relations with her at the time that she came to live in his home. Mensah said that because of this he sent her back to live with her mother, the inspector told the court. The girl told the inspector of specific occasions when she was living with the pastor and he had sexual relations with her.

The police statement indicated that an arraignment would be held in court on January 30. No further information has been posted on official Web sites or published in the news media in Ghana, but the pastor is evidently being held by authorities.
Adventists Organize First Multi-Faith Religious Rights Group in Jamaica

By AT News Team, Feb. 4, 2015: The National Religious Liberty Association was launched in Jamaica last week with a governing board headed by the leader of an ecumenical organization and including “a number of other denominational heads,” reported the Jamaica Observer newspaper. The event brought a “standing room only” crowd of thousands to the National Arena in Kingston. The Jamaica Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists convened the gathering and mobilized delegations from all of its 730 congregations.

The event was “the first of its kind in the English-speaking Caribbean,” the newspaper stated. Rev. Conrad Pitkin, president of the Jamaica Umbrella Group of Churches, is serving as chairman of the board and Pastor Nigel Coke, public affairs director for the Adventist denomination in Jamaica, is the secretary-general. Key politicians addressed the crowd as well as representatives from the Adventist General Conference (GC) in Washington DC.

Robert Pickersgil, a cabinet member speaking on behalf of the nation’s prime minister, said that the 2011 constitutional amendments which adopted a Charter of Rights secures freedom of religion for Jamaican citizens. He pointed out the “enormous impact” of religious liberty in the country. “Countless schools, hospitals, donor agencies and long-standing community development programs in Jamaica are the result of religious freedom and the strong influence of the church,” he stated as quote in the newspaper.

Pearnel Charles, a member of parliament represented the Opposition Leader. He pledged the Labour Party to defend religious liberty under all circumstances and challenged the churches to take a stand against all kinds of human injustice. “You cannot be silent when freedom is under attack,” he stated. “He also encouraged the church to care about politics,” the newspaper reported because people of faith cannot expect that their religious rights will be protected when they do not support the rights of others, including rights beyond religion.

The new association will be affiliated with the International Religious Liberty Association which was organized by the Adventist denomination in the United States and is accredited as a non-governmental organization at the United Nations (UN). Dr. Ganoune Diop, who is the full-time representative of the Adventist faith at the UN, was a key speaker at the event, reported The Sunday Gleaner.

“All religious freedom depends on freedom of worship,” Diop is quoted. “Jamaica is sending a message to [other] countries that all religious faiths can cohabit.” He expressed “a thank you to the Government and people of Jamaica” for their tolerance and protection of religious rights.

Last year the Jamaica parliament passed a law introducing flexibility in the work week “which set off a firestorm of controversy [because] it is seen by a number of religious groups as a threat to religious freedom [which] they do not believe … sufficiently protects their day of worship,” evidently because it does away with a tradition of closing businesses on Sundays. The majority party that governs the nation points to a provision in the new law that protects the right of employees to take a 24-hour period off during each week that can be used as a day of worship or spiritual retreat.

The Adventist denomination has nearly 300,000 members in the island nation, about 10 percent of the population. Adventists hold a number of prominent posts in government and business. The former union conference president Sir Patrick Allen is the nation’s governor-general, representing the authority of Queen Elizabeth II.
Church Administrators Listen to Young Adult Panel Discussion

By AT News Team, Feb. 4, 2015: The annual retreat of Adventist conference presidents in the denomination’s North American Division listened to a panel of young adults yesterday (Feb. 3). The topic was, “What do you wish pastor’s knew about Millennials?” The Millennial generation is the cohort born from 1978 through 1994, according to the American Demographic Institute. They are 21 through 37 years of age this year.

The percentage of members from the Millennial generation in the Adventist Church in the United States and Canada is less than half the proportion in the general population. “This is a major concern not only among Adventists, but among all faiths in America,” Adventist Today was told by Monte Sahlin, an Adventist researcher who serves as executive secretary of the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership, a group that includes researchers from the most religions.

The topics discussed at the annual retreat of conference presidents are suggested by the presidents themselves, although most, but not all of the presidents participate. The fact that this topic appears on the agenda is evidence of the concern that Adventist administrators have about this topic.

Five key points were made by the panel, according to a Facebook post by Pastor Sandra Roberts, president of the Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. She was present during the meeting.

1. Today’s young adults are hardworking and want to be asked to do things for the church and Christ’s mission. They are smart and capable. They want to talk about complex questions. They want in-depth Bible study.

2. The Millennial generation has access to Google and other search programs on the Internet, which puts them rapidly in touch with a large amount of information and opinion. They do not always use critical thinking skills, but they do have critical thinking skills. Don’t forget that! This generation is fact oriented.

3. If young adults do not attend church, they are not generally rebelling against the faith. Many are disengaged but are still Christians. Even among non-attenders, most still consider themselves Adventists. Each individual is at a different stage in their spiritual journey. Millennials are looking for a reason to be engaged by church again.

