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Bake Sale for Homeless LGBT Youth Incites Conflict at Andrews University

By AT News Team, March 11, 2015: A conflict over a fundraiser at Andrews University (AU) that was to be held for homeless lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) teens has escalated onto social media and other online news outlets. Andrews University, which is located in Berrien Springs, MI, is the flagship educational institution of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Eliel Cruz says he encouraged the university’s unofficial LGBT group Aull4One to hold a bake sale fundraiser for a service agency that supports LGBT homeless youth, reported Blue Nation Review. The Windy City Times added that the agency was Project Fierce in Chicago.

Cruz told Blue Nation Review that Aull4One has approximately 80 members, “majority of them queer.” “Administration knows we exist, they allow us to exist,” Cruz said, “and some administrators even champion the group’s existence. But unfortunately, we are unable to advertise our meetings and events on campus.”

“We turned in a proposal last semester for a bake sale, [and the] Deans of Student life asked us to move forward with the proposal,” Cruz said, according to the Windy City Times. “[Since] we are an unofficial group, we needed someone to sponsor us; this is quite common. Many students have ideas and get groups to sponsor them. Campus Ministries agreed to sponsor us.”

When AU decided not to allow the proposed bake sale, Steve Yeagley, dean of Student Life, explained the university position in an email to Cruz, according to Blue Nation Review. “I think the most helpful thing I can do is to draw your attention to the fundraising policy found in the Student Handbook. It simply states that funds may be raised for non-profit organizations ‘whose mission and practices do not conflict with those of the University.’ I think the judgment in this case is that there may be a perceived conflict between the mission and practices of Andrews University and those of Fierce Chicago – certainly not in their efforts to aid homeless youth, but in their approach to the LGBT issue, at large,” Yeagley said.

Yeagley also offered, “If a way can be found to serve LGBT homeless youth through an organization that more fully reflects the University’s mission and the stance of our denomination (which clearly calls for exhibiting compassion toward LGBT persons), let’s explore that.”

Blue Nation Review said Cruz then attempted to clarify: “Also, would a proposal to raise funds for another LGBT organization that works with LGBT homeless youth (say the Center in Halsted) actually be accepted?” It is not clear if the university addressed this specific question.

Andrews University distributed a statement to media sources outlining its perspective. The essential factor in the university’s opinion was the advocacy efforts of Fierce Chicago, rather than the direct service of the agency, according to the school’s statement—“our objection was not to the worthy goal of serving LGBT homeless youth and their transitional housing needs but to the perceived advocacy stance of the proposed organization.”

The entirety of AU’s media statement follows:

Andrews University recognizes the special challenges facing LGBT youth and believes that efforts to help them are worthy.
Providing care to LGBT homeless youth is compatible with our institutional mission to demonstrate God’s love to all people, and reflects our denomination’s specific call to exhibit compassion for LGBT persons.

At the same time, Andrews University has declined a student request to officially endorse a fundraising effort to raise money for an organization that may have a perceived LGBT advocacy role.

This decision was made in the context of our student fundraising policy in the Student Handbook, which states that funds may be raised for non-profit organizations “whose mission and practices do not conflict with those of the University.”

So, our objection was not to the worthy goal of serving LGBT homeless youth and their transitional housing needs but to the perceived advocacy stance of the proposed organization.

As a result, we can and will support LGBT homeless youth through organizations whose mission and purpose clearly align with the religious mission and purpose of our University and its sponsoring church. We invite our student clubs to find the appropriate organizations and opportunities to do just that.

Click on the following links for more information on the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s positions on homosexuality and same sex unions.[1]

The university also posted a question-and-answer document on its website that describes its perspective. In the document, university president Niels-Erik Andreasen shared that AU supports efforts to care for LGBT homeless young people. "It is within the University and Church mission to seek to provide care and compassion wherever and for whoever needs it. The problem of LGBT homeless youth in particular is a heartbreaking national problem —perhaps as many as 40 percent of the homeless teens on the street at any one time are LGBT. Many of these teens were in Christian families who rejected their child’s orientation and, in the process, their child. A safe place and genuine care must be provided for these homeless LGBT youth," he said.

Andreasen described how AU students can raise money for LGBT homeless people: “Students should engage in serious-minded dialogue about fundraising options with club sponsors or University administrators. Together, students and faculty/staff should explore whether a particular recipient of funds is largely and primarily aligned in support of the University's mission and its faith commitment. The University recognizes that every single activity of an agency may not be in 'alignment’—to expect perfect alignment might never permit any outside fundraising. But it is reasonable for the University to expect primary alignment between its mission and an agency’s activities.”

Finally, Andreasen also revealed his frustration with how the conversation was handled on campus. He shared, “the 'problem' as the University sees it is that once a decision was made that a student did not like, he stopped conversation about it and went to the press/social media to portray the University in a light that was neither fair nor accurate. What happened to the specific suggestion of an alternative Chicago-based agency that works with homeless LGBT youth and why was that option not explored more fully? These kinds of misunderstandings can be avoided when students and faculty/staff work together in good faith.”

Although this approach to the media was disconcerting for the university, it was quite effective from Aull4One’s perspective. The group raised levels of awareness on campus about the student group and also the experience of homeless LGBT young people more broadly. Furthermore, the publicity has drawn attention to Aull4One’s online fundraising campaign to support Project Fierce.[2] At the time of publication of this story, the campaign had raised $4,995, much more than would have been raised with the originally planned bake sale.

[1] The university’s statement is also available on the school's website: http://www.andrews.edu/agenda/event


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Sharing is caring!
Adventist Institutions Confront Racism, Consider Way Forward

By AT News Team, March 12, 2015: Andrews University, Union College and the Allegheny East Conference have each addressed issues of race relations recently.

