News & Opinion from Adventist Today
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NEWS

Key Figure in Russian Adventist Television Has Been Killed, Say Leaders of Independent Ministry: Spurred on more than two decades ago by strong donative appeals, 3ABN television took a high profile in the evangelization of Russia after the Soviet Union fell. Now some say that presence may be in serious jeopardy....

Ben Carson Apologizes for Comments on Homosexuality: A strong frontrunner in the Republican cavalcade of likely presidential candidates, Ben Carson has retracted controversial comments he made earlier about homosexuality as an acquired condition....

CNN Features Adventists on Program about Healthy Living: Loma Linda has long been famous among senior SDAs as a sweet microcosm of highly diverse members where residents live long, sunny lives. World media is now scrounging the lifestyle for clues to Adventist longevity....

Adventist Church Planting Sets Record, Spurs Growth: "Church Planting" in some areas of the Adventist world was once code for dangers as churches sent out...
fervent lay missionaries to form new congregations. Now church planting is credited as a primary factor in overall world Church growth....

**What Is Adventist Eschatology Good for?:** Adventist theologians this weekend are looking at hard questions about the continued relevance of end-time preaching, and how it does, or doesn't, affect Christian proclamation by the Adventist Church....

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**God Had no Need of Abraham's Son:** Jack Hoehn looks carefully at the biblical command that Abraham slaughter his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Dr. Jack sees deeper lessons in the redemptive pleats and seams of the Old Testament account....

**My Take: Adventist Education:** Through decades of Adventist education, apparently fewer than half of Adventist young people have taken full advantage of the Church's education system, and the percentage is neither rising nor falling, writes Raj Attiken. Should we be looking at other ways to serve those who abstain?...

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The Concert that Almost Didn't Happen: The phrase "Lord, make me an instrument" took a literal turn late last year when thieves stole a trove of musical hardware from the local Christian school, and the community rallied to help answer the students' prayers and salvage their Christmas program....

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Key Figure in Russian Adventist Television Has Been Killed, Say Leaders of Independent Ministry

By AT News Team, March 2, 2015: At a meeting on Sabbath (Feb. 28) in Florida convened by the Three Angels Broadcasting Network (3ABN) it was announced that the brother of the executive director of the organization’s affiliate in Russia has been “assassinated,” sources have told Adventist Today. 3ABN is an independent ministry based in rural southern Illinois.

Julia Outkina is the executive director of 3ABN Russia based in Nishny Novgorod, according to the organization’s Web site. Her brother played a key role in the establishment of the television ministry as the first Christian television network in the country, according to comments at the Florida meeting by Danny Shelton, founder of 3ABN, and Pastor Jim Gilley, the current chief executive officer.

3ABN Russia broadcasts three hours a week on the SETI NN television station in Nishny Novgorod. SETI NN is one of 200 local television stations across the country in the REN-TV organization, according to Wikipedia.

3ABN Russia broadcasts 24 hours a day, seven days a week on the Internet. There are 36 staff members that produce more than 50 programs, as well as operating a Bible correspondence school and producing music albums.

“This may very well be the end of 3ABN in Russia,” Shelton was quoted by sources at the meeting. He is reported to have told the gathering that a powerful political group has been attempting to “take 3ABN Russia for their own use.” It is unclear precisely what that statement means, but sources present at the clear impression that this was the motivation for the killing.
Ben Carson Apologizes for Comments on Homosexuality

By AT News Team, March 5, 2015: Ben Carson, the former neurosurgeon who may run for president of the United States of America, has apologized for comments he made this week about homosexuality.

On a CNN television program, Carson told Chris Cuomo that being gay is a choice. Carson pointed to prison in order to support his views: "Because a lot of people who go into prison go into prison straight — and when they come out, they’re gay."

On Wednesday (March 4) Carson posted an apology on his Facebook page. His message clarified his views regarding sexual orientation, marriage and the U.S. Constitution. Here is the apology in full:

In a recent interview on CNN, I realized that my choice of language does not reflect fully my heart on gay issues.

I do not pretend to know how every individual came to their sexual orientation. I regret that my words to express that concept were hurtful and divisive. For that I apologize unreservedly to all that were offended.

I'm a doctor trained in multiple fields of medicine, who was blessed to work at perhaps the finest institution of medical knowledge in the world. Some of our brightest minds have looked at this debate, and up until this point there have been no definitive studies that people are born into a specific sexuality. We do know, however, that we are always born male and female. And I know that we are all made in God's image, which means we are all deserving of respect and dignity.