4. Today’s young adults are looking for something authentic. “I work with human trafficking victims,” said one panelist. “They can tell if we are real, just like Millennials.” Engage in relationships with the young adults in your church and be real. “If we can sense you are authentic, we can work it out.”

5. Millennials have a different mindset than older generations. The brain works differently now because of the way the world is wired. This creates conflict between generations because of different perceptions. Adventists need to try to learn from each other and recognize how rapidly the world is changing.

“Perhaps we old folks too often make assumptions about a young person’s proximity to God … with reference to our way of doing things,” commented one Adventist pastor who preaches each Sabbath to many young adults. “In other words, our established practice (which includes much that is good) has replaced God as center in our faith. Christendom is not Christ and renovation is often needed … The next generation is neither (wholly) divine nor (wholly) deviant.”

In the interest of full disclosure, Adventist Today has paraphrased some the points summarized above for space and grammar considerations. Monte Sahlin is also executive director of the Adventist Today Foundation.
In India, Spicer University Marks 100 Years of Education

From ANN, Jan. 5, 2015

Spicer Adventist University, the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s flagship institution of higher education in India, stayed true to its mission during five days of 100th-anniversary celebrations by setting aside a day to train 500 pastors and gathering community leaders for a meeting where Adventist Church president Ted N.C. Wilson underscored the importance of showing compassion toward those in need.

The university, founded by U.S. missionary Gentry G. Lowry in 1915 with a mission to equip Bible workers and literature evangelists, used the festivities to reflect on its humble origins and to praise God for its growth into a powerful force for sharing Jesus in the Adventist Church’s Southern Asia Division and beyond.

“This is a huge milestone for Spicer Adventist University and takes the institution and the Southern Asia Division to a new level of commitment and responsibility for evangelistic outreach,” Wilson said Monday.

Dozens of local and church leaders descended on the university in the city of Pune for the celebrations, which ended Sunday. Among the guests were the influential governor of India’s Maharashtra state and senior leaders from the Southern Asia Division, which includes India, and the General Conference based in Silver Spring, Maryland.

The weekend marked the highlight of the program, with Wilson preaching to a crowd topping 2,000 people on Sabbath and meeting at the Hyatt hotel on Sunday evening with a group of several hundred people, including civic, educational, business, and health leaders, from Pune, India’s seventh-largest city with a population of more than 6 million.

“I was asked to speak to this unusual group of leaders coming from many religious backgrounds, including Hindu, Muslim, Jain, Jewish and Christian beliefs,” Wilson said by e-mail. “I emphasized the need for humility and selflessness to accomplish good things for humanity. I used references in Proverbs and focused on Christ’s humility outlined in Philippians 2.”

Wilson added, “Even though there were many non-Christians in the audience, the Holy Spirit used the message to reach many.”

On Friday, Wilson gave the keynote speech for “Pastors’ Day,” a day of mission-focused training seminars for a group of 500 pastors. Other speakers included Gary Krause, director of Adventist Mission at the General Conference, and Rick McEdward, director of the church’s Global Mission Center.

Spicer, the Adventist Church’s 66th educational institution, began with three faculty members, including Lowry as principal, and 27 students in July 1915, the same month that church co-founder Ellen G. White died in the United States, David Trim, the Adventist Church’s chief archivist, noted in a news commentary about the school published in the Adventist Review last week.

Spicer has since grown to 1,173 students, 132 faculty members, and 132 other staff. The school, which received university status last year but is still often referred to by its old name, Spicer Memorial College, is named after William A. Spicer, one of the first Adventist missionaries to India and a former General Conference president.

Spicer president Justus Devadas said the people of Pune have recognized the school as a “campus with a difference”

“Today, Spicer Memorial College, a recognized Christian minority institution with a distinctive educational philosophy
and academic program, continues to be the flagship of Adventist education in Southern Asia,” Devadas said in prepared remarks for the anniversary. “The college continues to strive to uphold its vision of inculcating its graduates with commitment to unselfish service to God and fellow beings. The faculty strives to adequately equip students with the requirements of a decent life in this world and for citizenship in the world to come.”

Other anniversary events at Spicer included an ordination service, the release of several books, and the staging of a play recounting how God has led the university over the past 100 years. A public ceremony on Sunday featured the governor of the state of Maharashtra, Chennamaneni Vidyasagar Rao. He spoke warmly of Spicer and its contribution to India.

Also, a university centennial project was inaugurated and dedicated on each of the five days. Among them were the Gethsemane Prayer Garden, the Marathi Church, and the $2.4 million Management and Computer Science Building.

“We praise God,” Wilson said of the celebrations. “He blessed in a tremendous manner.”