On February 28, 2015, the Allegheny East Conference (AEC) hosted a town hall meeting, which addressed the on-going relevance of Regional Conferences, or conferences primarily for black Seventh-day Adventist congregations. Participants included Dan Jackson (the president of the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, NAD), Henry J. Fordham III (AEC president), Charles Cheatham (former AEC president), and Dwight Nelson (pastor of Pioneer Memorial Church). The event was recorded, and the first portion will be released on the AEC website on Sunday, March 15, at 8:00pm.[1]

On March 7, students leaders at Andrews University (AU) hosted an event to consider the past and future of state and regional conferences. After an introduction to the history and structure of conference organizational patterns, forum participants answered questions posed by the moderators and by event attendees. In conclusion, five students presented a letter to NAD leadership, including all conference and union presidents, calling for an explanation of the current structure by this fall or a plan to restructure conferences by 2020.[2]

Major themes at the forum included unity, accepting differences, repentance, reconciliation, forgiveness and the Adventist Church’s public witness. Participants debated whether repentance and reconciliation should begin at the local level or if the process must begin at the top of the denomination’s hierarchy.

The forum was sponsored by thirteen student organizations, including the AU Adventist Peace Fellowship chapter, AU Student Association, and the Black Student Christian Forum. Participants included Shastri Lloyd (writer for the Student Movement, the campus newspaper), Melodie Roschman (editor of the Student Movement), Nicholas Miller (AU professor of Church History, director of the International Religious Liberty Institute), Michael Polite (AU associate chaplain), Dwight Nelson, Taurus Montgomery (pastor of Harbor of Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church in Benton Harbor, MI), and Timothy Nixon (executive secretary of the Lake Region Conference).

Olivia Ruiz-Knott, current AUSA president and one of five event co-organizers, told Adventist Today that the team has received primarily positive reactions to the event. Ruiz-Knott did note two critiques. First, the panel members could have been more diverse. Second, some people have noted “there were inaccuracies in the history presentation.” “That’s fair,” she said, so they have “been pointing people to Michael Nixon’s blog, which…gives a very good history of the issue.”[3]

This forum was in the wake of Dwight Nelson’s January 17 sermon, which called for racial unity in the church. At the time, many interpreted this to mean Nelson wanted to close the regional conferences, though he did not state this in his sermon. In the AU forum, Nixon questioned why people presume it is the regional conferences that need to close and rejoin the state conferences. Adventist Today Foundation executive director Monte Sahlin has publicly argued that in economic terms, it would actually be more cost effective to merge the state conferences into the regional conferences, though all sides acknowledge the debate must consider more than only financial concerns.

The Regional Conferences were created in 1945 in direct response to an incident that occurred about 18 months earlier and led to a decision by the General Conference executive committee in 1944 opening the door for their formation. The Lucy Byard disaster involved an Adventist church member in Takoma Park, Maryland, who was a patient in the emergency department at Washington Adventist Hospital. Byard was an African American who did not appear to be “negro” in terms of stereotypes at the time and was initially accepted as a patient. When hospital employees looked at her paperwork and found out that she was not “white,” they pushed her gurney into the hallway
and requested that she be transported to a “negro” hospital. By the time she was moved to another hospital several miles away she was greatly weakened, and she soon died.

African American church members were angry at this cruel and racist segregation policy at an Adventist institution and organized pressure for change. The alternative of forming Regional Conferences made up of the historically African American congregations in each of the union conferences east of the Rocky Mountains was a method for empowering the black membership to establish and govern its own institutions instead of being forced to have their financial giving and moral support go into institutions that discriminated against them.

There was wide-ranging discrimination against African American church members in the 1930s and 1940s, and most of these policies were created in the 1920s as more conservative viewpoints took over in the denomination. These policies were largely against the recommendations in the writings of Ellen G. White. Because of one White document in which she stated that if racist forces (such as the KKK which organized many lynchings during this time period) made it dangerous for congregations to include both races, then separate congregations were probably necessary, it was widely believed that she supported the segregation among Adventists that developed.

For example, African American pastors were paid a lower wage than white pastors simply because of their race. Tithe from African American members was used to support boarding academies where only white students were admitted. Offerings from African American members were used to fund evangelism in which blacks were not allowed to attend. The creation of Regional Conferences put an end to these racist organizational behaviors and others.

Today, the questioning of Regional Conferences seems to come more from members who are not African Americans. The suggestion that they might be merged into the state conferences is essentially “telling African American institutions they have to close down and I don’t think that those of us who are not African American really have a right to do that,” says Monte Sahlin, who conducted both survey and focus group research on race relations while he was an assistant to the president of the denomination’s North American Division. “The penetration of the Adventist mission among African Americans is much greater than it is among any other ethnic group in the United States, and that is testimony to the effectiveness of the Regional Conferences over the decades,” he observes.

On a more local context, during the question-and-answer portion of the AU forum, Miller noted that the faculty senate has initiated a process to learn about and deal with racism in the university’s history. He noted that this process began prior to news that Union College (UC) has recently been focusing on its history as well. Kyle Berg, a current UC student, studied the school’s racist practices and policies from the 1930s through the 1960s, which lead to a formal apology by the Union College Board of Trustees.

The example of Union College demonstrates how local research, acknowledgment and repentance can be significant steps toward change and healing in a single institution or local context; however, denomination-wide change will require steps to be taken by those responsible for greater oversight. Despite this, Polite called on event attendees to see the power they hold for making change.


[2] The entire March 7 Statement as well as a two-hour recording of the event can be found here: http://weareausa.org/march-7-request/. The group will be establishing a Facebook page to promote this statement.


Three New Adventist Television Channels to be Launched in the Caribbean Basin

From ANN, March 9, 2015: In an ambitious move, three new satellite television channels will be started during 2015 to operate in Spanish, French and English across the Caribbean and parts of Latin America. These are initiatives of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination’s Inter-American Division (IAD) and will join the worldwide Hope Channel sponsored by the denomination.