I support human rights and Constitutional protections for gay people, and I have done so for many years. I support civil unions for gay couples, and I have done so for many years. I support the right of individual states to sanction gay marriage, and I support the right of individual states to deny gay marriage in their respective jurisdictions.

I also think that marriage is a religious institution. Religious marriage is an oath before God and congregation. Religious marriage must only be governed by the church. Judges and government must not be allowed to restrict religious beliefs.

I am not a politician and I answered a question without really thinking about it thoroughly. No excuses. I deeply regret my statement and I promise you, on this journey, I may err again, but unlike politicians when I make an error I will take full responsibility and never hide or parse words. As a human being my obligation is to learn from my mistakes and to treat all people with respect and dignity.[1]

On March 3, Carson announced via Twitter that he had formed a Presidential Exploratory Committee, a major step toward officially launching a campaign. At the end of February, Carson placed fourth in the Conservative Political Action Committee's (CPAC) annual straw poll, receiving 11.4 percent of the votes. Carson is well-known to Adventists for his books *Gifted Hands* and *Think Big*.

From ANN, March 3, 2015: Throughout February CNN television featured Loma Linda University and the surrounding Seventh-day Adventist community in southern California on a program about how to live a healthier life.[1]

The 30-minute program, "Vital Signs with Dr. Sanjay Gupta," tackled the question, "What can one do to live a healthier, happier, and longer life?"

The setting for the opening portion of the show was the city of Loma Linda, and interviewees mentioned the key factors of healthy living—maintaining a plant-based diet, regular exercise, rest and relaxation, and having close social connections. They also spoke of the importance of a sense of mission, which for Adventists is closely linked to their faith in God and their hope in Jesus’ soon coming.

One of the key factors to a better life is "having a purpose in what you are doing," Richard H. Hart, president of Loma Linda University Health, explained on the program.

Gupta, CNN's chief medical correspondent, noted that Adventists observe the seventh-day Sabbath, giving them a break from everyday stresses and a chance to gather with fellow Adventists. "Adventists also observe a strict Saturday Sabbath. It's a time to unplug, and unwind, and share time with other like-minded people," he said.

Author and explorer Dan Buettner explained on the program that a secret to living longer is to spend time with health-minded people rather than those who eat poorly and don’t exercise.

In the show, Gupta focused on the commonalities within the world’s five “Blue Zones,” which Buettner has identified as areas where residents live the longest. Loma Linda is the only Blue Zone in the United States.

Loma Linda University Health also has the distinction of engaging in the world’s longest-running research studies on aging and longevity. The studies, collectively called the Adventist Health Studies, are cited in the show.

Adventists in Loma Linda have been featured by a number of media organizations in recent years. In addition to the CNN program in February, Loma Linda Adventists took centerstage in a lengthy article by Christian Broadcasting Network News titled, “Secrets to Longevity Revealed in Denomination’s Lifestyle.”

Adventist Church Planting Sets Record, Spurs Growth

By AT News Team, March 4, 2015: In 2014 Adventists planted 2,446 new congregations, a single-year record, reported the *Adventist Review*. This is 381 higher than last year, and it “tops the previous record of 2,416 churches in 2002, said David Trim, director of the Adventist Church’s Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research.”

Church planting is credited with fueling a second record, the highest membership growth in a single year—1,167,796 new members. According to the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, this brings total denominational membership to nearly 18.5 million.

“Countless studies show that church planting is the most effective form of sustained church growth — confirming the testimony of the book of Acts, the counsel of Ellen White, and the Adventist Church’s own history,” the *Adventist Review* quoted Gary Krause as saying. Krause is director of Adventist Mission, which supports church planting in geographical areas where Adventist congregations are not present.

By the end of 2014, “one out of every 392 people in the global population of 7.238 billion is a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, an uptick from one in 393 people in 2013 and one in 459 people a decade earlier in 2004,” reported the *Adventist Review*.

Ted Wilson, president of the Seventh-day Adventist world church, responded to the statistics: “Praise God for His goodness and blessing! By His grace, the emphasis on Mission to the Cities and comprehensive health ministry will accelerate the accessions [new members] as pastors, administrators, and members allow the Holy Spirit to guide in all that is done.”

Wilson continued, “We give God the glory for all the positive membership statistics. As I see world conditions and understand Biblical prophecy, I am firmly convinced that God is preparing the Seventh-day Adventist Church for the culminating proclamation of the three angels’ messages and the final loud cry.”