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A Question to Paul of Tarsus: Why the Delay?

by Ervin Taylor, February 4, 2015:  

*Question to Paul:* “You expected that the return of Christ would occur in your own lifetime. We know now that you were wrong about that. You were off by two thousand years and counting. Does that mistake bother you, Paul?”

*Answer from Paul:* “No, not really . . . I always knew the difference between faith, which is a life’s commitment, and theology, which is a mind’s speculation. I never thought that believing what God would do meant knowing how and even when it would happen. Besides, it is my experience that whatever details we give about the human future are *usually* wrong, but whatever details we give about the divine future are *always* wrong. Have you noticed that?”


The belief in a Second Coming of Jesus is embedded in half the name of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The 19th-century American origin of this Protestant denomination is associated with a mistake made in the interpretation of biblical prophecy having to do with the timing of the Second Coming. Jesus was supposed to return sometime around 1844, but there was a “Great Disappointment.” There was no Second Coming. However, all was not lost. A new denomination was born. According to the standard explanation of a small group who gathered around a young, charismatic visionary, Ellen Harmon (later Ellen White), the error was not in the timing, but in the identification of the event. A highly innovative theological adjustment was made in the interpretation and a brand new theological concept, the “Investigative Judgment,” was created on the basis of one rather ambiguous biblical text, the interpretation of which was then validated by the young visionary.

As Adventists, we should not feel that we are unique in having to explain a mistake in addressing the topic of the Second Coming. The history of the Christian Church, going literally back to the beginning, is littered with predictions about the timing of the return of Jesus that failed to occur. Why should we Adventists feel we are so special? We are in a long line of Christians whose predictions about the Second Coming did not come to pass. We are also in a long line of Christians who came up with a number of very creative explanations why their predictions had been mistaken and/or reinterpreted what “return” actually meant.

One of my granddaughters has a saying: “Nothing is wrong, but something is not right!” With regard to this topic, at the very least, something is not right about the conventional classical or traditional Christian and current official Adventist understanding being advocated by our current General Conference president, namely, that we are living in the “End Times” and the Second Coming is very near. The problem is that we don’t know what is not right, probably because we are mere humans trying to figure out something totally beyond our “pay grade.” To quote the imagined response of Paul, “whatever details we give about the divine future are *always* wrong.” That’s the nature of so-called predictive prophecy; it’s always wrong. So why do we call it “predictive”?
Strings & Angelic Hosts

by Lawrence G. Downing, February 5, 2015:  An article by physicist Brian Greene, “Hanging by a String,” (SMITHSONIAN January 2015) rekindled thoughts that had lain dormant for a time. He and others of his profession venture into the jumbled theoretical worlds of cosmology. String theory is of particular interest to them. String theory proposes that at the heart of every particle is a tiny, vibrating string-like filament. It is an infinitesimally minute particle (try a million billion times smaller than the structures probed by the world’s most powerful accelerators, Greene, p. 22). In his explanation of String theory, Greene states that the mathematical equations require that the universe have extra dimensions beyond our three. There is more, much more!

Four physicists – Philip Candelas, Gary Horowitz, Andrew Strominger and Edward Witten – in 1985, proposed that these extra dimensions were minuscule. This explains why they had not been seen. Further, these strings are so small that when they vibrate they undulate not just in the three-dimensional universe, but also in the additional tiny universes. Defining the shape of these extra-dimensional universes is the quest for a small group of Oxford physicists, Greene included. Utilizing the calculations of higher dimensional geometry, this group set about to seek answers to the questions their calculations suggested. As their work progressed, their possibilities list expanded to thousands, millions, billions, and in the mid-1990s Joe Polchinski reached numbers so large they have never been named. Those who root about among the Strings pondered the possibility that, at last, Einstein’s recurring dream of a unified theory may be at hand. We who are not part of the scientific community marvel at the propositions that arise from those who, like Greene, delve into the mysteries of our cosmos. Their work opens to us interesting fields where our imaginations can roam.

Newtonian science affords scarce allowance for numerous events, descriptions and accounts scripture records as fact. Angeles, for example. How can one, if bound by Newtonian physics, explain how an angel appears and in an instant, like the morning mist, dematerializes? How can it be that these same beings can migrate throughout the universe and transport through space as easily as we pass from one room to another? The accounts that describe conversations between heavenly beings and humanity boggle our minds. Care to go further? Consider Jesus’ ascension. How many of our years would pass before a body, traveling at the speed of an ascending hot air balloon, would reach space beyond space? What manner of life-support systems would be necessary once that body escaped earth’s atmosphere? The questions multiply more rapidly than solutions.

To further disturb our minds, scripture speaks easily of the heavenly places! Images from the Hubble and other space contraptions take us into places that confound our imagination and raise questions that await answers. The violence and upheaval space-shots display; the disruptions that occur as one gaseous body engulfs another or as a clump of matter is irrevocably drawn toward a black hole where all trace will forever disappear. . . . Where, in all of these wonders, can we place heaven? Where do we find, in the turbulent cosmos, a quiet place that bodes for a better, peaceful land?