“Our main objective with the new channels is to present the gospel to our region in a culturally relevant context, provide opportunities for all language groups to minister to their constituencies, develop and expose nascent talents, and assist viewers who are seeking spiritual answer to their daily challenges,” stated Pastor Leon Wellington, communication director of the IAD.

The three operations will be named Hope Channel Américas, Hope Channel Caribbean, and Hope Channel Français. At a meeting last week communication professionals and denominational administrators from throughout the region worked to determine where to base each channel and discussed technical issues and needs.

Hope Channel’s president, Pastor Brad Thorp, congratulated IAD leaders for establishing the new channels. As communicators who influence the Adventist movement, who project the image of the Adventist faith, “Hope Channel is the window to the world as to who we are … carrying the compassion of Christ through our programs,” said Thorp.

Building a series of programs to fill three channels will be the first step before launching the actual transmission, said Thorp. Normally for a channel to launch, there must be at least 1,000 programs available and potential for additional productions, he explained. “We need good sermons, technical expertise in every story, in every report, and we need that element of compassion to come out to be up close and personal” he added.

Out of the 18 or so production centers throughout the region, Montemorelos media center and Inter-Oceanic Mexican media center are the two that have been consistently providing programming for Hope Channel’s Esperanza TV, said Abel Marquez, associate communication director for the IAD, who will oversee management of the three new channels. He said most of the rest of the production centers will provide programming for their regions and will create programs for the new channels.

More information on the three new channels is available at www.interamerica.org.

*The Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news agency of the Adventist denomination. Libna Stevens was the primary reporter for this news bulletin.*
Medical School Approved for the Adventist University of the Philippines

From ANN, March 12, 2015: Approval has been granted for a medical school to begin classes in August this year at the Adventist University of the Philippines. It will be the Adventist denomination’s sixth medical school worldwide and the first in Asia.

The nation’s Commission on Higher Education gave legal status for a College of Medicine to be located on the campus in Silang in the province of Cavite. The program has also met requirements set by the denomination’s International Board of Education.

The first class will have 35 medical students. The school will use Batangas Medical Center as its main teaching hospital because of its volume and variety of patients. It will also partner with Adventist Medical Center—Manila.

The program is designed to serve the denomination’s Southern Asia-Pacific Division. “We’re very excited. They have worked very hard for this day, a dream of more than 30 years,” said Dr. Peter Landless, director of health ministries director for the denomination.

The new medical school will “train and graduate physicians who are service-oriented, effectively witnessing for God and promoting the worldwide mission of the Adventist Church as medical missionary-minded doctors wherever they may be,” said Dr. Doris Mendoza, the founding dean.

The university has been partnering with Loma Linda University School of Medicine, an Adventist institution in the United States, for advising on student admissions, curriculum development and faculty development. “Over the past 100 years, Loma Linda has refined a process to select mission-focused graduates who have carried out the healing ministry of Christ and the commission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and their mentoring of AUP and our other new medical schools has been vital,” said Lisa Beardsley-Hardy, director of education director for the General Conference.

The denomination opened its fifth medical school in Peru in 2012. Other Adventist medical schools are located at Loma Linda University in the United States, Montemorelos University in Mexico, River Plate Adventist University in Argentina, and Babcock University in Nigeria.

A seventh Adventist medical school is currently being planned for the denomination’s East-Central Africa Division, Beardsley-Hardy said. “To carry out our mission, especially in the underserved parts of the world, we need many more physicians who speak the language of patients and are culturally competent, in addition to being excellent clinicians,” she said.

The Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news agency of the denomination. Max Cadalig and Teresa Costello helped in reporting this story.
The Downside of Testimonies

by Mark Gutman, March 13, 2015: An Adventist lady had planned to fly from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur on Thursday, July 17, 2014, as part of a trip that would end in Ambon, Indonesia, on July 19. Since 1991 she has worked with the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), which is kind of a United Nations for “indigenous peoples, minorities, and unrecognised or occupied territories” who “are not adequately represented at major international fora, such as the United Nations.”

“In all of my [many] UNPO missions, no matter where I’ve gone, I have kept the Sabbath and not once set foot on an airplane,” she later wrote. Three days before the flight, she realized that July 19 was a Sabbath, which meant that she would be flying on Sabbath. “[God’s] Spirit spoke to me during our (the lady and her husband’s) devotional on Monday morning and told me, ‘If you take this route, you will travel on the Sabbath. Don’t.’” So she changed her flight schedule, notified UNPO on Tuesday, then confirmed the flight change, and flew on Wednesday instead of Thursday.

The plane she had originally been scheduled to fly from Amsterdam was shot down while it was over Ukraine, in an incident heavily covered by the media. But our church member, having changed her schedule to leave Amsterdam on Wednesday, was busily and safely at work for UNPO. “I am here to witness that God has spared me because I need to continue my mission here in Ambon and be available to aid people in our world who need help,” she said. Likewise, a commenter on the website asserted, “It doesn’t mean that God was not concerned about the lives of those that perished. It just means that He still has a work for this lady to do, and that is why she was impressed to change her ticket.”

Others were no longer necessary

She may indeed have been spared because she had a work to do but “it appears that some of the world’s leading AIDS researchers lost their lives. The Australian reported that 108 of of the passengers were researchers and their families, who were en route to the 20th International AIDS Conference in Melbourne.” Would we be justified in concluding that either their work was not as important or that their particular role was no longer important? Is it a given that nobody else on the plane had more work to do?

Statements we make praising God for his goodness to us often seem insulting to others or relatives of others who did not fare as well. Such comments may also fail to back up and take in a larger picture. Since we only interview survivors, no evidence can now be provided by the unfortunate deceased passengers. There is no way to find out how many people were flying that particular plane because they had felt similarly impressed that God’s Spirit was telling them that they should be on it. After all, they weren’t breaking the Sabbath by flying on Thursday.

