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Adventist Denomination to Restudy Principles of Bible Interpretation

From ANN, July 15, 2015: Top denominational leaders have agreed to work with the Biblical Research Institute (BRI) on a study that is intended to inform the Adventist denomination about the principles of Bible interpretation. The announcement came in response to a question asked by a delegate to the recent General Conference (GC) in San Antonio, Texas.

Pastor Myron Iseminger, GC undersecretary, made the announcement on Friday, July 10, the last day of business meetings at the GC Session. He also stated that the BRI “is already studying the issue and has plans to publish their findings” in an updated edition of a book on the subject. It has published at least two books on the topic, including Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach, edited by Dr. George W. Reid, who was BRI director at the time, and Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers, edited by Dr. Gerhard Pfandl, a current staff scholar.

Both sides in the discussion on women’s ordination had claimed that the Bible supported their position, and the majority of the denomination’s Bible scholars have stated that there is no decisive Bible teaching on the subject. On July 9, a delegate urged the denomination’s leaders to restudy its hermeneutics in light of the divisive vote on women’s ordination on July 8 so as to avoid similar conflicts of opinion regarding some verses from the Bible in the future. The delegates then voted to make the request official.

Hermeneutics, or the study of the principles and methods of Bible interpretation, strives to provide an underlying framework that may be applied across any and every analysis of particular verses of Scriptures. Even though Adventist scholars have often weighed in on the topic in the past, the delegate who raised the issue thought that a renewed stance was needed after the women’s ordination vote.

It is unclear what practical effects the study might have on future decisions or how it may relate to Ellen G. White statements that even though “the great truths of the Word of God are so clearly stated that none need make a mistake in understanding them” (Manuscript Releases, Volume 15, page 150), “we cannot … take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same shade of light” (Ibid. page 149).

A source has pointed out to Adventist Today that in the preface to the 1911 edition of The Great Controversy, White describes an approach to interpreting the Bible that is contrary to the fundamentalist position taken by many of the Adventists who opposed the ordination of women pastors. White was one of the cofounders of the Adventist movement who was credentialed as an ordained minister most of her life.
Unpublished White Materials Released on the Web

By AT News Team, July 21, 2015: Last Thursday (July 16), the centennial of the death of Ellen G. White, the most prominent cofounder of the Adventist movement who held credentials as an ordained minister for most of her life, about 50,000 pages of her unpublished letters, diaries and manuscripts were released on a web site operated by the White Estate. This is the same collection that has for a number of years been available to researchers and students at several White Research Centers located at Adventist universities around the world.

The materials date from 1845 to early 1915. They are typed transcripts of her handwritten originals prepared by typists under her supervision or White Estate staff. Some of the handwritten originals no longer exist.

The first release of White’s materials that were not published during her lifetime was the book Medical Ministry published in 1932. In that same decade researchers began to be permitted to study unpublished and original materials at the White Estate office with the provision that nothing could be published without permission from the estate trustees.

White’s will named five trustees who inherited her literary materials and copyrights, explained Andrew McChesney, news editor of the Adventist Review, in an article last week. She “had written especially strong counsel to some of them,” Dr. James Nix, director of the estate, is quoted by McChesney. “So they were not excited about the materials being released. If you were president of the General Conference, why would you want some pastor in the middle of the United States reading about you from the pulpit?”

In the 1980s the research centers began to be set up with copies of the files of unpublished materials, and the rules for researchers were softened. Today all of the individuals named in the materials and their close relatives are dead, so there is really no problem with the materials being made public.

Over the years since that time a number of books have been published that are “compilations” of both unpublished and published materials on specific topics. The original versions of all her periodical articles, pamphlets and books are also currently published.

Nix does not “expect any surprises to emerge from these documents,” McChesney wrote. “The materials have been gone over by researchers for years,” he quoted Nix.

Last year the first volume of an annotated version of this collection was published. It is planned to eventually publish the entire collection in a scholarly set of reference books with background notes on all of the names mentioned, discussions of the issues covered in the materials, etc. The first volume includes both a transcription and photographs of the handwritten original of the oldest White document, a letter from 1847.

“This is a watershed moment in Ellen White studies,” wrote Adventist historian Dr. Michael Campbell in a review of the volume in the most recent issue of Andrews University Seminary Studies (Spring 2015, pages 228-233). He referenced two other significant books on the same topic that have come out in the last two years. (See list below.) But, Campbell cautioned, “Since the first volume took well over a decade to produce, and only covers a small fraction of [the 8,000-plus documents], unless the level of production increases, at the current pace the project will take over two centuries to finish.”

Campbell urged the White Estate to involve a network of Adventist historians to help with the process. He also suggested that future volumes need to include information on the cultural context of the materials. For example, “the notion of the ‘cult of domesticity,’ which defined the roles of men and women during antebellum America” is ignored in the volume.
A link to the newly-released collection appears at the top of the White Estate’s Web site: www.ellenwhite.org

The three new books on White and her literary production:


Adventist Launches Radio Station Focused on Health

July 23, 2015: A new radio station has been launched by an Adventist entrepreneur which may be the first with programming focused almost entirely on health promotion. Glen Striemer, an Adventist who owns three successful Internet radio stations, decided to turn his sights toward the natural healing industry, a huge and growing market today.

Striemer found “no shortage of Eastern Religion, psychic radio networks and charlatans seeking a buck.” But he didn’t find even one Christian radio station that concentrated on health. “When we saw this landscape,” he told Adventist Today, “we thought, what a place to go in with our health message!”

The result was Natural Way Radio, launched at the beginning of the month. “We believe [it] is the first 24/7 global Christian Natural Healing station,” said Striemer. He used the NEW START concept (Nutrition, Exercise, Water, Sunshine, Temperance, Air, Rest, Trust in God) for program development. Listeners will find a mix of peaceful music interspersed with short segments on a variety of health topics, such as vegan cooking, stop smoking seminars and moments with counselors who answer questions listeners send in.

The station also provides three-minute messages designed for people interested in alternative spirituality, such as heaven and angels, as well as social justice issues. The goal is to mingle the gospel with the practical, and to reach more listeners with health information.

Striemer’s other three stations each target a different segment of the population. Loud Cry Radio targets conservative Christians (not necessarily Adventist), Native Christian Radio reaches out to the three million Native Americans living in North America, and SDA Radio caters to those Adventists who may not be comfortable with everything on Loud Cry Radio. These stations are commercial radio and depend on advertising.

Much more information is included in a story in the Feature section of Adventist Today. Read the whole story here.
New Association Formed for Adventists Who Hold Public Office

From ANN, July 23, 2015: There are a growing number of Adventists in many nations who are elected officials or appointed to significant government positions. Perhaps the leading example may be in Jamaica where the Governor General is an Adventist minister, Sir Patrick Allen. He resigned as present of the denomination in that country in order to accept the appointment by Queen Elizabeth II. In a country where about one in ten citizens are Adventists, the presiding officer of the upper house in parliament is also an Adventist; Senator Floyd Morris, who was a delegate to the General Conference (GC) Session in San Antonio earlier this month.