So here we have it. We who read and value scripture are confronted by the discoveries of science that defy much of what we know and believe about the laws of our universe. Included are the voices of those who propose a new physics. Like a thunderbolt or rampaging comet, the theories associated with a new understanding of our cosmos blaze forth. Michio Kaku, in his book Parallel Worlds, addressed the advances that have taken place in cosmology that force scientists to rethink how the universe operates. The suggestion of parallel universes opens new possibilities. Our “what ifs” run wild, or perhaps amok? Might one dare suppose that the concept of parallel universes provides an abode for heavenly beings?

The writings and work of Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking, Brian Greene, John Barrow, Paul Davies, John Polkinghorne and numerous others add to the cosmological discussion and increase our knowledge trove. Think of
A being that is not bound by the limits of our three-dimensional universe. Is this where the Almighty resides? Where heaven rests its foundations? Is this the universe where the “Others” have the capacity to venture from a universe which is off our limits, to ours?

Where do such thoughts and possibilities lead those whose limits of sciences and mathematics reach stretch point upon confronting simple algebraic equations or struggle over basic geometry? One thing we can do is dust off our imaginations and give passing note to what cosmologists propose. Consider, for example, that divine beings may inhabit a domain separate, but in significant ways, similar to ours. We can contemplate the numerous possibilities presented by the theories that arise from science and wonder at the mysteries that our universe reluctantly shares. We need not be disturbed by the limitations inherent within our Newtonian construct. At the same time, we can find satisfaction that science opens to us opportunities to think about what once was science fiction, a new world, outside ours, whose builder and maker was and is God. Little wonder that the Psalmist, when contemplating his universe, observed that the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows forth his handiwork. As an aside, should an angelic host from another universe appear to you, give a howdy and a welcome to our world. Should that visitor invite you to join in a journey to that mysterious other place, give us a Tweet now-and-again.
My Take: Pluralism

by Raj Attiken, February 5, 2015: There is heightened anticipation about the upcoming General Conference Session in part because of at least two items that are slated to be on the agenda: authorizing Divisions to decide whether or not to ordain women for pastoral ministry in their respective territories and the revisions to the Fundamental Belief on creation. It is unlikely that decisions regarding these matters will be received with equal enthusiasm by all segments of the church, given the nature of these issues and the current diverse composition of the global Adventist Church. The actions are likely to be seen by some as an affirmation of historic Adventist values, by others as a compromise of these values, by some as reflective of the cultural and theological diversity of the global church, and by others as being out of touch with the theological and faith maturity of contemporary global Adventism. Some fear that actions on these issues could splinter the denomination, as has happened in other religious groups.

My take is that we, in the Adventist Church, have arrived at a time when we need to give consideration to the nature of pluralism within our denomination and how it affects our life as a church community. While the notion that two or more divergent and even opposing views can legitimately coexist in the Adventist Church might initially appear to be radical, some honest reflection will point us to the reality that pluralism already characterizes our relationship to our beliefs and practices. Pluralism, as a practical and operational hermeneutic for life, is already a very present reality in the church. We are a community in which individuals and groups of individuals hold different perspectives on many doctrines and issues. What we haven’t done, heretofore, is formally acknowledge that this is so, that it is an inevitable reality in today’s world, and that we must learn how to relate to it in a wholesome way.

Pluralism is the nature of the global society we live in. People who hold different perspectives than ours occupy the spaces we occupy in the church. To believe otherwise is to be oblivious to reality. Beliefs and practices are no longer sequestered within communities or geographical regions. Instead, they coexist with other ideas and beliefs within the same communities. No impenetrable fences or walls exist. Efforts by individuals or groups to prescribe their particular ideology as the only permissible or plausible one cannot and will not succeed in a pluralistic environment.

The pluralism I describe here is not relativism (the view that truth is not absolute, but exists only in relation to particular contexts, cultures, societies, etc.) or syncretism (the fusion or merging of different beliefs and practices). Instead, pluralism is an encounter of commitments, and does not require us to leave our identities or beliefs behind. It not only recognizes that diversity exists within the church, but it energetically engages that diversity, actively seeking to understand across lines of differences. Pluralism does not imply that there is no one truth on anything, when considering mutually incompatible truth claims. Nor does it imply that there are no foundational truths that we can embrace. It invites us, however, to hold on to these truths gracefully, in humble recognition that now “we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror,” and that “all that I [we] know now is partial and incomplete.” (1 Cor. 13:12, NLT).

It can be argued that it is a sign of a faith community’s maturity that, on matters of belief and practice, multiple perspectives can coexist in the same space within that community. That in the face of differing perspectives and unresolved debate, it does not call people to rigidly align themselves on one side or another, but to take seriously their personal quest for deeper understanding. That it displays a strong commitment to fostering ongoing conversations regarding the nature of its life together as a community, its values, and its mission.