Just reporting the facts

The writer of the Review article about the flight switch felt that “an article should focus on the biggest, most relevant story for its audience. In this case, the audience is primarily Adventist and has a special interest in the case of a fellow Adventist associated with MH17 [the Malaysian airlines flight number].” In other words, if this is what people want to read, let’s supply it. He also defended his writing with “The article only reports the facts,” which reminds me of a story (probably a fable) about a captain and a first mate.
On a special occasion, the first mate of a ship got drunk. The captain reported in the ship’s log, “The first mate was drunk today.” The mate pleaded with the captain to remove the sentence, pointing out that it could delay the mate’s captaincy by months or years. The ship’s captain stated firmly, “If it is true, it has to go in the log. That’s the rule. End of discussion!” A few weeks later, the first mate got to make the log entries. He wrote, “The ship seems in good shape. The captain was sober today.” “We report only the facts” could more accurately be stated as “We report only the facts that we select to make our case.” The facts we report may lead people to incorrect conclusions, but at least the conclusions will be more like our own. “60 Minutes,” FoxNews, and “the liberal media” have all been accused of such one-sided reporting.

If it worked for me . . .

Eye-catching headlines or articles often claim cause-effect relationships that don’t exist. For example, “The number of vaccines children are receiving is increasing, and the number of children who are being diagnosed with autism at some time after being vaccinated is on the rise. Therefore vaccines must cause autism.” As has been brought to our attention recently, such reasoning, known as post hoc ergo propter hoc (Latin: “after this, therefore because of this”), may be very wrong, but can win a lot of followers.

Because one lady felt impressed not to take a certain flight and thus missed dying in a plane crash, some have gathered that it is dangerous to fly on a commercial airline on Sabbath (although the plane crashed on Thursday). One can read too much into a coincidence. One can also read too much into a sample of one. Deciding we want to believe something often results in a “confirmation bias” (reread “Just reporting the facts”), which is “a type of cognitive bias that involves favoring information that confirms previously existing beliefs or biases.”

Follow God, and you’re safe

Reporting stories that appear “providential” can create the impression that recognizing God’s impressions is fairly straightforward. And when God impresses, you obey. But we don’t know how many people were impressed that they should be on that plane, perhaps to accomplish some good deed. Nor have we been given a report on how often the good lady has impressions that turn out to be useless. (“I should go back and make sure that I turned off the oven.”)

Scientists warn us against basing important decisions on anecdotal evidence. The fact that three people took the snake oil I sold them and got better doesn’t prove that my snake oil is good, even though it increases my snake oil sales. (Reread also about post hoc ergo propter hoc.) Some commenters were so impressed (unnerved?) by this event that they had started rethinking their travel plans ( . . . the commandment doesn’t exactly say not to fly on Sabbath, but why take chances?)

Conclusions

Sometimes our cheery testimonies strike others as unkind barbs or unproven claims. Our looking good in one story can lead us and others to forget that an incident in which we shine proves neither our sainthood nor our theories. If we can tell who is on God’s side by observing who escapes calamity, we’d better delete Job from our Bibles. We don’t tie the long lives of some cigar smokers to their smoking. Nor should we be quick to claim that an occurrence of escaped mishap or good fortune can be attributed mainly to our rule observance or goodness.
1 See http://www.unpo.org/

2 This quote and other details from the story are taken from the *Adventist Review* website. See http://www.adventistworld.org/2014/october/news-feature.html

3 See http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2014/07/malaysia-airlines-crash-everything-we-know.html

4 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post_hoc_ergo_propter_hoc

5 http://psychology.about.com/od/cognitivepsychology/fl/What-Is-a-Confirmation-Bias.htm
So no more speculation and hypothesizing. Let’s do a little nature study in the Bible.

*Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.*
*Matthew 6:26*

*Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!*
*Luke 12:24*

*Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food?*
*Job 38:41*

*The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother*
will be picked out by the ravens of the valley
and eaten by the vultures.
Proverbs 30:17

Your carcasses will be food to all birds of the sky
and to the beasts of the earth,
and there will be no one to frighten them away.
The LORD will smite you with the boils of Egypt
and with tumors
and with the scab and with the itch,
from which you cannot be healed.…
Deuteronomy 28:26,27.

What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin?
But not a single sparrow
can fall to the ground
without your Father knowing it.
Matthew 10:29.

I know every bird in the mountains,
and the insects in the fields are mine.
Psalm 50:11

PREDATORS

Supporting creation, my North Pacific Union GLEANER features, for 2015, 52+ pictures of The Wonders of God's Creation.[1] 15 of those pictures are of wonderfully designed and created predators, animals created to prey on other animals. We admire the fox, cougar, bear, eagle, heron, coyote, and owl and admit that they are not clumsy or deformed vegetarians struggling to make do with an animal diet because nothing else plant-based is available to them.

The owl has feathers intelligently designed precisely to let it fly slowly and silently across fields in stealth not to capture mushrooms, but rodents. And the design is not only for slow, but also for silent, with special features on the leading edge that muffle sounds. Stealth bombers from the Creator’s workshop. The fox and bobcat and cougar are designed to kill and eat. Only the bear could do pretty well as an omnivore and thrive on a plant based diet, and even that would be hard without catching fish.

RAVENS

And then there are the Ravens, Corvus corax or its close relatives. The Biblical Hebrew is some places oreb “black” and hayit “screecher” but the Greek corax suggests “sate, glut, feed full, to tear, ravage, or pluck” showing its function as eating dead things, a flying garbage collector. I pity the prophet of God (the one translated to Heaven without seeing death) who was fed by these carrion collectors.[2] Now we are not to eat ravens[3], but they are clearly intelligently designed to eat our carcasses and other dead flesh.[4]

God feeds the ravens.[5] And knows when the hawk catches the sparrow. “Then the young lions roar for their prey, stalking the food provided by God.” Psalm 104:21.

How can these predators and carrion feeders be Wonders of Creation? Aren't they wonders of the Fall? Why are there so many intelligently designed fangs and stings and teeth and talons? Did they all suddenly evolve minutes
after Eve ate the forbidden fruit? There were ravens on Noah's ark, friendly ones that would do Noah's search and rescue operations for him, flying back and forth until the ground was dry enough for him to stay away after seven weeks of flying (enjoying, no doubt, a lot of flood-induced carrion).