Now, the World Adventist Public Officials Association (WAPOA) has been organized to connect Adventists around the world who serve their nation as elected or appointed officials. A group of 21 leaders from ten countries—ambassadors, ministers of state, members of parliament, a deputy chief justice and high-level officials of international organizations—had lunch together on July 8 during the GC Session. It can be an isolating experience for an Adventist to hold a political office, the group concluded.

Those seated around the table spoke frankly about the need for better networking between Adventists who serve their governments, and about the loneliness that often comes with serving in a civic role. Some expressed their disappointment that holding elected office is sometimes seen as “off limits” for faithful church members—a sign that someone has compromised their integrity. All spoke about their desire to carry their spiritual values into the public realm and to reflect Christ’s character in their service to their country.

Morris was voted the first president of WAPOA. Philippine Ambassador to Papua New Guinea, Bienvenido V. Tejano, was chosen to serve as the association’s secretary, and Damaris Moura Kuo, president of the Religious Liberty Commission of the Brazilian Bar Association’s São Paulo Division, was selected as its public relations officer.

According to Morris, the first order of business will be to identify more Adventist public officials—whether they serve their national government or their local city council—and invite them to join the association. The group plans to communicate regularly and to organize a meeting of the association in 2017.

The gathering was hosted by the GC Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) Department. Dr. Ganoune Diop, the newly elected department director, says he hopes the association will promote a vigorous dialogue between Adventists who hold prominent and often-influential positions. “These men and women need our support and our prayers,” he says. “They are first and foremost our brothers and our sisters, but they are also called to represent Christ’s kingdom and His values within often-difficult and sensitive circumstances.”

Adventists who work in government and civic organizations are encouraged to contact the new organization through the PARL department Web site.

The Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.
Weekend Event Marks Centenary of Death of Adventist Founder Ellen White

From News Release, July 17, 2015: Top leaders of the Adventist faith are on the campus of Pacific Union College in northern California this weekend to honor the memory of Ellen G. White, a founder of the denomination who died 100 years ago this Sabbath (July 18) at her home in Elmshaven near the college.

White was believed by her fellow believers to exercise the spiritual gift of prophet as described in the New Testament (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4). Together with her husband, Pastor James White, who served as the primary organizer of the denomination, the couple in their late teens and early 20s pulled together a handful of mostly other young adults during the 1850s to re-start the Adventist movement after the disaster that ended the movement in 1844 when Baptist evangelist William Miller predicted that Christ would return on October 22.

The White Centennial Legacy Conference began yesterday (July 16) and includes a number of speakers. Dr. David Trim is was a history professor at PUC when he was appointed archivist of the denomination; James R. Nix is director of the White Estate. Dr. Ted Wilson is president of the denomination and he will preach during the Sabbath services at the college church on the topic “The Importance of the Gift of Prophecy in the Adventist Church.” Other speakers will include Dr. George Knight, a retired professor of church history at Andrews University near South Bend, Indiana; and Elissa Kido, director of the Center for K-12 Adventist Education at La Sierra University in southern California.

The keynote event yesterday was a lecture titled “Ellen White, Elmshaven and the Napa Valley” following by Dr. Eric Anderson, director of the Walter C. Utt Center for Adventist History at the college, followed by a kick-off luncheon at the Elmshaven home of White. At 3:40 p.m. Thursday afternoon, attendees had a moment of silence followed by a commemorative prayer at the exact time 100 years ago that White died.

White’s significance is not limited to the Adventist denomination. In November 2014, Smithsonian Magazine chose White as one of the 100 most significant Americans of all time. According to the Adventist Encyclopedia, “Ellen G. White was a woman of remarkable spiritual gifts who lived most of her life during the nineteenth century (1827-1915), yet through her writings she is still making a revolutionary impact on millions of people around the world.”

During her lifetime Mrs. White wrote more than 5,000 periodical articles and 40 books; but today, including compilations of her 50,000 pages of manuscript, more than 100 titles are available in English. She is the most translated woman writer in the entire history of literature, and the most translated American author of either gender. One of her books, Steps to Christ, has been published in more than 140 languages.

She is seen by most Adventists as an inspired writer, although she insisted that such a belief not be a requirement for membership in the denomination. The official position of the Adventist denomination is that “the writings of Ellen White are not a substitute for Scripture. They cannot be placed on the same level. The Holy Scriptures stand alone, the unique standard by which her and all other writings must be judged and to which they must be subject.”

After serving as a missionary in Australia from 1891 to 1900, White moved to Elmshaven where she spent the last 15 years of her life writing many of the books that form an important part of her spiritual legacy. Elmshaven is located near the small town of Saint Helena in the Napa Valley of northern California.
Six Reasons Why I No Longer Trust the General Conference

by Harald Giesebrecht, July 10, 2015: Over the last five years I have observed and been part of the process leading up to this summer’s vote on women’s ordination. This process has unfortunately undermined some of my trust in the General Conference. Here is why.

1. **Our General Conference leadership is guilty of acting divisively.**

The question of women’s ordination is in and by itself not a divisive issue for our world church. I don’t spend much energy worrying about who does what in Argentina. And my guess is that they don’t lose any sleep over who does what in Norway. And we all celebrate who does what in China. Different views on ordination of female elders and the commissioning of female pastors has not divided us. Neither will women’s ordination. Practical solutions and acceptable adaptations to working policy will be found. But some of our General Conference leaders have instead made it their mission to make this a potentially church-splitting issue by acting very much as if it is. This has not only cost millions of dollars and caused great harm to parts of our church-family. It has also seriously undermined the influence of the General Conference in parts of the world. What reasons can possibly justify such a great cost to our system of governance?

2. **Our General Conference leadership has refused to lead the church to a solution to the problem they have created.**

The Annual Council was pressured by General Conference executives to submit the motion to the delegates with no recommendation, even though the same GC executives knew perfectly well that a yes vote would solve the problem, whereas a no-vote would solve nothing at all. One can only speculate about what ideological considerations can cause our world leaders to think it is worth it to cause so much damage. Two sentences from Ted Wilson could have changed the vote in favor of a livable solution. Instead the ironic cost of using “democracy” to coerce the West is a loss of influence over the unions in Europe and North-America.

3. **Our theologians have not been allowed to provide theological leadership in this process.**

The TOSC was not composed to reflect what our theologians actually think or teach. Instead it was deliberately put together with 50% for and against women’s ordination, with many participants having minimal relevant theological training. The deceptive impression was given that our theologians are split right down the middle, and that Headship Theology is a viable option along with the other positions. Had instead every Adventist university sent their top New Testament scholars to TOSC, the outcome would have been very different. What is the point of having theologians if they are not allowed to provide theological leadership? Why all this theological training when the views of the untrained are made to count just as much?

4. **The General Conference is showing signs of becoming a threat to our Adventist heritage.**

This may sound a bit far out at first, but hear me out. If our theologians are not allowed to provide theological leadership and our General Conference leaders are allowed to put whatever they want to a vote by the delegates, the prospects are frightening indeed.

Did the arguments actually made against women’s ordination in this process demonstrate an awareness of our Adventist theological heritage beyond finding suitable Ellen White quotes? Did, for example, the proponents of Headship Theology show any awareness that their theology presupposes a Calvinistic view of God that is totally alien to the very core of Adventist theology? To be able to tout Calvinistic headship theology and Roman Catholic views of ordination as “true Adventism” one must either be ignorant or dishonest. With an ever increasing
percentage of our global membership being first-generation Adventists, we should however not be surprised if future decisions are not rooted in “the way God has led us in the past.” One can only speculate what would have happened if delegates in San Antonio had been asked whether the church should adopt headship theology: Yes or No?