The presence of pluralism and discussions on how to relate to it lend themselves to no easy answers. The issues are many, the arguments complex, and the responses varied. It would be hard, though, to overstate the practical significance of this topic. Acknowledgment of pluralism as a feature of contemporary Adventism will allow conservatives, liberals, progressives, fundamentalists, and other groups to each legitimately feel that their version of
Adventism merits a place at the “table”; we can stop all witch-hunts to smoke out those on the “other side” of issues and label them second-class Adventists or not Adventists at all; we can disband our heresy patrols on college and university campuses and in churches; we can hold fewer church business meetings to throw people out of our fellowship because of what they believe or don't believe; we can shut down our propaganda websites and invest in things more useful; we can even resort to respectful conversations with those whose views differ from us. Best of all, we can enjoy a safe and healthy environment in which to pursue a quest to deepen our understandings, strengthen our faith, and enrich our community.

It is somewhat naïve for us to continue to act as if a vote by a committee, council, or assembly – even after earnest prayer and supplication – will necessarily garner global agreement of belief or practice on any issue. It is just as naïve to believe that unity within the Church can be achieved simply by obtaining a majority vote on any item at a General Conference session. Shouting louder will not produce unity or uniformity. Thumping the pulpit harder doesn’t garner agreement. Even obtaining a majority vote on any issue does not usher in unity. Those among us who are determined that we will convert others to our perspective, if not through conversation and debate, then through votes at an assembly such as a General Conference session, are on the wrong side of reality. The effort to resolve the tension between two opposing ideas through a vote at an assembly, or to declare which idea is right and which is wrong, or which one is favored by God and which one is not, is a misplaced effort.

I do not expect pluralism to be our newest “fundamental belief” or credo. But I do wish that at this upcoming General Conference session, when setting up the items for discussion, debate, and action, our leaders would declare a clear and unambiguous public recognition of the pluralistic nature of the Adventist Church, and of the implications of this reality on how we live with differences in beliefs and practices within our community. On why we can hold different views, be engaged in different ecclesiastical practices, embrace different rituals, and still be fully and authentically Adventist. On why a charitable environment that is conducive to open and honest conversations on opposing perspectives is essential if our beloved community is to be a robust community. Such a declaration at the General Conference session will not only influence the spirit in which conversations occur, but will also influence what happens within our community after the votes are taken. It will certainly be an act of incisive leadership.

Let’s formally and publicly acknowledge what we’ve known for a long while. Let’s declare pluralism as the “new normal” in Adventism. That’s my take!

[†] In light of the current reality of a pluralistic church, it would do us well to consider issues such as the impact of pluralism on “present truth,” on Adventist identity, on our Fundamental Beliefs, and on church unity.
God of All the Earth

Debbonnaire Kovacs, Feb. 4, 2015  From Isaiah 40:21, 22, 25-31

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood
from the foundations of the earth?
It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers…

Photo from

http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/spaceimages/?search=earth&category=featured#submit with permission to share

who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to live in;

…

To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes on high and see:
Who created these?

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He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength,
mighty in power,
not one is missing.

Photo from [http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/spaceimages/?search=galaxy&category=featured#submit](http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/spaceimages/?search=galaxy&category=featured#submit) with permission to share

Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,

“My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

Photo taken by Debbonnaire Kovacs,
on the coast of Cape Breton Island

The LORD is the everlasting God,

the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint,

and strengthens the powerless.

...

My photo, my beloved...

Even youths will faint and be weary,

and the young will fall exhausted;

but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,

they shall mount up with wings like eagles,

they shall run and not be weary,

they shall walk and not faint.

Photo taken by Debbonnaire Kovacs from a ferry to Prince Edward Island, Canada
The Inspired Expired-2

What to Do with a Deceased Prophetess? [Part 2 of a three part series.] By Jack Hoehn, February 4, 2015: [Part 1 of this series attempted to show the kind of world Ellen Gould (Harmon) White was born into. It was more like a 3rd world country than it was like the USA of today. Many changes happened during her lifetime and by the time of her death much had already changed or was beginning to change. However, Sister White did not live to adjust to all of these changes, nor the subsequent ones. The previous article ended with this illustration and the following questions:

Our inspired prophetess Ellen White has left us 100 books, 5,000 periodical articles, and a total of two million and five hundred thousand (or so) words. What are we to do with someone from a very different world than our own, who left us with such a prodigious output? How can we put Ellen on a level footing with other inspired writers such as Moses, Luke, James, and Jude? What do we do with the writings of the Inspired Expired?]