G.T. Ng, executive secretary of the denomination, noted the work of those involved in planting. “Obviously pastors have been busy going about the King’s business. Not to forget our unsung heroes, trained and dedicated churches members are toiling behind their pastors, giving their time and means for the kingdom.”

Despite the reported growth, Ng cautioned that the statistical picture is not uniform. “In spite of the upbeat membership growth and outstanding number of newly planted churches, we must be mindful of the slow growth, nongrowth and reclining areas of the world. Great swathes of population are still steeped in traditional religions. They need our continued intercession and encouragement,” he said.
What Is Adventist Eschatology Good for?

By AT News Team, March 5, 2015: Three Seventh-day Adventist academics and pastors will gather at Loma Linda University (LLU) this Saturday (March 7) to address a number of questions regarding Adventist end-time expectations: What is Adventist eschatology good for? Does the Second Coming matter today? Do the books of Daniel and Revelation still matter?

“Last-day events still mesmerize many Adventists, but staying interested is not as easy as it used to be,” states the event’s promotional materials. “The long delay of the Second Coming has had a dampening effect. There is little threat, just now, of a national Sunday law. From the standpoint of traditional Adventist eschatology, difficulty in the relationship between Islam and the West comes as an unsettling surprise.”

The three participants—John Brunt, Kendra Haloviak and Charles Scriven—will argue that indeed Daniel and Revelation matter very much today. Blunt is a New Testament scholar and pastor of the Azure Hills Seventh-day Adventist Church. Haloviak is author of a just-published book on Revelation and a faculty member at the La Sierra University Divinity School. Scriven is a theologian-ethicist and visiting professor in the Loma Linda University School of Religion.

Under the title “What Is Adventist Eschatology Good for,” they will attempt to show how a fresh reading of the Bible’s literature of hope can enhance the church’s message and build a better world.

Scriven gave Adventist Today a preview of some of the material the trio will cover. “The panelists will consider whether or not a ‘last-day-events’ interpretation of the Bible’s apocalyptic literature does full justice to the moral passion that suffuses the entire biblical canon,” Scriven told Adventist Today. “John Brunt and Kendra Haloviak-Valentine have published articles and books that raise questions about conventional understanding and supply perspective that we don’t necessarily get from the end-time preaching and seminars we are used to,” he added.

“One argument you will hear is that Daniel and Revelation, and related material in other Bible books, have this-worldly implications,” Scriven noted. “To skeptics of the Christian hope, eschatology seems, all too often, like a vision of escape from the practical demands we face today in the world God made for us. This conversation will address, among other things, the concerns that Jesus had in mind when he asked us to pray: ‘Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.’”

The panel discussion will not be live-streamed, but it will be recorded. Viewers will be able to access the video on the LLU website approximately two weeks after the event date (link).[1]

The discussion will begin at 3:00pm in the Damazo Amphitheater. The event is sponsored by the Loma Linda University School of Religion’s Humanities Program.

God Had no Need of Abraham’s Son


**Why Worship This God?**

You can admire, respect, appreciate, long for, hope for God, in the absence of final evidence. And most humans do. Even atheists mostly rebel against a God they don’t approve of. “I could never worship a God that....” It is hard to be against gravity, but it is quite possible to be against a false or unsatisfactory explanation of gravity. So is God a fact, like gravity?

God is not a recent development. The most ancient forms of humanity have been found to believe in God or gods. “*In the beginning God…*” is a true statement for whatever form of humanity we discover.

Two possibilities—one, there is an external Reality to nature, self-existent, transcendent, and we struggle to understand and know this Reality because we were created in its image. The second, all humanity has an inborn need for a god, so all humankind everywhere has struggled to create god in our image.

The weakness of the second possibility is, where does the universal ‘inborn need’ come from? How have we come to such concord in belief, if every one made up his own god de novo? The weakness of the first possibility is, how can Creature ever comprehend Creator? How can the pancake ever understand the cook?

**We Hear Notes We Cannot Sing**

I am a mediocre 2nd tenor or baritone. I can sing the lower tenor notes or the higher baritone notes. But when singing the bass part, and the notes drop below the 2nd line from the bottom I know exactly how I would sound, even
with my vocal cords incapable of sustaining that note. I am capable of hearing that note or knowing in my mind exactly how it could sound, and I am able to recognize the sound when a true bass or grand piano reproduces it. I can hear notes I cannot sing.

Though I am not capable of sustained goodness, I am capable of recognizing it. An imperfect creature can still worship a perfect God. A fallen being can imagine life before the fall. A creature can admire its Creator, if any contact with that Creator is possible. So what kind of God was revealed on Mount Moriah?