Adventism was from its outset immersed in what George Knight calls “the spirit of Anabaptism.” There were other strands that influenced us deeply, but Anabaptism and Restorationism freed us to develop a theology apart from mainline Protestant and Catholic tradition. This has, for example, launched us into the project of creating a Christian theology free from a Platonist (dualist) worldview. And it has decidedly freed us from the tyranny of Calvin’s God. Instead our cosmic conflict perspective emphasizes the love of the Creator and the goodness, freedom and responsibility of creation. When I see all this threatened by a haphazard influx of foreign and incompatible strands of theology that our theologians are not even allowed to correct, I am frightened indeed. As a fourth-generation Adventist, I had never dreamt that I should ever perceive the General Conference as a possible threat to the core of Adventism. But the process on women’s ordination has left me worried.

5. **Our General Conference leadership is asking us to yield our conscience to ecclesiastical authority.**

I grew up with the Great Controversy (my mother would read it to me), and it has in many ways shaped my conception of what Adventism is all about. One of my favorite parts was the story of Luther, standing up for the Bible against an overwhelming opposition. In this he was a hero, along with a host of others who had been faithful to their calling and their conscience and refused to bow to ecclesiastical authority. They taught us how we should act should we face similar pressure. But the message from San Antonio is that I should do the opposite. I should yield my convictions and my conscience.

When I speculate on why Ted Wilson refused to recommend the yes-vote, I can think of no other acceptable reason than strongly held biblical convictions. He has been willing to pay a high price for his convictions. With regard to Europe and North America, he has gambled with the influence of the General Conference. He is, in a way, acting like a true Adventist who will “stand for truth though the heavens fall.” And yet he is asking Adventists all over Europe and North America to give up their convictions and act against their conscience. He is asking us to continue to denigrate women in the name of Jesus, even if we believe Jesus calls us to actively reverse this curse. Had he wanted to, he could have created space for all of us to follow our conscience. Women’s ordination is, after all, not a fundamental belief. Instead, he is asking us to yield to him?

I am sorry. I have to choose my conscience. I am a good Adventist too. But growing up, I never imagined I would hear the General Conference president ask me to betray such a sacred Adventist virtue for the sake of uniformity.

6. **Our structures give far too much power to one man.**

Over the last five years I have watched my church become more sectarian, more totalitarian, more polarized and more divided… This has happened in spite of many of the vice presidents whom we know as people who would mourn this development. Our president’s polarizing language has translated into polarizing actions and divisive votes. For some reason there seems to be nothing and no one in our system of governance that is able to balance his zeal. His personal opinions now dominate everything that proceeds from the GC. How can they ask us to believe that the General Conference is the steward of divine authority, when its decisions so clearly are seen to be the extension of one man’s personality? Didn’t Ellen White worry about a similar scenario a little over a century ago?

But of course … she was never ordained.

*Pastor Harald Giesebrecht is a father, church-planter, writer and Adventist minister currently serving as a pastor in Oslo, Norway. He is also the academic dean for the Norwegian Bible Correspondence School. He was part of the Trans-European Division Biblical Research Committee set up to study Women’s Ordination.*
2015 San Antonio Adventist General Conference Session: Observations and Reflections

by Ervin Taylor, July 19, 2015: Below is a collection of observations and reflections overheard and observed based on actions taken at and statements made by Adventist denominational leaders and others during the 2015 San Antonio General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

1. “An Adventist General Conference session combines aspects of an ecclesiastical council, three-ring circus, revival meeting, political convention, sales pep rally, bazaar, family reunion, and reaffirmation rituals carried out in colorful costumes.”

2. “The voting carried out at these sessions represents the working out of a reaction from former Adventist missionary lands in the global South paying back the homelands of the Adventist global North for 150 years of evangelistic, medical, and educational efforts.”

3. “Despite the many negatives that surface at the GC session, the reports of work of ADRA in many parts of the world and the integrity of the reporting of the research at the Adventist Health Study provide evidence that many positives and much good can, under some conditions, be carried out by some working within the Adventist denominational structure.”

4. “Some Adventist clergy seem to fear a secret ballot as much as other Adventists fear the secret rapture.”

5. “The revised Adventist denominational statement concerning the nature of Creation means that, for the sake of consistency, corporate Adventism may, in the future, declare that the ancient Hebrew understanding that the earth is flat may well become Adventist Church doctrine.”

6. “When you attend an Adventist General Conference session, you are presented with evidence that, in some contemporary denominations, the spirit of the Middle Ages can be maintained and the Enlightenment can be prevented from intruding.”

7. “Institutional Adventism has created a special Adventist version of Protestant Christian Fundamentalism which denies that Adventism is Fundamentalist while embracing all of the elements of historic Fundamentalism.”

8. “Those opposing the ordination of women to the Adventist ministry need to figure a way to say with a straight face that the female Adventist prophetess was not a human woman but a special creature endowed with superhuman qualities that transcend gender.”

9. “By the actions voted at the General Conference session, the Adventist World Church has demonstrated that it is itself irrelevant not only in the modern world but also in contemporary First World Adventism in the same way that a company that manufactures buggy whips would be considered irrelevant in a modern economy.”

10. “The statements of the current General Conference president reaffirm the accuracy of a dictum of a World War II German political figure to the effect that if you say things that may not be true a sufficient number of times, those things become true to your hearers.”
My Take: A Global Family Needs a Global Mind

by Raj Attiken, July 22, 2015: Management consultant Peter Drucker famously said that culture eats strategy for breakfast. He was, of course, talking about organizational dynamics. Culture ate theology, policy, and procedure in the Seventh-day Adventist Church for breakfast and lunch at the church’s 60th General Conference Session in San Antonio. Which leads us to ask: Given the global nature of the church, are we destined to live with the reality that our policies and ecclesiastical practices will be held hostage by the cultures that have dominant representation in our decision-making assemblies?

It was evident during the business session discussions that our “global family” thinks and acts provincially. This provinciality was not confined to nations and geographical regions. It was evidenced also in organizations within the church that are enclaves of insularity, and whose “culture” promotes a certain sequestration. In the decision-making process, it is understandable why individuals would insist on putting an imprint only on outcomes that align most closely with the indigenous culture of their place or organization. Hence, regional and sectarian identities asserted themselves on several agenda items in San Antonio. We functioned often as self-enclosed cultural entities that are mutually external to each other.

The identity of individuals, and groups of individuals, is inescapably marked by the particularities of the social and cultural setting in which they grow and develop. Their identity is linked to parental figures, peer groups, teachers, religious authorities and community leaders, and to particular languages, religions, customs, and the construction of gender and racial differences within their communities. As the church has taken root in diverse cultures it has also been profoundly shaped by the particularities of these different cultures.