Aging of the Prophetess

In February 1915 the 87-year-old Messenger of the Lord was in fairly good health, still able to dress herself and to get about the house. She ate meals with the family, and when the Napa Valley weather permitted she would go out for a drive, still with a horse and carriage, although horseless carriages had been made by Henry Ford in Detroit since 1904. There was no denying, however, that her body and mind were failing. One of her staff, D.E. Robinson, reported to Ellen's special friend, Stephen (and Hetty) Haskell[1], on February 10, “Her appetite seems to be good, and she thoroughly enjoys her food. Yet we who are associated with her can see that she is constantly growing weaker…Just recently it has become quite difficult for her to write with a pen. Some days her memory seems to be better than others.”[2]

Intracapsular Fracture

Sabbath, February 15, 1915, about noon, as she was entering her study from the hallway, Ellen tripped and fell. After helping her painfully into bed, her nurse, May Walling, telephoned (this new service was now available at Elmshaven) Dr. Klingerman at the St. Helena Sanitarium. When the doctor came, he said that it was either a bad sprain or a fracture. Ellen was taken to the Sanitarium, where the newly available X-ray examination showed "an
intracapsular fracture of the left femur at the junction of the head and the neck.” [3] She was moved back as gently as possible to her home, and there she spent the last five months of her life in bed.

**Sufferings of a Saint**

“When asked if she is suffering pain,” her son and chief agent after his father died, William White, reported to Seventh-day Adventist friends, “she will start to say Yes: then she stops and says, ‘It is not so painful as it might be, but I cannot say that it is comfortable.’” “A few weeks later, when asked what kind of day she had had, she replied, ‘A good day—in spots.’”[4]

**The Candle Flickers Out**

On Thursday, July 15, it was clear that Sister White was in a coma, and no further attempts at feeding[5] or treatments were made. Family members were called to the room for the death watch. Friday morning, July 16, 1915, they noted her breaths were rapid and shallow at 50 breaths a minute; by Friday afternoon they slowed to 38, then 18, then 10, and before Friday sundown at 3:40 pm, perhaps close to the time her Savior had called out, “It is finished,” Ellen White’s breathing stopped. Her great Sabbath had begun.

Her son Willie wrote, “It was like the burning out of a candle, so quiet.”[6]

**Undertakers**

It appears that detailed plans for her death had been made during her long final illness. Curious about 1915 morticians, I looked up and found an August 3, 1915, US Patent application filed by the Embalmers Supply Co, listing “Embalming–Pumps, Syringes, Needles, Trocars, Nozzles, Gosenecks, Atomizers, Scalpels, Bistouries, Aneurisms, Arterial Hooks, Hypodermic Needles, Stop-Cocks, Draining Tubes, Nasal Tubes, Cut-Offs, Cotton Packers, Directors, Scissors, Forceps, Chin Rests, Artery and Vein expanders,” among other things! So it appears that the technology for preservation of dead bodies was already far advanced by the time of Ellen White’s death.

I assume that is why it was possible for them to have three separate funeral services with open caskets for her during the next week. By Sabbath, friends who called at Elmshaven “found her in a simple cloth-covered black coffin bearing a modest silver plate with the engraved words ‘At Rest.’”[7]

**Funerals 3**

Perhaps the most speculative chapter of the recent Oxford University Press book *Ellen Harmon White—An American Prophet* is Chapter 16, written by T. Joe Willey.[8] The first funeral was on the lawn of her home on Sunday, July 18, for local family and friends. Then, taking advantage of the California Conference Camp-meeting going on near Oakland, her body was taken by train for a second funeral on Monday, July 19, with over 1,000 Adventists in attendance. Finally the casket went back to headquarters of the church she had helped found in Battle Creek, Michigan. In the Battle Creek Tabernacle on Sabbath, July 24, three thousand people crowded into the church, and another 1,000 were outside on the lawn. People passed by her coffin for two and a half hours, and then her funeral was conducted by the General Conference president she had installed, A.G. Daniells, and the sermon was preached by her faithful fellow warrior and special friend, Elder Stephen N. Haskell.

The casket was closed and carried by carriage to the Oak Hill Cemetery, with “100 automobiles and nine streetcars following down Main Street.” After a brief graveside service the local paper and the *Review and Herald* both reported that “the remains of our dear sister were tenderly and silently lowered into the grave to rest beside the body of her husband, Elder James White.”[9]

**Dead but Not Buried**
Quite a bit of historical sleuthing then is reported by Willey, that says this was not quite the end of the prophetess. Although denied by Ellen White’s subsequent representatives until recently, records seem to show that she was removed from the grave and kept in an above ground vault for another month and four days, or until 40 days after her death.

A letter discovered from her son Edson to second son Willie suggests that he and a few others took one last look at his mother 40 days after her death, before she was finally put into the grave on August 26. Naming five other Adventists from Battle Creek who were with him, Edson wrote his brother, “Of course, her face had changed considerably, and yet she was preserved as well as I could expect…” before they finally replaced her in the grave prepared for her.”[10]

Request for James White’s Resurrection?