**Cat Sacrifice**

Cat comes to the screen door. The night is warm and only the screen separates my bedroom from the yard. The cat’s call is warm and short and proud. It is a different sound from hunger, from hurt, from aggression. It’s the come-and-see-what-I-have-done call. I know what I will see. A smaller animal will be lying in state on the doormat. It is a cat’s offering. A mouse, a mole, or something feathered. My cat is well fed and this is not about hunger. It is a triumph; it is a victory celebration. It is an act of homage but also pride. Cat is paying rent. Cat worships with sacrifice. Cat needs to be stroked and praised.

Imitating a cat, the Ur pagan offered his god an enemy taken in battle, a paw of a lion, the tail of a giraffe. My courage, my might, paying god his rent.

Till one morning before dawn God wakes a man from Ur and says, no more cat-afice. I don’t want an Egyptian captive, a Canaanite donkey, a Philistine bird, I want something closer and dearer. I want you. I don’t want pride; I want the death of pride. So take your pride Isaac and come up to the mountain.

It was severe. “Horrible,” “absurd,” “cruel” are thrown against Abraham’s God. It made no sense; it was a contradiction; it seems immoral. Sons and daughters revolt against being bait in a divine ploy. Holier than Yahweh we claim we would never agreed to murder, no matter what God asked.

Baal accepts the sexual sacrifice of someone else’s daughter. Moloch accepts the group offering of someone else’s son. Ishtar, Isis, Anat accept your corn, peaches, and pomegranates.

Yahweh alone refuses to be bought off. He will not accept what Cain found in the garden; he is not interested in your captives or your prey, your conquests or your boasts.

**Isaac Was Already Dead**

Throw away the pride of the hunt, the joy of abundance, the honor of prowess, and bring to me a broken heart. Give me your worst grief, the fear that underlies fears, the failure that overshadows success. Give me the worst thing that ever could happen to you, bring me the death of your son, your prime and beloved son. Find a mountain, build a table of stone, and lay it out before the Lord.

Isaac was dead for three days in his father’s eyes. I don’t think any options existed. Only those who have not heard the Voice that knows no disobedience, the Word that creates its own reality, can imagine that Abraham had a choice.

Isaac was dead from the moment of command. What choice is there when the knock on the door brings a telegram that starts, “We regret to inform you…”? “I’m sorry but your biopsy shows it is far advanced …”? Abraham spent the journey to the mountain not questioning IF, but searching WHY his son was as good as dead.

God requires of Abraham and his son their deepest terror, their ultimate fear, the worst thing in the world that they could imagine: to be laid out on a table of stone on Mount Moriah. They must sacrifice their worst. And by rote as in a dream Abraham raises the knife over the son who did not run away, and brings it down…
Stopping the Unstoppable

Only a hand from Heaven could have stopped that knife. It was on its way with a father’s love to make it quick and deadly sure. Every muscle, every tendon, every power of a great man’s body was determined to assure death on the first plunge. There would be no second blow, no painful prolongation. For 120 years he had practiced killing animals, and fighting men. Isaac will not suffer from Abraham’s hesitation.

So by faith, the Book says, Abraham offered up Isaac. And by obedience Isaac permitted the offering. Not faith in reason, not faith in fairness, not faith in understanding—faith in God.

He made me, He gave me an untimely son, He has required that son back. It makes no sense; it isn’t fair, and I don’t understand it, but I know God and I have faith in Him, as my son has faith in me.

When Gabriel grasped the knife and halted the unstoppable hand of Abraham the universe gasped in horror. For they all realized that no angel would stop the hand of the heavenly Father in the sacrifice of the heavenly Son. No lamb in a bush could prevent Calvary.

Abraham rescued from filicide, and Isaac resurrected from suicide, understand for the first time the meaning of animal sacrifice, “God will provide Himself, a Lamb.”

Abraham and Isaac having given God their worst, He gave them his Best, the mysterious plan of salvation of the guilty by the Guiltless, of the sinner by the Savior, of the broken by the Whole. They did not descend the mountain grumbling.

What Happens Next?

Saint Isaac becomes the rare monogamous ancient. While preferring Esau, he never retracts the blessing destined for Jacob. Whatever he plants grows a hundredfold. Where he digs he finds water. For 180 years.

Saint Abraham becomes the father of the faithful — faith in the transaction painfully revealed on Moriah. Calvary forever illumined by an ancient scandal. God had no need of Abraham’s son, but Abraham and all his spiritual sons and daughters need to know exactly what Moriah has to teach. God asks for our worst and gives us his Best. We may not like the story, but we should at least respect it.