**CREATED BEFORE THE FALL?**

If God did create ravens and owls and vultures and other intelligently designed predators on Day 5 of His Creation Week, does that not tell us something about death before the fall of man?

Ellen White once spoke on why God created pigs.

“As for pork, I never have anything to do with it because God tells me not to touch it, and He knows best. It is a scavenger. Its only use is to gather up filth. God does not want us to become scavengers to the scavengers.”[6]

If the pig’s “only use” is to gather up filth, to be a scavenger, and God created pigs on His sixth Creation Day before mankind’s fall, what was the pig doing before the fall?

If nothing died on earth before Adam’s sin, what were pigs for? If there was no Great Controversy going on between light and darkness, between Christ and Satan, between love and hate, between good and evil, during the creation, who created intelligently designed things to control overpopulation, to destroy vermin, to scavenge the carnage of battles creation Day after creation Day?

**CREATION AS CONTROVERSY**

As you know, if you have read my article in the print edition of the most recent edition of *Adventist Today,*[7] I believe that understanding the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan as preexisting the creation of earth, and continuing during each great Creation Day, then I can understand why God in mercy created garbage collectors like ravens and pigs. Why in love, to prevent Satan-inspired overpopulation of rodents and vermin, he would create Intelligently Designed owls as stealth bombers.

Why cougars and lions and tigers were needed to deal with the sick or wounded and prevent overpopulation by herbivores. And why nature was subjected to bondage to the fight going on in this universe between good and evil.

**THEATRE OF THE UNIVERSE**

When I was a teen, a series of programs and a book were published as “EARTH THEATRE OF THE UNIVERSE.” I think the idea was right on. That now on this earth other created intelligences can watch and see what Satan’s principles and what God’s principles look like when allowed freedom to work themselves out. Although at the time that book was published, I thought it started as Adam and Eve left the gates of Eden. But the evidence in the natural world suggests that this Great Controversy has been going on since Day One of God’s Creation Week. Darkness and Light have been on demonstration.

In that light I can accept that Intelligently Designed carnivores and scavengers such as lions and ravens were created by God to demonstrate the difference between life and death, between murder and love, between living by predation and living with cooperation, in this laboratory of Good and Evil called earth.

Satan was here on earth from Day One of Creation. I am sure he has been working things with his own super-intelligence to support his suggestion that by the genes acting selfishly, life will succeed. God has either set up the experiments to elegantly test that supposition, or permitted Satan some manipulative freedoms to make his points. I don’t see God creating viruses or plagues or cancers. They all clearly are satanic manipulations of bacteria and cells. But I can understand how God in mercy might create pigs to clean up the filth, ravens and jackals to remove the corpses, and owls to control plagues of rodent vermin. Scavengers and predators can be Intelligently Designed
creations made in wisdom and mercy and love for dealing with the results of a cosmic Great Controversy being played out on this earth. When Queen Esther went before her king, she didn’t ask him to stop the attacks on the Jews; she asked him for permission for the Jews to defend themselves. Likewise, when Satan launches an attack on God’s passive and plant-eating creatures, some of them may have to fight back with tooth and claw. The thorns are there to protect the rose. The dog must bite to protect his owner from the wolf.

NEW DAY DAWNING

God knows when the sparrows fall, but He does not yet stop it. He is waiting for something. Perhaps He is waiting for someone like you or your great-grandchildren? Perhaps there are principalities and powers we do not know who are yet to be won. Perhaps God is truly, as some of our theologians suggest, open about the future and working with us, until we decide enough is enough and agree to bring the battle to its end. He has granted us great freedom, and determining the end may be in our hands by His design.

Perhaps He waits for us to ordain women! I don’t know, and neither do you. But until then, in mercy, dead sparrows and doves and nuthatches disappear because of intelligently designed scavengers and predators, as they have on each Creation Day that started in darkness, but ended in light, and each earth day since then.

We have no reason to not keep expecting the dawning from our present age of darkness to the New Day when predators will be de-clawed and scavengers will be given better food to eat. If lions will thrive on straw, who knows if owls couldn’t learn to silently, slowly search for mushrooms or wild strawberries?

And if ravens flying to and fro looking for carcasses from Noah’s flood might not learn in a New Heaven and a New Earth that nuts, grapes, lychees, and rambutans taste better than eyeballs?

Footnotes:


[2] 1 Kings 17:4-6, Elijah.


- 6
Stopping By Martie’s Place

by Harry Banks, March 11, 2015: Each Saturday at about 11 o’clock, I arrive at the phone company and go down to the basement education center and open my Bible. The name of the group meeting there is In His Steps Community Fellowship. It’s been a long time since I’ve hung out with friends who just wanted to open the Word and take the two-edged sword out of its scabbard.

They play the Word in Quadraphonic sound: the words and language channel; the history, customs and context channel; the contemporary equivalency channel; and… and… Oofda… the personal honesty channel. Glib Sunday School or glib Sabbath School know-it-all answers are not allowed. Or if they show up, they are inspected for honest relevance to personal practice.

And so it was… This past week we stopped by Martie’s place. Luke 10:38-42. We thought it was sort of strange that in a time and place where women were generally considered property, a family with a man in the household would describe the house as “belonging to Martie.” Her name could mean “lady” or “mistress”… Hmmm… Wonder what that was all about…

Then there was the context… Did I mention that was one of the channels…? The story shows up just after… well, not just after but the stories leading up to this are… The Seventy out and about casting out demons, Returning in a glow of victory; Jesus doing a “Yes pump” (a contemporary motion of celebration when one extends an arm, makes a fist, and pulls the arm and fist rapidly toward the chest) “YES” – He saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven.