Being a “global family” requires that we cultivate a “global mind” and know something about the reality in which our brothers and sisters live. To speak of global Adventism – Adventism extended in space and time – means simply that Adventism cannot be understood exclusively from one cultural perspective. The church must take seriously differences in cultures, ethnicity, gender roles, and social location, and equip its members to understand these differences, if it is going to be an authentic representative of the kingdom of God on earth. At a minimum, we must ensure that those who are selected to serve on decision-making assemblies of the church understand the cultural nuances that animate the life of the global Adventist family. In a global decision-making body such as a General Conference session, we are called to do not just what fits our culture to the exclusion of others, but what allows the church in all cultures to flourish.

I am not making a case here for a Western or American narrative to be accepted by all. No language or culture has a monopoly on God, the gospel, or theology. I am asserting here that all parts of the global Adventist community have narratives that those in other parts must seek to understand and respect. They also have contributions to make to the rest of the Body of Christ. No church in any culture may consider itself sufficient to itself and to its own culture.

Christianity has seen those eras when the Church saw little need to take other cultures seriously or to understand them on their own terms. Theology was viewed as a systematic set of universal truths that applied to all cultures and thus simply needed to be translated into local languages. Just as truth is universal, so too was there one theology for everyone in all cultures. The new era that the world has entered into, with its changing demographics of Christianity, has nudged us to recognize that Biblical interpretation involves text and contexts. Contexts, with their particularities of time, place, culture, and social location, give theologies their specific texture.

While we celebrate the wonderful diversity that characterizes who we are as a church, we must also be keenly aware of the tensions that exist when divergent cultures come together to address common interests and concerns.
These cultural tensions will not simply go away, nor can they be fixed by merely voting policies or mandating practices. A system of decision-making about what is right or wrong, good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate that is weighted towards cultures that have the largest number of votes is a deeply flawed system.

Since Seventh-day Adventism relishes its identity as a fast-growing worldwide church and global “family,” we must nurture greater understanding of, and appreciation for, those who make up this family and how they influence and shape our identity. Yale theologian Miroslav Volf proposes that each church in any given culture must say, “I am not only I; all other churches, rooted in diverse cultures, belong to me too.” Each needs all to be properly itself.

We must also design systems of decision-making that recognize and respect the distinctives and nuances in belief and practice of the church in the many cultures that make up global Adventism. In order to achieve this we must find ways to enhance the cultural competency of our leaders and members alike. That’s what it will take for us to truly be a robust, functional global community. That’s my take!

*(I invite you to post your ideas on how cultural competency can be cultivated within the SDA community.)*

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Bread

By Debbonnaire Kovacs, posted July 22, 2015

A round-up of “what-if?” snippets inspired by John 6:1-21

**Philip:** You’re asking *me*?! How should I know where we can get bread for this mob? Six months’ wages wouldn’t be enough, and I doubt we have that much amongst the bunch of us! … Well…okay, sure…I can help get them all to sit down…I guess. That will take a while, I must say. Okay, folks, listen up! We’re all going to sit down. Sit down, come on, hey, you kids—sit down! Quiet! Why? I don’t know, because Jesus said so. Sir, can you get your family to sit together right over here between these rocks and those trees? If you women could just keep the kids under control…

**Boy:** Here, sir. I brought my lunch. Yeah, I know, it’s not much, but there’s some fish in there, and bread. Mom made it fresh this morning. She’d like me to share.

**Andrew:** Um, Jesus? Here’s a boy who wants to share his lunch. It’s just two fish and five pitas. I don’t know how much use it’s going to be. *(Silently, to himself: *It’s amazing the way he always is with kids! You’d think this boy just brought him King Herod’s entire winter food supply!)*

**A Pharisee:** Hmph! Here we go again, I suppose this charlatan thinks he’s going to fool me! Maybe this rabble can be hypnotized into forgetting they’re hungry, but I’m wise to him! I’m going to keep my eyes glued to him to see what he’s trying to pull. Hey! Let go of me, you son of a Samaritan! No, I’m not going to sit down! How dare you speak to me like that?

**A mother:** Hush, now, I know you’re hungry. We’ll go home soon. I still have a little of the lentils from yesterday…shhh…Let’s sit down. Jesus wants us to, and I don’t want to miss a word he says. Yes, sir, we’ll be fine right here. Thank you. I’m sorry the baby is fussy. I’ll try to keep her quiet.

**A beggar:** Oh, don’t worry about me. I’m used to being hungry. Really. I hardly notice any more. Sure, I’ll sit. Something about that guy—I just like to be near him…

**Jesus:**

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam,*

*Hamonzi lechem min ha’aretz.*

*(Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Ruler of the Universe,*

*Who has brought forth bread from the earth.)*

Bread! Passing, breaking, sharing, here, have some fish, yes, there’s more, don’t worry. Make sure that man over there gets some, here, honey, shhh, you can have all you need…Sir? Here you go. Take this basket. Oh, no, we have plenty, pass it on…

**Philip:** You’d think I’d learn!
Boy: Wait till I tell my mom!!

Andrew: I knew he could do something, but I never thought—oh, my!…

Pharisee: I’m not touching it! It’s probably filthy with magic spells or something, or would turn to dust in my hands! I’m going to report this!

Mother: I wonder if I should save some of this? Maybe I can hide some in my cloak. Is anybody looking? We might not get more any time soon…

Beggar: (laughing joyously) Plenty! Plenty! Look at this, can you believe it? Here you go, have more. Hey, over there—did you get enough? Here you go, here’s another basket. Sonny, you can have mine—there’s more where this came from. Praise the Most High God!

Jesus: It is I, do not be afraid.
The debate on women’s ordination at the General Conference Session was never intended to address the question of whether it is theologically appropriate or not to ordain women to the gospel ministry. That was done in the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC). Dr. Artur Stele, a GC vice president, shared a number of helpful insights in a press conference after the historic vote (you can watch the press conference here: https://vimeo.com/133036522). He reminded everyone that church members have strongly held convictions on both sides of the issue and that we cannot change the convictions of others. He said that the delegates were only voting on a possible solution to the women’s ordination debate by giving the Executive Committees of the 13 Divisions of the World Church the latitude to make decisions on women’s ordination based on what they deem appropriate for mission in their regions.

During the debate on the floor, re-elected General Conference President Ted Wilson urged the world church to remain united. His comments were interpreted by many as an appeal for uniform practice in every area of the world church. Around 60% of the delegates at the General Conference Session voted against variance in policy between Divisions as a possible solution to the women’s ordination debate. Their vote simply stated qualified women should either be ordained in all 13 Divisions of the world church or in none of them.

It is important to remember that the 13 Divisions are part of the organizational structure of the General Conference. Therefore, decisions made by the delegates at a General Conference Session are authoritative for Division Executive Committees. However, Unions are independent organizational units, and the delegates at Union Constituency Meetings can make separate decisions regarding women’s ordination for their Unions. I am thankful that I work in a Union where God’s calling to pastoral ministry is fully recognized without regard to gender. For those of you who are members in Unions where this is not the case, I urge you contact your Union leaders. It’s time for the Unions to act!