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(If you found this article thoughtful, please share it on Facebook or other media with friends. Concise, constructive comments are welcomed. All comments will be read with interest, but may be edited by the author to retain those constructive and on topic.)

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My Take: Adventist Education

by Raj Attiken, March 4, 2015:  There have been a growing number of voices in recent months calling for an overhaul of the Adventist secondary education system in North America. Efforts to find good solutions to the challenges faced in this arena seem to have intensified.

Several suggestions have been made on how we might reposition the Adventist educational system for the future, at least with regards to boarding academies. These include: 1. Consolidate boarding academies and operate a few strategically placed institutions (perhaps sponsored by Union Conferences rather than by Conferences); 2. Increase funding to academies to revitalize and sustain operations: find new revenue streams; 3. Incentivize students to attend our academies. 4. Outsource the management and/or operations of academies; 5. Replace the constituency-based governance system with a different governance model; 6. Utilize on-line learning/teaching modalities. We could wish that one, or a combination of several, of these approaches will yield the desired outcomes. Some of these options have been tried at different times in different places.[i]

In the context of the present challenges, considerable attention has been drawn to the approximately two-thirds of students in Adventist homes who do not attend an Adventist school (a percentage that has reportedly remained somewhat constant for decades). Perhaps in some tangential way, this interest in students who do not attend our academies also opens to us an important window of opportunity. Instead of leading us to view these students merely as potential recruits for an academy and intensifying our recruiting efforts towards them, it should prod us to explore how we can serve and support them better in their spiritual and moral development while remaining with their families. Such an approach would respect a parent’s decision to parent their child within the family system, at home. This approach will also honor the simple and venerable notion that parents have primary responsibility to ensure that their children are nurtured in their moral, spiritual, intellectual, and physical development, particularly in the childhood and adolescent years.

Undoubtedly, academies will – and must – continue their efforts to get more of the “unaffiliated two-thirds” enrolled in school. But if the current buzz about Adventist education is really because the Church feels a certain responsibility for the nurture of all of its children (and not merely to rescue and bolster up a declining institutionalized system), the Church must find ways to also support parents in their efforts to facilitate the development of the mental, physical, and spiritual attributes of their children who attend public or private schools or are home-schooled.

There already are many Adventist parents who create a healthy, nurturing, supportive, and stimulating environment within their family relationships that aids the spiritual formation of their children. There are other families, however, who would welcome some assistance in this regard, beyond what is offered in Sabbath Schools, Pathfinders, Youth and other ministries of the church. An intentional, structured, and covenanted relationship with these parents and students could go a long way in supporting the spiritual development of these children and in providing a context in which they could explore Christian perspectives on faith, science, origins, service, etc.[ii]

The institutional approach to meeting the current challenge regarding Adventist schools will inevitably look for solutions within the institutional paradigm. However, if we change the question from “What will it take to add your child to our school’s roster?” to “How can we best support your efforts to educate your child?” the paradigm within which we look for answers also changes. If our real interest is in seeing all our children develop strong Christian values and a wholesome Christian worldview, the questions must of necessity change. We must not perpetuate the notion that unless a student attends an Adventist school, he or she will not achieve the goals of “true education – the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers.”[iii]

By all means, let us look within our institutional paradigm for ways to sustain the traditional Adventist educational
system. But let us also be open to looking beyond this paradigm to benefit people who are now “nonconsumers” of traditional Adventist education. It may be that two-thirds of our efforts and educational funds should be directed at fresh and innovative approaches to serve the two-thirds of our students who do not attend our schools.

What is the likelihood that the Church will seriously explore any new paradigms in education? It is very slim unless we resist the forces that exist in the Church — as they do in every other organization — that attempt to shape and morph every new innovative proposal so that it fits the structures, values, and economic models of the church’s existing operational paradigm for education. It will take creative and courageous leadership to resist these forces and establish new paradigms.

We’ve had over a century to develop and refine our current educational system. It is time to invest in developing other paradigms so that we serve all our students — those who attend our schools and those who don’t. That’s my take!

[i] The record of past school consolidations in North America does not commend consolidation of academies as a promising option.