Which is followed by the law expert… who gets schooled on neighbor relations… Those people you can’t stand that are spiritually and morally superior in their actions. (If Jesus stopped by and told the story today with the main character being a transvestite… would we get the emotional stab…?) The guy wouldn’t even say the hero’s name, Samaritan. And Jesus ends with instructions to “DO.”

Hmmm, and oh, remember… the Samaritans had just shut Jesus and his disciples down, and they are in a “no travel” neighborhood. Still, He had “set his face toward Jerusalem” and was traveling from the northern Galilee area, and the shortest route was through Samaritan-held land.

So anyway… getting back to Martie’s place… it is just after showing up the law expert with the glib Sabbath School “I know the Torah” answer: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Luke 10:27, TNIV). In case you were wondering, the smart guy answer was based on Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

In the end, the smart guy gets told that flapping his lips isn’t good enough… He should “Go and DO Likewise”… Ouch!… bet that stung… (Hmmm… Not so sure current quick-quote-MacDraw-bench-warmers would take it any more kindly…(sorry – that sounded kinda harsh)). It’s interesting to me that we debate gender issues in ordination, and abortion… but skip domestic violence, with 40 some percent of the general population affected by domestic violence. (As an aside, I’ve had a pastor with domestic violence charges and no action from the conference.) Then there’s this devastating stuff of gossip… “I’ve heard of conference officials who say, ‘I know all about that person,’ when they have never taken time to talk personally with that person.” Has anybody heard of the works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit?? Just sayin…

Oh, yes… we were stopping by Martie’s after getting the runaround from the Samaritans and schooling Mr. Smart-Answer Quick-Draw with an example he would not even name… And… and… Martie, a woman in a male-dominated society who owns her own house. And she is doing what she does best. Making it all happen. She gets a little short… when she sees what looks like inefficiency. Chris said, “Martie, you’ve got your and-then’s
mixed up… Martie was “let’s get everything ready and-then take time to talk.” Her sister was taking time to talk “and then” take care of mundane things.

We got to talking about priorities… How we let the cares of this world…(yeah, somebody mentioned the parable of the sower)… the business of church… we let them crowd out our time for taking time. I got to thinking how easy it is to avoid opening the Word, and taking time to listen in prayer (some talking but more listening), and commit the day to guidance from above and beyond our finite hustle.

Kinda makes you wonder how Type-A people are to have a chance? On the other hand, I had someone who had just come back from specialized training in Spiritual Direction assert that 15 minutes a day was all one should spend. Otherwise there was too big a temptation to have an unhealthy disengagement with the reality we live in.

We also noticed that the next section was Jesus talking about prayer… Hmmmm Doing for our Neighbor, Listening and Praying all packages up next to each other in the three stories… Had never quite thought of it that way before.

And then our worship leader… went around the room and pinned down each person present and asked, “How are you going to apply this story to your life this week?” He even waited for an answer….

While I was writing this I got to thinking – if I don’t take time for the Spirit… How would I ever have the fruits of the Spirit? It would be kind of hard to have that kind of fruits when I don’t spend any time inviting the presence of the Spirit into my life. And no wonder those fruits seem to be so scarce at the spiritual marketplace.

My work day puts me in a classroom with 18- to 30-year-olds. The smart techy types. They don’t have much room in their world for quick-draw answers. Sometimes it makes me wonder if we are alienating the younger generation with our hustle of political and administrative housekeeping, and skipping the roots of spiritual vitality. I encourage what I call a “proper level of insubordination” in my classroom. That way I know what they are thinking. Guess what! They can spot when I am being phony really, really, really fast!!!

My young friend who recently started pastoring commented honestly how challenging it was to actually do the devotional time. There are so many good projects and things to do.

Questions we raised but left unanswered were… Should Mary have been hanging with the guys in the first place? In addition to not helping out? Maybe there were several things about this situation that were upsetting to her sister.

One of the challenges we talked about was how we come to a story like Mary and Martha…. (OK, so I called her Martie to try and get us to get the story out of the “quick-draw” I-know-this-story-I’m-not-really-listening-any-more realm.) Did you ever notice that we almost always start with Mary’s name first? It’s hardly ever Martha and Mary, even though Martha owned the place…. Hmmmm… odd…

Anyway, like I was saying… how do we come to this story?… with freshness and honesty?… Fred Craddock talks about “overhearing the gospel.” Hearing it so much we quit listening.

OK… So I actually got at least one day started right this week so far… I opened scripture, listened, asked for help to open up my life to guidance for the day, held up my friends who are in crisis or poor health in prayer.

The day was not without stress but it didn’t feel like I was going it alone. The conundrums of the day were met with a confidence of ultimate resolution, even though it was not clear how that resolution would come about or when it would be resolved.

OK, your turn… How will you apply the story? Come on, let’s get real here… No flip answer… Tell me about how you walk the walk… not about talking the talk…

Sorry if I’m skeptical… but I figure you’re going to get online. Find an irresistible flame war… and go for it… Do you really think about the fruits of the Spirit when you write your comments??? Really??? OK, so back to the question…
How are you actually going to let your Christ time affect your words and actions? Sorry to be so in your face…

Trick question… What would the Master have to say about what he sees on your screen…? Would he be saying to quit your busyness or that you’ve picked the better part? Just thought I’d ask…

But we’re not done yet… Our worship at the phone company ends with a benediction. So that’s how I’ll end this visit to In His Steps…

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer” (Psalm 19:14).
Psalm 107, Chanted

By Debbonaire Kovacs, March 11, 2015  For Lent, each devotion will consist of a chanted psalm. This week’s psalm actually goes well (accidentally?) with the visual arts that are up for this week.

Click on this link to hear the psalm.
Adventism and the Arts: Jim Averitt, Drummer for God

By Debbonnaire Kovacs, March 10, 2015  This is part of a series on Adventism and the Arts. If you know of an Adventist church, group, or individual who use(s) arts in worship or service to God, please email me at artseditor@atoday.org

When you first walk into the Lexington (Kentucky) Seventh-day Adventist church, nothing strikes you as being particularly out of the ordinary. It’s a nice sanctuary, seating several hundred, with angled pews and good decorating. Piano to the left, organ to the right, pulpit between, so far no surprises. Unless your eyes stray to the right of the organ, to the trio of timpani.