“Sam Millen is an Australian serving as an Adventist pastor in Virginia. His self-imposed North American exile has now reached its 17th year.”
A Christian Response to the Court Decision about Same-Sex Marriage

by Dr. Bruce Campbell Moyer, July 19, 2015: David Brooks has written, for the New York Times, “Social conservatives could be the people who help reweave the sinews of society. They already subscribe to a faith built on selfless love. They can serve as examples of commitment. They are equipped with a vocabulary to distinguish right from wrong, what dignifies and what demeans. They already, but in private, tithe to the poor and nurture the lonely.

“The defining face of social conservatism could be this: Those are the people who go into underprivileged areas and form organizations to help nurture stable families. Those are the people who build community institutions in places where they are sparse. Those are the people who can help us think about how economic joblessness and spiritual poverty reinforce each other. Those are the people who converse with us about the transcendent in everyday life.

“This culture war is more Albert Schweitzer and Dorothy Day than Jerry Falwell and Franklin Graham; more Salvation Army than Moral Majority. It’s doing purposefully in public what social conservatives already do in private.” (New York Times, 29 June 2015)

Talk has been cheapened by overexpenditure. It is action that makes our faith real. We are in for a lot of talk in the near future, especially on same-sex marriage, now legalized in the United States by the Supreme Court.

While I may not choose to conduct such a wedding, I applaud the court’s decision. Civil marriages are “weddings" separate from the church’s blessings. They are “blessed" by the love and commitment of the couple and the participants. I have chosen not to participate in some heterosexual weddings because of personal convictions that God was neither involved in the arrangement nor was it appropriate. All people, however, deserve the gift of love, protected by the state.

This does not sanctify it. It only protects it and dignifies people. Christians must be true to their theological convictions while still being loving and supportive of others who disagree, who do not share all of their convictions. This is, I think, where grace enters the picture. It is this grace that must characterize our lives and interpersonal relations. If we fail here, we have little to offer except more rules.

Dr. Bruce Campbell Moyer is an ordained Adventist minister and retired faculty member in the seminary at Andrews University. He has served as an urban pastor, a staff member at the Institute of World Mission, director of the Adventist Center for Global Urban Mission and coordinator of worldwide HIV-AIDS programs for the Adventist Relief and Development Agency (ADRA).
Great Disappointments

Guest Blog by Ronald Coleman

Ron is a Seventh-day Adventist commercial airline pilot who also plays a very good clarinet. He is a friend of Jack Hoehn and has given Jack permission to repost Ron’s recent opinion piece on the Post-GC 2015 Disappointment of many Seventh-day Adventists. (Original on Ron Coleman’s blog.)

How do we respond when the leadership of an organization which has long had our loyalties decides to take that organization in a direction that we cannot in all honesty support? That is no doubt the question in the minds of many Seventh-day Adventist church members after the recent proceedings of the General Conference gathering.

Those who value the company of fellow believers know the importance a church family can have in their lives. And those who have enjoyed long association with a particular church family feel the strongest ties. But the stronger the ties the more devastating it can be when the organizational “rules of membership” are tampered with in a manner that seems to demand intellectual compromise as a requirement of continued membership.

Of course, this is not a new dilemma. The large numbers of “ex” members bear this out. But when one is personally confronted with what feels like a “compromise or leave decision,” the issue (whatever it is) suddenly looms so much larger than any which drove others away before us.

Perhaps this is a good time to remind ourselves of this: A man-made religious organization is not the Church. They are two different things. The universal Church includes any and all who celebrate the Good News of deliverance which is the core of the message of the Galilean. It is by far the more important to one’s spiritual journey (and sanity). When this Galilean spoke of two or three gathering together he was almost certainly referring to this universal Fellowship (Church) of Believers – not a religious organization of policy makers. In fact it is probably true to say that no organization can ever fill the role of the Church in anyone’s life (though some may live for years with the impression that it can).

It is important here to ask ourselves what fundamental belief we are talking about that is universal enough to eventually unite atheists, agnostics, scientists, philosophers, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Catholics, Baptists, Mormons, Adventists, terrorists, pagans, politicians, Dalits and countless others from every corner of our planet.

When the broad perspective is taken, it becomes apparent that the only belief fundamental enough to do that is the Good News that One came to live among us with a message of deliverance and eternal life – and that while here demonstrated in First Person the peaceful nature of a God who is the source of all Life. All other “fundamentals” are not really fundamental no matter how strenuously they may be promoted.

Does this mean that the Bible does not contain much perspective that is useful? Not at all. There is much useful in learning and contemplating the history of our ancestors and the record of God’s dealings with the many and varied situations recorded. But all must be viewed and understood in the context of the Great Light – and questions which we are keen to have answers to but which are not really answered by the Bible writers must be allowed to remain unanswered for now. Intellectual honesty requires that.

So go ahead and enjoy the fellowship of believers. Don’t be unduly concerned with the meanderings of an
organization that promotes unnecessary (and probably often incorrect) statements of policy or creed. An organization and a Church are entirely different things.
A Family of Four Unique Christian Radio Stations

By Debbonnaire Kovacs, posted July 22, 2015

“Internet radio is the wave of the future,” says Glen Striemer. He ought to know. He owns four internet radio stations, each reaching different populations, though there is overlap.

Striemer’s background shows him to have the people skills and marketing skills to be a successful radio entrepreneur. He spent twenty-five years selling literature back when it was called “colporteur ministry,” and sold two million dollars’ worth of books all over the U.S. and Canada. When he retired from that in 2008, he worked for five years in sales, marketing, and promotion for three different Christian radio stations. It was in 2014 that he had his epiphany regarding internet radio and went into business for himself.

His flagship station was Loud Cry Radio, which went on the air in 2015. It caters to the conservative Christian, though Striemer adds that there is “a world of difference” between conservative Christians in general and conservative Adventists. He points out that many Adventists object to any drums or beat, or sometimes even to anything that is not Adventist in origin. Loud Cry Radio has all Adventist spoken word content, but its music is an interesting mix.

In fact, all four stations maintain this same mix in their musical styles in general: country, soul, contemporary, instrumental, symphony, Broadway songs from famous shows, and Jewish music down through the decades. Striemer says there is “some incredible Jewish music in Hebrew.”

Loud Cry Radio also did something that, so far as Striemer is aware, no other Christian radio station has done. “Back in 50s, 60, and 70s,” he explains, “all or most major artists did contemporary albums, Christmas albums, and gospel albums. We went back and got the stars’ gospel albums, everyone from Dolly Parton and Willie Nelson to Mahalia Jackson and Elvis Presley—the list goes on and on—and every hour on the hour you hear these songs. The general public seemed to really appreciate that.”

Besides music, the station plays some unique programs: they have a Christian counselor, a Christian mechanic, grief support, a “Dear Michele” advice columnist; a total of ten to twelve exclusive shows they’ve developed. The way they do sermons is different than usual, too. They take sermons by big Adventist names such as Mark Finley, Morris Venden, or Henry Feyerabend, and distill them into three-minute segments. For example, he said, “Elder Finley did an hour on heaven; I got seven distinct sermons from that. And they’re powerful. People are busy and distracted. They’re listening to internet radio in their cars on their way to work or shopping. Hour-long sermons are obsolete. Our shows are music-driven, but we do put in these little sermonettes, and people comment on how much they like them.”

The station “met with some pretty immediate success,” Striemer says. He advertises in Adventist union papers in a cycle, and also hired a social media team, promoting to Adventists and non-Adventists worldwide.