With regards to revitalizing of our academies, the fairly recent experience at Mount Vernon Academy may be instructive. Within the past decade, a massive revitalization process was launched which included new leadership and expanded staffing, approximately $3 million (from generous donors) spent on remodeling the dormitories, administration building and other facilities; a one-time investment of close to $1 million by the Ohio Conference for academic and program enhancement; a significant increase in the annual operating subsidies from the Conference; the growth of the educational endowment at the Conference for the academy to over $2 million, and more. Although enrollment doubled within about two years, the increase of Ohio Conference students was minimal. The expectation that if we operated a school with excellent facilities, a strong spiritual and academic program (including dual-credit classes for college credit), best-in-class extra-curricular programs, etc., we would attract students from families who are able to pay all or most of their tuition costs, did not materialize. Instead, the increased enrollment required increased tuition subsidies and scholarships. As funds declined for these scholarships, so did enrollment.

One feature of the Mount Vernon Academy revitalization plan was that an offer was made that any student — regardless of his or her ability to pay — would be welcome to attend. Despite this financial incentive, most Ohio Conference academy-age students did not enroll at Mount Vernon Academy.

[ii] The use of life coaches, spiritual mentors, customized annual Spiritual Development Plans for children, are just a few of a plethora of possibilities that could be considered.

Two Speeches

by Andy Hanson, March 4, 2015: In the Cover Feature of the Adventist Review of February 26, 2015, Nathan Brown makes a clumsy attempt to soften the rhetoric, discharge the passion, and change the clear and unmistakable clarity of expression of Ted Wilson’s inaugural speech into fuzzy religious platitudes. His four-page essay is written to provide help in “Getting Past The Buzz Words” that threaten the unity of the church. The following are direct quotes from Wilson’s speech, lest the reader forget.

From Ted NC Wilson’s milestone address to General Conference delegates July 3, 2010, entitled “Go Forward.”

“Go forward, not backward…Do not succumb to the mistaken idea, gaining support even in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, of accepting worship or evangelistic outreach methods merely because they are new and “trendy”… Look WITHIN the Seventh-day Adventist Church to humble pastors, evangelists, Biblical scholars, leaders, and departmental directors who can provide evangelistic methods and programs that are based on solid Biblical principles and “The Great Controversy theme.”

“Go forward, not backward! Use Christ-centered, Bible-based worship and music practices in church services. While we understand that worship services and cultures vary throughout the world, don’t go backwards into confusing pagan settings where music and worship become so focused on emotion and experience that you lose the central focus on the Word of God…Worship methods that lift up performance and self should be replaced with a simple and sweet reflection of a Christ-centered, Biblical approach.

“Go forward, not backward! Stand for truth though the heavens fall. Don’t succumb to fanatical or loose theology that wrests God’s Word from the pillars of Biblical truth and the landmark beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Don’t be swayed with every little whim of “new” theology or complicated time chart purporting to carefully explain unusual or obscure concepts that have little to do with our overall theology and mission. The historic Biblical beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church will not be moved. The Biblical foundation will stand secure to the end of time.

“Go forward, not backward! Stand firm for God’s Word as it is literally read and understood…Don’t go backwards to misinterpret the first eleven chapters of Genesis or other areas of Scripture as allegorical or merely symbolic. As just this week we have once again affirmed in an overwhelming manner, the Seventh-day Adventist Church both teaches and believes in the biblical record of creation which took place recently; in six literal, consecutive, contiguous 24 hour days. The Seventh-day Adventist church will never change its stand or belief in that foundational doctrine…To misunderstand or to misinterpret this doctrine is to deny God’s Word and to deny the very purpose of the Seventh-day Adventist movement as the remnant church of God called to proclaim the three angels’ messages with Holy Spirit power.

“Seventh-day Adventist Church members, hold your leaders, pastors, local churches, educators, institutions, and administrative organizations accountable to the highest standards of belief based on a literal understanding of Scripture. Utilize wonderful resources such as the Biblical Research Institute’s new book on hermeneutics that helps us know the correct way to interpret the Scriptures.”

In the same February 26 issue of the Adventist Review, Benjamin J. Baker authored “Who’s That Adventist Woman Beside Martin Luther King, Jr.?" That woman was Yolanda Clarke, who was then the Music Director at Union United Methodist Church in Brooklyn and a member of the Ephesus Seventh-day Adventist Church.
“There were members at Ephesus who thought I shouldn’t play for Sunday churches. But whatever I did, I was going to shine for Jesus.”

When asked to perform with the official chorus for the March on Washington, Yolanda “jumped at the opportunity,” and ended up on the dais with Martin Luther King, where she heard a speech that left her “enthralled” and “spellbound.”