Depending on your expectations, background, and opinions, you may be glad, sorry, or indifferent to the idea of drums in church. It will be when you hear them, adding drama to a hymn, giving depth and richness to a choir anthem or organ piece, making Handel’s Messiah fly even higher than it already does—that’s when you’ll decide what you really think about them.

Jim Averitt, the drummer, says one woman came up to him one of the first times he played and said, “I was disapproving when I saw you roll those things in. I didn’t think they belonged in a church. But then…when you played them during the singing…I love them! Thank you!”

Averitt is an unassuming, friendly-looking man with gray hair, a warm smile, and a large cross on a chain around his neck. He looks as if he could be a pastor from another denomination. He’s not a pastor, but he is from another denomination.

He played timpani in the symphony and various concert bands throughout his school years, but says he didn’t play much during the early years of his working life. “But in about 1978 or so, a friend of mine was organist at the Methodist church. There were about 15-18 people in the choir. The organist wanted to do a fanfare, and he wanted a timpani roll,” Averitt says. They borrowed timpani from nearby Asbury University and Averitt played. The organist loved it, and so did the congregation, so they began to do it more often. Eventually, Averitt bought his own timpani and has now played for everything from congregational singing to special events for 35 years.

He goes over the music in advance, paying close attention to the melody and finding where it needs emphasis, and even more importantly, to the words. “For example, in ‘Crown Him with Many Crowns,’ a very dramatic piece which is enriched by drums, the third verse is about crowning Jesus ‘the Lord of peace.’ You don’t want any bang-up drums there.” Averitt writes in his parts, but he can improvise sometimes, too. “I think drums, to a large extent, are part of the spiritual experience for many, many peoples around the earth,” he says.

But how did he get into playing at Lexington SDA? It’s a long story, actually, one which will not be told here. Averitt and his wife, Sharon, used to attend a large church of a mainstream denomination which went through a dramatic and painful split, losing several hundred members to several other local churches. There were still 100-150 (of an original 7-800) attending, but they were not happy, says Averitt. He and his wife were among those. Some of them met at a restaurant after church to discuss where else they might meet.

Averitt remembers the defining moment for himself. The members had gone through channels, talked to the bishop, the conference, and the district supervisors, but nothing had healed the breach. One Sunday, while he was at his timpani on the platform, he says he “just gave up. I put my sticks down and left. I hadn’t done that before!

“I should have gone home, but my next conscious thought, I was at traffic light at Lane Allen Road. I don’t even know how I got there. I had this thought, ‘Hey, the Seventh-day Adventists meet here; I think I’ll go see if anyone’s
A couple were there, and Averitt talked to them. They arranged for him to meet then-pastor John Bradshaw, and Averitt told him the story. They explained that they weren’t just a disgruntled group; the president and some faculty from Asbury Seminary were in the group and they were serious about worshiping God in a healthier environment. Could they meet at the Adventist church?

Bradshaw allowed them to meet there one Sunday, then took it to the board and they worked out a lease arrangement. For six years, the Faith Fellowship, as the multi-denominational group named themselves, have been meeting at the Adventist church on Sundays. They have grown, and also increased in denominations represented, including Methodists, Baptists, Disciples of Christ, Quakers, Presbyterians, Catholics, and more.

For many Adventist churches, this is still not that unusual; many buildings house groups who worship on both days of the weekend. But the story takes another interesting turn.

Averitt says, “So I seemed to be the point man in connection with organizing this Faith Fellowship. But I was led there by God. He led me there and led John Bradshaw to consent to help us. I started right from the beginning attending the Adventist church, too, and I fell in love with the people! I disagree with some of the church teachings, but I go to both as much as possible."

His spiritual life, Averitt says, began early. His father was a Methodist pastor and “I was always in church and Sunday School. I was raised in Bible and Bible ways, although I didn’t always translate it into my home life. I was raised understanding grace; that’s the biggest blessing. So there’s no lightning strike conversion; mine was a gradual conversion over my whole life.” He was baptized as a baby, but after attending the Adventist church, there came a time when he decided he wanted to be baptized as his own choice. So present pastor, Pavel Goia, baptized him as part of an Adventist service. “Now,” says Averitt, “I’m an Adventist member and a Faith Fellowship member, and I worship at both.”

When he was young, Averitt says, if people asked about his religious beliefs, he said he was a Methodist. For the last 30-40 years, he just says, “Christian.”

And this is where he joins issue with the Adventist church.

“In my association with Seventh-day Adventist folks, it made me think more about what it is I really believe. What I list as my faith is Christian. Well, what does it mean to be Christian? It made me study a lot, and it disturbs me to some extent, what I learned that the church teaches that I disagree with. I’m nuts about the people; they’re great friends of mine! But at same time, when you read scripture, it was the people who thought their ‘denominational’ teachings were more important than scripture that crucified Jesus. So I am concerned and do a lot of praying about any of the churches who do not give high priority to the gospels. I think the gospels teach us that it’s not important to follow the customs, or Ten Commandments, or to believe in evolution or not. God created and is still creating, and I don’t think I’m in a position to say, ‘Listen, God, this is what I think.’ Rituals, keeping the whole law, that doesn’t count. What counts is if you follow Christ’s commandments. Feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned, take care of widows and the needy. That’s Christianity.”

And so he drums. And he smiles. And he prays for us. Keep praying, brother! We need them. And you can never have too many prayers.
Broken and Beautiful

Photos and reflection by Debbonnaire Kovacs, March 11, 2015  This cup was once my father's shaving mug. Then it was my (and later my siblings') first baby cereal bowl. My mother passed it on to me and it became my children's first baby cereal bowl. Next year it will go to my son and daughter-in-law for their first child, who will be born this October.