Soon Striemer’s eyes turned outward again. What other segment of the public was underserved by Christian radio? What about the three million Native Americans living on the North American continent? His next station was Native Christian Radio, and features native artists, native testimonies, and native preachers. “Not a hundred percent,” he admits, “because there are not enough out there.” But the station caters to their history and traditions. He says with all the natives he’s talked to, he’s been impressed that their heritage is very important to them. He sees many white people criticizing that, even saying that natives are “bringing in paganism.”

“We don’t criticize; we embrace,” says Striemer. They launched their station with a video of the Canadian
government officially apologizing for the horrific abuses that happened in residential schools, and this video is still the first one on the list found here.

The Smithsonian Museum donated files of native people singing hymns in their dialect from all over North America, and they sometimes play these. They have a Native Spotlight which features native artists, and promote native natural healing on topics such as alcohol, diabetes, tobacco, and diet.

Naturally, Striemer faced some opposition. Some white people complained that if you listened to this station you would “hear gibberish.” Striemer simply took that as evidence that he was successfully making a station that would appeal, not to whites, but to Native Americans. Some Adventists also complained about the drums, Broadway tunes, and “heathens like Elvis Presley” on Loud Cry Radio.

So Striemer launched his next station, SDA Radio. He says they debated long and hard on using the name, and ended up using it, with a disclaimer on the home page that states, “SDA Radio is a tithe paying, supporting ministry and is not part of, or affiliated with, or endorsed by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist headquarters in Silver Spring, MD, or any of its subsidiaries. Copyright 2015 SDAradio.org.” He also gives a brief (brief! one paragraph) history of the denomination and a clear statement of the station’s purpose, which is to highlight the renewed emphasis on salvation by faith alone that was brought about by the 1888 messages of A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner, and strongly endorsed by Ellen White.

“Righteousness by faith is what the sermonettes on this station are all about,” Striemer says. The music on this one is “toned down a notch” for Adventist ears, (but they probably still offend some, since they also have “lots of women preachers.”)

One of those is Striemer’s daughter, Naomi. She used to have a show when he worked in Christian commercial radio, and when she left to concentrate on her music and they put John Tesh in her place, they assumed ratings would soar. Instead, hers were actually higher! They still feature Naomi’s messages on all four stations. (If you’d like to learn more about Naomi’s ministry, visit her here.)

Just recently, Striemer reached out in a different direction. He did some research on natural healing and found “there wasn’t one natural healing radio station in the Christian radio world. When we saw this landscape, we thought what a place to go in with our health messages!”

The result was Natural Way Radio, “the first 24/7 global Christian natural healing station. We got some really peaceful music, and we’ll play a couple songs, then have a natural healing snippet. Our only sermons are on things eastern mystics are interested in, such as heaven and angels.” Striemer says they mingle the gospel with that, and also have some Christian counselors and some of the Native natural healing.

All these stations will soon be found in one place on a GS Radio site that he hopes will be up in a month or so, but in the meantime, you can find them all from the links above. And they depend on advertising, so if you have products and services that you think would be a good fit, and you want to help, click on Advertise on any of the stations’ homepages to find out what your options are.
Four Radio Stations

Click on any logo to go to the radio station of your choice.

Loud Cry is intended for a general, conservative Christian audience.

Native Christian is self-explanatory—intended to appeal to Natives and those interested in Native issues.

This one is especially for Adventists, but will appeal to any interested in gentle music and salvation by faith alone.

The newest in the family, Natural Way radio is the first global, 24/7 Christian radio station centered on principles of natural healing.
Nothing In My Hands, Chapter Ten

By Del Starr, a pseudonym, all rights reserved. Posted July 22, 2015

Be Sure to Wear Some Flowers in Your Hair

In spite of the thought that they must live in San Francisco, it was a happy group that entered the Presidio for the first time. The 30-day leave had been nice but they were now anxious to get back into their own home and relax a bit. The kids wanted to just be out of the car for a while.

It was also payday, and Gary had not been paid since he left Germany. When he went to pick up his check, however, it was only for $100.00! For an entire month! Since there was still some money left from the trip, it didn’t seem a terrible situation yet. But…..

When Gary and Dianne presented themselves for government housing, they were told that there was none available at the moment and they would have to find housing on the local economy. That was problematic on the meager $100.00 they had received.

They looked for some time for anything that would be within their reach and found only a small two-bedroom duplex on "the other side of the tracks." Actually, it was most nearly ON the tracks as the tracks were only about 50 feet from their door.

Furniture could not be delivered because they didn’t have either room for it or means to move it when government quarters should become available. The duplex was furnished only with a cookstove and Gary and Dianne struggled. They were able to purchase a cheap couch from a thrift store but had no beds. They slept on a pallet on the floor as did the three children in the other bedroom.

They suffered through the first month but when Gary went to get his next paycheck, it also was for only $100.00 for the month. Rent on the duplex was $100.00 per month and Gary had to drive 30 miles and cross two toll bridges to reach the Presidio. Life was becoming a bit more complex.

Gary investigated to learn why his check was such a small amount and learned that because he had taken some advance pay to finance the trip, his paycheck would remain at $100.00 for a period of about six months. Gary and Dianne were devastated. How would they feed their babies?

A routine was finally developed. Gary would purchase one pound of hamburger before he left the post and Dianne would cook it up in spaghetti to cover two meals. There was no salad, there was no garlic bread, only spaghetti. The kids didn’t mind at all but Gary and Dianne soon tired of spaghetti. It was an especially poor diet for a pregnant woman.

Dianne decided to try to make some Jello, a favorite of the kids, but they had no refrigerator. She tried anyway and set the bowl outside at night to chill. The Bay area, in California, is not known for its frigidity and by the next morning, the Jello was little more than a heavy syrup. They were all disappointed but drank it anyway.

Kitty Mow adjusted to the move quite well and scouted the neighborhood for her favorite foods…mice. Dutch, however, suffered a bit. He had to be tied outside and he didn’t like it. He was a very insecure dog and if Dianne and Gary would leave him, he would bark constantly until they returned. The neighbors didn’t like him any more than Dianne did.

The kids thought it all rather fun. They enjoyed the activities of the neighborhood children and especially liked the
newspaper man who would give them handfuls of rubber bands.

Dianne and Gary worried about their family. No furniture, no money, no hope, and they now detested spaghetti. There was no indication when they might be able to move into government quarters.

Dianne’s pregnancy was growing heavier and heavier. The little pallet on the floor for sleeping was getting harder and harder and she could not rest. The only solution was to go once more to the thrift store and find an old mattress upon which to lay her weary body. Of course funding for the mattress had to come from the $100.00. The rent payments were falling farther and farther behind.

Gary put up a notice on the bulletin board at the base, stating that they had a male dachshund to give away. It was soon answered by a civilian man who said that he and his wife had a female doxy that needed company. Dutch would have a doggy door and be able to enter and leave the home at will. Dianne was greatly relieved when Dutch moved to his new home but rued the day that they had determined to fly him home and the cost involved in flying him. She couldn’t help thinking of the food that money would have provided now for her little ones.