After the speech was over, Yolanda “just stood there and watched. I felt that God was using everybody that was at that march to speak for all of those people who couldn’t speak for themselves—the Africans who had died on the Middle Passage, the Blacks who were enslaved, the poor who had no voice. It takes everybody—from the lowest to the highest—to bring to focus the things that are vital to humanity.”

Two speeches, one memorable for its ability to exclude and humiliate,* the other to “focus on things that are vital to humanity.” General Conference delegates, if you manage to do that in July, all of us can be FREE AT LAST!

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* Andy Nash, writing in the Adventist Review of March 21, 2013, opines in “Beyond Belief,” “While relationships will always factor into any church member’s experience, a new study suggests a shifting landscape in which more and more people are leaving the Adventist Church primarily because they’ve changed their beliefs.” Nash chronicles the experiences of one respondent:

“The tipping point came when I realized we couldn’t expect our sons to tell us the truth if we were modeling a lack of integrity by being active members of a church they knew we no longer believed…We did not leave because we were in any way hurt, angry, bitter, or disgruntled. We left with great grief and great loss, and we left because the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to us so compellingly that we know we could not dishonor Him by remaining in a system that does not know who He really is or what He really did.”

http://www.adventistreview.org/?issue=2013-1508
Psalm 19, Chanted

By Debonnaire Kovacs, March 4, 2015  This week’s psalm is the lovely Psalm 19, set to music so many times. If you want to really hear it just about as beautifully done as it can be, click on this link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTYJm5Ae0Xo to hear the Mormon Tabernacle Choir doing Haydn's oratorio from The Creation.

(But if you’re going to do that, please either skip my chanting, or listen to me first! I do not want to follow that!)

Many readers may also remember, as I do, the popular song from the 70s and 80s in which we sang verses 7-10 and 14, specifically from the King James wording.

No matter how you sing or read this psalm, let your heart lift the words up to the Great Creator and be reminded that the One is creating still. If there’s darkness and chaos in your life, keep your eyes open—you don’t want to miss the transformation!

Here is my chant of Psalm 19.
The Concert that Almost Didn’t Happen

By Heidi Baumgartner, Washington Conference Communication Director; Re-posted by permission, March 4, 2015
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The holiday season has a full lineup of school Christmas concerts. For Northwest Christian School (NCS) in Puyallup, their Christmas concert almost didn’t happen because thieves stole the school’s musical instruments and other items on Oct. 27, 2014.

The local news stations and publications picked up the theft story, and the community rallied to provide donations and musical instruments to help the music program get back in session. Music stores and associations reached out to the school to offer their services and support.

To show its appreciation to the community, the school invited community donors to attend the back-on-the-schedule Christmas program on Dec. 17.

“We are filled with gratitude,” said Craig Mattson, NCS principal, at the opening of the concert. “We experienced an outpouring of support that was overwhelming. We are here tonight because of the support of our community.”

The audience of 450 people arrived early, and hardly a seat was empty for this special hour-and-a-half concert. Students in kindergarten through eighth grade showcased their musical abilities by singing Christmas carols and playing their donated and loaned band instruments, hand bells and chimes.

“I’m so proud of these kids,” says Claira Hockenson, NCS music teacher. “They did a great job with the Christmas concert even though they had a little less practice because of the theft.”

About two months after the theft, detectives recovered 30 of the 42 stolen instruments. Music store partners are repairing the band instruments after their careless storage.

At the close of the concert, the school gave a bell-shaped Christmas ornament to the families in attendance as a way to commemorate their gratitude for how God took care of the school’s music program.
The Child is Father of the Man

By S M Chen, March 4, 2015  “My heart leaps up when I behold” – William Wordsworth, 1802

It was several decades ago when my father, not long retired from a lifetime of denominational service as a chemistry professor, noticed pain in his abdomen. Initially attributing this to ingestion of some excessively hot tea, he ignored it for a time, hoping that, like many ailments, it would dissipate on its own. When it did not, he sought medical attention.

He ended up at the hospital where I worked, and his workup proceeded apace. A CT abdominal scan revealed a tangerine-size mass in the tail of his pancreas which, upon needle biopsy, showed malignancy. Angiography demonstrated encasement of the splenic artery and occlusion of the splenic vein.

A well-intentioned surgeon with normally impeccable judgment convinced him to undergo surgery, which offered the only curative option. The angiographic findings indicated nonresectability, and I was dubious, but my father, whose options were limited, elected to have the operation, hoping, as many of us undoubtedly do in such situations, against hope. Perhaps the surgeon’s optimism was justified and his judgment not clouded by hubris.