You'll notice it's got some mended breaks. Nearly everything we hand down through our generations contains brokenness as well as beauty, so we mend the brokenness as well as we can, and try to focus on the beauty.

I recently learned about the Japanese art of *Kintsugi*. In an ancient tradition (look it up—it's amazing!) the Japanese choose to make the mended breaks the focus of the piece by gilding them with gold, silver, or platinum. In their view, the mended pottery is even more valuable than it was before it was broken. My heart literally speeded up. I knew this could be intensely valuable to me. Where could I get gold—in an instant, I remembered that my late husband, among all he left me, left gold paint—he always was gifted in helping me see beauty where I thought it didn't exist.

Carefully, I gilded all the cracks. (I didn’t do the inside of the cup, since I’m not certain the paint is non-toxic for baby food!) Here is a new symbol of learning that God does not look on me with love in spite of my broken places. Neither does God love me because of my broken places. God loves me. All of me. Period. And the fact that I’ve let God shine through the cracks makes me more valuable, not less.

I encourage you to gild some broken places, prayerfully, this Lenten season.
Concerts for Peace—for our readers in the NYC area

Pposted by Debbonnaire Kovacs, March 11, 2015
We are excited to announce the continuation of our new REACH-NYC “Concerts for Peace” Season 2015. With guest musicians from the Greenwich Village community, Seattle, Washington, The University of Arkansas, and the Atar Trio direct from Jerusalem, Israel, it is going to be an outstanding month of exciting music and outstanding performances.

“Concerts for Peace is a ministry where we are providing, not only great music for the community to enjoy, but also with Benefit Concerts that help support local community groups in the New York City area, that are doing a great work in supporting New York City’s neediest individuals and their children.

It is pure joy, that members of many community groups as well as a variety of faith traditions are attending these dynamic concerts. If you are a member of any faith based tradition, church or synagogue, please invite your friends and tell your respective congregations about these concerts.

You are invited to join us and bring your friends and get the word out inviting others to attend the outstanding series of concerts starting this Saturday, March 14, 2015 at 5:00 pm, with the 27 member Walla Walla Academy String Orchestra. Continuing the series on Monday evening, March 23, 2015 at 7:30 pm, with the 75 powerful voices of the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff Vesper Choir, that will bring a sensational experience to your soul.

On Thursday evening, March 26, 2015 at 7:30 pm, The Atar Trio will also be performing in New York City in the 1881 Landmark Sanctuary of Historic Manhattan Seventh-day Adventist Church as part of their 2015 U.S. Concert tour. This outstanding and gifted trio of musicians comes to us all the way from Jerusalem, Israel and you will not want to miss their incredible performance.

Below (Please scroll down) you will find complete information on each concert, and it is my hope that you will make every effort to join us at one of these opportunities to enjoy fine music while helping reach and support New York City non-profits in their work for those underserved in New York City.

May God continue to bless you with peace.

Best regards – Tony Romeo, Executive Pastor / REACH-NYC

P.S.: Please help our ministry grow with a fully tax deductible donation to support us in the work we are doing here in New York City. You can mail your tax deductible contribution, making out your check to “REACH-NYC” and posting it to: REACH-NYC, P.O. Box 651, North Salem, NY 10560. You can also make a safe donation by clicking on the “MAKE A DONATION” button below. A Great Big “Thank You” to all our supporters around the world who helped us this past year. REACH-NYC is recognized by the IRS as
a 501(c)(3) corporation. You will receive a personal thank you and receipt for your records for any contributions you wish to make.

Join us for a Spirit filled morning of great music and the sharing of the Word. We gather for worship on Saturday morning’s at 11:30 a.m. in the 1881 landmark sanctuary of Historic Manhattan Seventh-day Adventist Church, 232 West 11th Street, NYC. Located just 1.5 blocks West of Seventh Ave. South and one and a half blocks East of West 4th Street, in the beautiful West Village.

PARKING: If you are traveling by car and cannot find a parking space on the street, we recommend a discount indoor parking garage located on West 12th Street. Travel down Seventh Ave. South and on the corner of West 12th Street, make a left turn. The indoor parking garage is located immediately on your left. The discounted parking fee is good on Saturday’s from when you arrive until 7 PM.
Concerts for Peace-for our readers in the NYC area - Adventist Today


CONCERTS FOR PEACE

SATURDAY MARCH 14, 2015 - 5:00 PM
THE WALLA WALLA ACADEMY STRING ORCHESTRA

IN THE 1881 LANDMARK SANCTUARY OF
HISTORIC MANHATTAN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
232 WEST 11 STREET, NYC

CONCERTS ARE FREE WITH ALL DONATIONS GOING TOWARDS LOCAL COMMUNITY PROJECTS IN NYC
IN SUPPORT OF NON PROFIT GROUPS HELPING PEOPLE IN NEED.
A REACH-NYC SPONSORED EVENT
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CONCERTS FOR PEACE

MONDAY MARCH 23, 2015 - 7:30 PM
THE 75 VOICES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT PINE BLUFF VESPER CHOIR.

IN THE 1881 LANDMARK SANCTUARY OF HISTORIC MANHATTAN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
232 WEST 11 STREET, NYC

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Concerts F20015R PEACE

THURSDAY MARCH 26, 2015 - 7:30 PM
THE ATAR TRIO DIRECT FROM JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

Ofer Shelley-Piano . Tanya Beltser-Violin . Adiel Shmit-Cello

Performing The Music of
Three Transcriptions from “Porgy & Bess” by Gershwin . Heifetz
and View from Mt. Nebo composed by Judith Shatin

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IN THE 1881 LANDMARK SANCTUARY OF
HISTORIC MANHATTAN SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
232 WEST 11 STREET, NYC

1.5 Blocks West of 7th Ave. South and 1 Block East of West 4th St. Reception with the musicians.

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