Willey records, “At the time of James White’s death in 1881 an Adventist elder had urged Ellen White to appeal to God to raise her husband from the death. ‘Do not let them bury him,’ one of the leading brethren implored, ‘but pray to the Lord, that He may bring him to life again.’ After reflecting on the request, Mrs. White declined, saying, ‘He had done his work… Would I have him suffer all this over again? No. No. I would in no case call him from his restful sleep to a life of toll and pain. He will rest until the morning of the resurrection.’”[11]

Speculation

Willey then speculates: “Edson and Willie White may well have believed that their worthy parents deserved the same…benefit [righteous individuals who came forth from the dead at the time of Christ’s resurrection].”[12]

So perhaps 40 days and 40 nights after her death, this one last check of the casket by her son was necessary to confirm that in fact the Servant of the Lord was really dead and had not been resurrected and could be finally buried.

Would We Resurrect Sister White?

When I first read this 16th Chapter in the Ellen Harmon White book, I found it interesting but almost tabloid-like as a “previously unexposed secret fact” about our prophetess. Like something from The National Enquirer or other gossip publications sold at the checkout counter of the supermarket.

But the more I think about it, the more I realize that all sincere Adventists who value the church Sister White cofounded, and the concepts she introduced as heaven-sent dreams and visions to expand and widen our understanding of scriptures, have the same problem that her son Edson or the grieving elder begging for Ellen to resurrect James had! We want her back.

It is very hard for us to bury a prophet. And sadly for us, it is not because we love her as a person, although we have all been blessed by her, but frankly it’s because we have found her very useful, and we miss that.

She helped us make decisions on which doctrine was the most correct, and which interpretation best fit the times, and what foods were good for you, and how should you keep the Sabbath, and what was wrong with this General Conference president, or that leading medical doctor. In her two million five-hundred-thousand words we have found something for all of us.

We need her to support Trinitarian-Righteousness-by-faith-alone Desmond Ford Adventism. We need her for “Shape up and get perfect so He can come back” and “wear your skirts 14 inches off the ground” GYC Adventism. We need her for vegan, herbalist, enema-cleansing, no drugs, Uchee Pines or Weimar Institute “she-never-made-a-mistake” health messages.

And might I perceive that our present top church administrators appear to feel that a sacred mission has been given
them to force the rest of Adventism who may be in danger of burying the dear Sister once and for all, to dig her up once more and let the world hear her speak again in all her 19th century glory?

(To be continued. This is Part 2 of a three part series on The Expired Inspired. If you found this article interesting, please share it on Facebook or other media with interested friends. Because this is a series, it will be closed to reader comments until after all three articles have been published.)

FOOTNOTES:

[1] See Part 1 of this series for the special place Elder S.N. Haskell and his wife had for Ellen White in her later years.


[4] Ibid, Page

[5] Ibid, Page 430. Towards the end as she was not eating they had been giving her what they called “albumen water,” apparently egg white diluted with water, that she would sometimes sip, but otherwise she had stopped eating, and now they had to quit even offering fluids.


• 5
Welcome Home... Maybe? Part One

By Gregory Matthews, Feb. 4, 2015  

[Luke 15:11-31] With his foot pressed to the accelerator, Ralph[i] raced to the hospital. The voice on the telephone had said: “Your wife is on her way to the emergency room. You need to come very quickly.” At the hospital, the doctors told Ralph that Susan had a twenty percent chance of living. She had probably been without oxygen for fifteen minutes. A helicopter was on its way to take her to the regional medical center. As they spoke, Susan opened one eye, said two words to Ralph and lapsed into unconsciousness again.

Three days later, the word, came: “Susan will live. But she is likely to have severely decreased cognitive function.

Days passed. Concern for her mental status continued. One morning during rounds, staff discussed doing heart surgery a few weeks later. Suddenly their discussion was interrupted: “No,” Susan said. “If you cannot do it now, you cannot do it at all.” Susan had come back. She had more cognition than they realized.

As Susan reviewed her near experience with death the words of her favorite verse echoed in her mind: “My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber.” (Psalm 121:2-3, NIV.)

God was watching over Susan, and always had. Like a prodigal daughter, she had wandered in the world of sin. But, her Lord had continued to pursue her like a hound from heaven chasing a fox.[ii]

Susan had been abandoned before birth by her father. Her mother had been unable to provide her with the care that she needed, so her paternal grandparents had stepped in. Susan moved with them to the West Coast. The grandparents purchased some property and the family lived in a tent while they built a home in which to live.

Susan spent twelve happy years in this family. She was grounded in basic Christianity. Her pastor was Adriel Chilson, who was married to a granddaughter of Ellen White, a co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Under his pastoral care, Susan grew to know and love the Lord and to value the counsel that she found in Ellen White’s writings. At a time when Susan had neither a father nor an effective mother to care for her, God had put people in place to give her the nurture that she needed.