Later, much later, I would relive those moments and, feeling as if I’d let my father down, wish that I’d discouraged him from undergoing the knife or, failing that, to push for his not being awakened in the event the tumor indeed proved to be unresectable. In California (and, indeed anywhere in the USA at the time), the latter scenario was likely impossible in that, unlike certain limited places such as the Netherlands, no physician would be persuaded to participate in such action. I chided myself that I had not sought a second opinion preoperatively, which was certainly an option that I considered but briefly.

At surgery, the tumor was indeed proven to be unresectable, and the surgeon, after confirming such, merely closed him. But postoperatively my father was worse off than before. He developed ARDS (adult respiratory distress syndrome) and nearly succumbed. A skillful internist brought him through that, and he was sent home, where his cancer would work its inexorable, inimical, opportunistic destruction.

My father was a stoic man who complained little, but, during the time he spent in my home, I witnessed his anorexia, inability to eat, the pain that nothing could ameliorate, the suffering. He was, perhaps in a different context than was originally intended by the 16th century Spanish writer, St. John of the Cross, passing through his ‘dark night of the soul.’

More than anyone, the one who was there for him was my mother, his companion of nearly five decades. When he shed tears (mostly silent and internal), she tasted salt. She was the flickering light in his darkness.

Not insignificantly, despite lacking any obvious serious illness, she went to join him within a year of his passing. My eldest sister, with whom she lived after my father died, said that my mother seemed to lack the will to live. I think this happens at times with certain individuals: their vital life force (what the Chinese call ‘qi’) dissipates when they no longer feel needed.

Pretty much all her adult life my mother had been a caretaker and nurturer, first as a wife, then mother, then grandmother. The bulk of her adulthood had been spent as a homemaker (and a fine one she was). When my father died, she lost her best friend, and her reason for living, her raison d’etre. So she chose to go be with him and, although that choice may have been passive rather than active, the end result was the same.

Perhaps she succumbed to Takotsubo cardiomyopathy, or ‘broken heart syndrome,’ a condition unknown until the
1990s. We will never know.

My father was anointed after he had been discharged from the hospital. Many prayers were tendered on his behalf. Parenteral megavitamin C (this after allopathic medicine had thrown up their hands) did no discernible good.

Unlike Hezekiah, who was granted fifteen extra years, and like Paul, whose ‘thorn in the flesh’ was not removed despite repeated supplication, my father departed in expected fashion, although I cannot say his, like that of protagonist Tristan Ludlow of Jim Harrison’s novella, “Legends of the Fall,” was a ‘good death.’

But he had been blessed with a good life. A loving wife and children, all of whom were reasonably educated, largely because of my father’s belief in the value of education, a satisfying, distinguished career, and many outside interests, the breadth of which is impressive considering how busy a man he was (he published thirteen books, as well as numerous articles, mainly scientific; was a member of various scientific societies; built a freestanding garage at one domicile and tilled the soil of a half-acre garden which largely provided the provender for a family of eight; had a photographic darkroom, carved animals from soap; popularized origami before the word became part of ordinary parlance; made root beer and pickled cucumbers; canned and froze produce; and had time to take the family on outings to various parts of the country. He once modestly characterized himself as a Jack of all trades but master of none; I do not believe this to be an accurate description, in that he was accomplished at many things, including magic tricks, with which he loved to regale audiences, particularly the young).

And, although I believe he was taken too soon, he lived the sort of life Alan Watts, British speaker, writer and philosopher, would have advised. I think he loved his life and had few, if any regrets. As my eldest brother opined at his eulogy, he was a great man. Not necessarily as the world counts greatness, but that, too.

Most importantly, I believe that we will see him once again, restored to the prime of health, in a different place, where the promise has been given of no more sickness or sorrow, where ‘the former things have passed away’ and there will be no need for the sun, for the Son Himself will provide all the light that is needed.

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(Sharing is caring!)
A Dimly-Lit Pathway

Photo and reflection by Debbonnaire Kovacs, March 4, 2015  This is a dim photo of a special church service. A pastoral intern spent hours on her knees placing slate tiles to represent a path and a crossroads, arranging stones to show a winding path and a bit of spiral, some candles for enough light for contemplation, and at the center, a woodcarving of a human being in extremis, curled into fetal position, arms over head, heart wide open in pain or sorrow or even despair (the feeling is in the heart of the beholder).

I thought of the path a very young Ellen Harmon described, narrow and tortuous, confusing, with no visible destination, but with just enough light to see one step at a time. And with an inner certainty that the path will lead…

…eventually…

… to The Light.