She was getting closer to delivery and it was January. Gary was concerned about bringing a tiny baby into the dilapidated duplex and once more approached the folks at post housing, expressing his concerns. Emergency accommodations were sought and Gary and Dianne were assigned to temporary quarters across the Golden Gate Bridge from the Presidio.

Oh, how excited they were as they made plans to move. The old couch and mattress would stay in the dilapidated duplex, possibly for some other needy family, as the government would provide furnishings for the temporary quarters. A real bed! An honest-to-goodness couch! And a refrigerator! Dianne felt so relieved. She knew that the baby would be safe coming home to the sparkling hardwood floors and the insulated quarters. Besides which, being government quarters, there was no rent to pay and the $100.00 would go a lot farther.

The temporary quarters were at a much smaller post known as Fort Barry. It was very “country” and as the military horses were housed in the area, at night the horses would be turned loose to roam the installation. A small creek ran outside the back door. Trees surrounded the living quarters. It was good. In fact, it was very good. Dianne felt she could stay there for the rest of her life and never wish to move.

Gary’s job at the Presidio was in the welding shop and he thoroughly enjoyed it. Dianne began once more to bake from scratch as she had for their entire married lives and soon the house was enveloped in the odor of fresh bread and cookies. Even the children appreciated the move though they had suffered little (they thought) at the duplex.

Kitty Mow again adjusted very well and the family was complete.

In February, Janelle arrived. She was a beautiful baby, blonde-haired and blue-eyed, and Gary and Dianne were very proud of her. Tenderly, they carried her home and placed her in the little bed that was to be her home for the next few months. Dianne had never been able to breast feed her babies, so she prepared bottles for little Janelle so that when she awakened in the middle of the night, Dianne would be ready for her. The family retired for the night, Janelle in her little bed at Dianne’s side. Dianne slept with one eye open, as the saying goes, alert for the slightest whimper from her infant girl.

The family awakened the next morning, Dianne with a start, realizing that Janelle had not awakened during the night. She immediately leaned over the small child to see if she was still breathing. She was!! “Oh thank you God,” Dianne breathed. From that very first night, Janelle never awakened at night and Dianne was able to rest well every night.

Janetta was delighted with her baby sister. She enjoyed Brian and Brad but she instinctively knew that Janelle was her own gender and she hovered over her like a mother hen.
Gary had occasion to work at the on the freezers Commissary one day. They had malfunctioned and were full of ice cream. It would soon thaw and be wasted, so the workers were invited to take it home with them. When Gary arrived home with all sorts of ice cream, Dianne was excited for the children and thankful for the refrigerator/freezer. There were about four other children housed in temporary quarters and the kids enjoyed sharing their ice cream with them.

One little boy was so appreciative that he asked Janetta to marry him. Janetta was by now five years old, and the little boy was the same age. Janetta ran home to tell Dianne that she was “engaged.” Dianne smiled at the attempts of the children to be grown up but inside her heart she cringed, knowing that Janetta was growing and maturing and it wouldn't be long until she really was an adult. Dianne longed to keep her from having to suffer the same things that she had suffered though she knew one thing that Janetta would never have to worry about. Dianne would never use Janetta as Grace had used Dianne.

Finally, permanent quarters opened on the Presidio and once again it was time to pack. It was not a large move though, as their furniture was still in storage awaiting this day. The day it arrived was like Christmas. So many boxes, so many memories, all their possessions, the children’s toys, everything! They were finally at home on MacArthur Street in the Presidio of San Francisco. One small item bothered Dianne. When she unpacked Gary’s clothing, there was the blue dress and the fishnet stockings. But of course, they were a memento of that wonderful evening in Germany, so she packed them onto the top shelf of the closet.

Here, there were flowerbeds to work, grass to mow, a playground at the end of the street in which the children could play, and two bathrooms. The family of six needed two bathrooms. Once again life was good… and secure.

After settling in, Dianne determined to win a post housing award by improvements to quarters and she began cultivating and planting the flowerbeds. She was intrigued by the many varieties of geraniums. So many differently scented ones. She took clippings wherever she could, and soon the house was surrounded by geraniums. She also planted her trademark “Tropicana,” a florescent orange-colored rose. She had planted one in each area in which she had lived and this was to be no different. All of these perennial flowers were interspersed with annuals and it was a riot of color in Dianne’s flowerbed. Sure enough, she won the award from the post commander for improvements. It hung on the living room wall.

Gary took an interest in raising tropical fish and soon the house was full of tanks of all sizes. There were guppies in 10 gallon tanks and mollies in 15 gallon tanks. He raised mostly live-bearing fish but there were a few egg layers also. Dianne and Gary enjoyed turning on the tank lights in the evenings with the house lights off so they could just watch the fish. They found it to be very relaxing after the children were in bed.

Gary had a wonderful sense of humor and would play “kid games” with the children. He would delight in having water fights with them and often, Dianne’s floor would be covered in water. She enjoyed the children so much that she didn’t complain and would even enter into play with them. Gary would sometimes take a bucket of water and sit on the roof of the storage shed. When a child passed by the shed, Gary would delight in dumping the bucket of water over them. Laughter permeated the home. But Dianne was feeling uneasy.

It wasn’t long until they knew that the family would soon number seven. Dianne was happy. She enjoyed the family and one more child would just make it that much happier. Except for the fact that she still felt uneasy.

The following April, Tina was born. Grace had decided to come to San Francisco for Tina’s birth. Dianne was not disturbed about it for she knew Gary would not succumb to any advances by Grace.

Tina was just three days old when Gary, Dianne, Grace, and the now large family, drove up to St. Helena to view the home of Ellen G. White. Though it meant little to Gary, Grace and Dianne were enthralled to see the living quarters of their prophetess. Grace took pride in telling everyone, “That baby is only three days old, can you believe it? Look at them. Three days old and they are doing so well.” Grace of course, was remembering her own labor and delivery and her ten-day stay at the hospital.
Grace stayed on for two weeks after Tina was born and then went back to Seattle. It was probably the best time that Dianne had ever spent with her Mother since she had first married at nearly seventeen years old.

Dianne was now twenty-eight years old.

Gary would leave the Army after this stint and he and Dianne decided that they would return to Portland, Oregon to make their home. Everything now was focused upon "when they got out" though the time was still nearly two years away.

Dianne’s unease kept growing and she finally faced Gary with it. She was disturbed by the blue dress and the fish net stockings. Gary tried to placate her by telling her that they were only a memento but it bothered Dianne greatly. Gary was not acting right either, though Dianne could not place her finger on it.

He began to ask Dianne to put color in his hair and to do it up in rollers. Dianne accommodated his requests but it left her feeling sickened. Dianne did a lot of sewing for the family and Gary asked her to make shorts for him “just like hers” but different, in that Dianne’s shorts were loose-fitting and Gary wanted his to be skin tight.

They had been attending the Seventh-day Adventist church in a nearby town and Dianne rejoiced at having God in her life and an appearance of religiosity, at least. No mention was ever made of her former marriage or involvement in the church.

Probably because of Dianne’s restlessness, the couple began to argue. A lot. There wasn’t ever a real reason to argue, it was only that feelings were on edge. Dianne had problems trying to figure out what Gary was trying to portray with his dyed and curled hair and his skin tight shorts. She was so disturbed that she suggested that they obtain marital counseling. Gary agreed.