The music ended. Five hundred Adventist guests had just witnessed 17 year-old Susan and Ben mutually pledge their lives to each other and to God. Two months later, Sarah moved in with them. Times were hard. She needed a place to stay and was a relative of Susan. During the months that followed, however, it became evident that Sarah was Ben’s mistress. Susan divorced Ben.

One day a telephone call came from Germany. Ben was now in the U.S. army and wanted to try to renew the marriage. Once travel arrangements could be made, Susan flew to Europe. Here she found that Ben had fathered children by two different women. When she confronted him with this, Ben handed Susan fifty cents and ordered her home.

Susan was desperate. She was in a foreign country. She had neither food, nor shelter, nor money. She went to the Club; put the fifty cents in a slot machine and with one pull of the handle she had enough money to buy something to eat. As Susan was not married to Ben, she had no claim against the U.S. Army for transportation back to the United States. The American Consulate arranged for her to fly to New York City where she was met by a Social Worker who arranged transportation to the home of a relative.

Lonely and confused, Susan made poor choices in men. She became a mother. Deep down within her spirit, she felt
emptiness. In her search for meaning, she returned to the Seventh-day Adventist church. She wanted a father for her daughter, but she did not know how to find one. She married Andrew, a soldier in the U.S. Army and soon the three of them were in Germany again. A short time after they arrived in Europe, they received a letter addressed to them in Germany. It informed them that she and Andrew would be expelled from membership in the local Seventh-day Adventist church for the sin of failing to attend services, unless they attended the following week. Living in Germany, it was naturally impossible for them to attend services in the United States. As a result the congregation acted and they were expelled from membership.

Once Susan and Andrew returned to the United States, they began a new relationship with the Adventist church. They both formally joined following an evangelistic series. But trouble soon followed. Susan learned that Andrew was participating in a homosexual life style. This was not acceptable to her and divorce soon followed. The local congregation did not know the reasons for the divorce. They only knew that they now had a divorced woman who was driving the school bus that brought their children to school. Susan was soon not only divorced, but without the small income that she had been earning. The next blow came when someone accused Susan of using tobacco. She denied those charges as she had not used tobacco for three years. But the congregation acted and Susan was expelled from membership once again.

Marriages and relationships followed one after another. Susan gave up on God. She knew her sins. The church she loved had rejected her twice. Surely God could not accept her. With the passage of time Susan became the mother of nine children by five different men.

Stability came as she raised her children as a single parent. Caught in a trap, she did not know how to return to the Lord, but the God who had died for her on Calvary had not given up on Susan. The Lord was working for Susan at times and in a manner of which Susan knew nothing.

The next step in her return to God occurred on a Friday evening. Susan had no idea when she walked through the door of a bar that evening that God had entered with her. In her understanding of God she probably would have said that if God had been with her at all, he would have left her to enter the bar alone. On that Friday evening, in those early hours of the Sabbath, on a day dedicated to spiritual communion with God, the Lord was going work to bring to salvation a woman sitting on a stool at a bar. The Jesus who had died for her was calling her home.

To be continued next week…

[i] All names have been changed with the exception of the names of SDA clergy.

[ii] The Hound of Heaven is a poem written by Francis Thompson (1859-1907) sometime before his death. The idea of this poem is that God works to bring the sinner to repentance and salvation as surely as the hound chases after the fleeing fox. J. R. R. Tolkien is one of the people who have been influenced by this poem.
No Trace of Earth Serves God through Music

Reported by Debbonaire Kovacs, Feb. 4, 2015  

No Trace of Earth is a contemporary Christian band from Lincoln, Nebraska. Their music is on YouTube as well as other online stores and radios (Spotify, iTunes, Amazon mp3, etc.). Here are links to their YouTube channel, iTunes store, and Facebook page.

Brad Carlson, lead singer and bass player, tells the story of their beginnings on their Facebook page (click About tab). Here is an excerpt (I highly recommend reading the whole, witty story):

It all started back in January of 2011. I (Brad) and Chris Jesse were frustrated with the music at our youth group. So we decided to take the problem into our own hands and create our own praise band. After checking with my little sister Marissa to see if she would play keys, I asked a friend of mine, James Dickerson, to play guitar. He said, “No.” After my self-esteem rebounded from the blow, I went back and asked again. He consented to play with us for one event, and we haven’t been able to get him to leave since then. We picked up Ashton to sing harmony…

In March of 2013, we recorded an EP of four originals with Phil Zach at The Grid Studio in Lincoln, Nebraska. We really enjoyed recording music that had been instrumental in our Christian journeys in the hope that it would help others to find healing and to see God in a new way. Today we do a combination of concerts and praise sets. A fair amount of what we do is local or regional events. We are excited to see where God leads us in the future and what we will be able to do serving Him.


• 22