After a couple of sessions with the counselor, communication began to flow more smoothly. Gary decided they didn’t need any more counseling and so they quit going. But it wasn’t long until they were back in the old mode of arguing nearly every day. They did well at keeping it from their happy family, though, and the children grew and thrived.

A few more months of arguing made Dianne ready to leave the marriage. Gary begged her to stay and Dianne told him she would only stay on the condition that they follow through with the marital counseling. Once more they attended counseling sessions. Again it had a positive effect upon the marriage. Communication began to flow smoothly once more and Gary again decided they didn’t need any more counseling. The entire routine repeated itself once more with more sessions with the counselor, more promises, more improved communication, dropping out of counseling and another return to arguing. This time though, they were close to Gary’s discharge from the Army and they got caught up in the excitement of finding a home in Portland to purchase and preparing themselves for what they hoped would be their final move.

The day to clear quarters finally arrived, Dianne bade farewell to her cozy home on the Presidio, and the family moved into the Guest house for the final separation from the military. The final payday came, and Gary went to get his check but it had been withheld until his final separation. Once more the family was without funds and the children were hungry.

Gary went over to the Safeway grocery store to see if he could find something cheap for the kids to eat. This time they had no cooking facilities so they would, of necessity, have to eat instant foods, which were even more expensive. Gary however, had happened upon a banana sale. He could purchase an entire 40-pound box of bananas for $1.00 and he came back to the Guest house grinning from ear to ear, toting 40 pounds of bananas. The children were allowed to eat bananas whenever they desired. They thought it was great!!

Tina was still a tiny baby and she had to have her special baby foods but even she was able to eat a bit of banana here and there. It wasn’t long until the rooms they occupied were permeated with the smell of bananas. Tina and Janelle’s diapers smelled like bananas, the smell of bananas was on the breath of the rest of the children, the
garbage buckets were full of banana peels. Dianne mentions today, that she is curious what the maids thought when they came to do up their rooms and the garbage cans were always heaped with banana peels.

The day of finally mustering out arrived and the family, now flush with not only the missing paycheck but also with travel pay and mustering-out pay, had their first really solid meal in a week. By now they had two station wagons. Dianne drove one filled with their plants and fish tanks and Gary drove the other with the belongings they would need until their furniture arrived. The children were divided up between them and they started out on their way to Oregon—home for Dianne.
The Rest of the Story

by S M Chen, Posted July 22, 2015

Based on the book of Jonah, II Kings 14:25.

Editor’s Note: This story is especially fascinating if you think of it in conjunction with Chen’s earlier story here.

I write this with no sense of pride. For indeed, I have none left.

You know, from what is contained in the four short chapters of the book bearing my name, the strange and fantastical events that befell me after I was instructed by the Almighty to deliver a warning to the great city of Nineveh.

Some may think that prophets are not like ordinary men. That we are not subject to the same temptations, that we are protected from the wiles of the Evil One, and that the mystery of iniquity does not visit us. That we are somehow above the fray.

I wrote my book, in part, to dispel such nonsense.

In actuality, it has a different ending. One I wish to relate here.

* 

First, however, I want to summarize, in brief, those events, and to expound a bit (for that is an author’s prerogative, is it not?).

Here is why I fled upon being given instructions to warn Nineveh: the country of Assyria, of which Nineveh was the capital, was the enemy of Israel, whose evil king was Jeroboam II. I reasoned thusly: if I refused to go to Nineveh, that wicked city, God would destroy it, and Israel would benefit. If I went, God, in His mercy (I had seen evidence of such), might spare Nineveh and Israel would suffer as a consequence. So my refusal was an act of patriotism (albeit misguided).

I went to Joppa with the intention of journeying to Tarshish, about as far away from Nineveh as I could get. It is a wonder that I was able to sleep once I boarded that ship, but sleep I did. Fleeing the Almighty is tiring business.

I sensed that the great storm that arose after I boarded the ship happened because of my disobedience. Why else should there be such a storm on the Mediterranean when it is almost always calm?

The ancient custom of casting/drawing lots using small stones was a human variation of the Urim and Thummim, I venture. Often it seemed to work. It did in my case.

To their credit, after my confession, the mariners tried to ride out the storm, but to no avail. Man is never a match for his Maker.

This event – the calming of the storm after the sailors cast me into the sea – had a profound effect on them, strengthening the faith of those who had any, and making believers out of some who hitherto had been unbelievers.

So I got swallowed by a great fish. Swallowed, not eaten. It could have easily been the latter. But the Almighty, in His infinite mercy, permitted me to be ingested, not digested, by a creature whose dimensions are so great I will not
even attempt to describe them. I slid into darkness, into a fearful place of horror. It smelled like a giant fish market.

During the three days that I was entombed, I witnessed a variety of seafood pass from the maw of the great fish into its gullet, thence into its stomach. Squid, fish of all different kind and size, seaweed, and krill—all passed southward in amazing quantity.

I admit to having had a feeling of deep despair, of a profound fear of the unknown, that I would die without having the chance to say goodbye to my family, and, last but not least, that I had been a disappointment to my Maker.

So I prayed with fervor and humility, and He heard me.

After three days in that living hellhole, I was regurgitated, and saw the light of day.

* 

When, once again, I was instructed to warn Nineveh, I did as I was bid. I journeyed there, and preached. I did not think it to be a warning so much as a proclamation: in 40 days, Nineveh would be destroyed. Perhaps the people listened to me because of my strange appearance, which had been altered by being in the belly of the great fish. My skin was bleached in spots; I looked like a wild man.

I fully expected the great city to be annihilated. I did not count on the workings of the Almighty, whose thoughts are not as ours, and whose acts are beyond our comprehension.

So, when I sat on a hill overlooking the city, the better to watch its destruction, I admit to an exhilaration born of expectation.

When nothing happened, I had a conversation with the Almighty. I expressed anger, and told Him it was better for me to die than live with the ignominy of being considered a false prophet, whose predictions did not come to pass. How small of me.

As I sat there, stewing in my own juices, God prepared a gourd. The gourd, in those days, was a substantial plant. Its capacious leaves provided much needed shade.

But then there was the worm. It killed the gourd. And the sun beat down mightily, and I suffered sunstroke. I must have been out of my head to, a second time, say that I preferred death to life.

And I was reminded how absurd I was to have more pity for the gourd than for the 120,000 inhabitants of Nineveh.

That is where my book ends.

* 

The writings of those who came before me chronicle the rise and fall of nations and, more specifically, the fall and rise of individuals. Adam, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David are but some. All were flawed; none perfect. They fell, but got back up again. Abraham became the father of multitudes. From Jacob’s loins came the children of Israel. Moses was translated after death. David was an adulterer and a murderer. Yet God called him a man after His own heart.

God was not through with me yet.

* 

I journeyed home to Gath-hepher in Palestine, a bit north of Nazareth. It was over 500 miles from Nineveh and took me over 3 weeks.
My wife ran out to greet me. I’d been gone for over a month. Before I could tell her what had happened to me, she said, “Come quickly. Our daughter is ill.”

I hastened into the house.

In a darkened room, on a cot, lay Sarah, our only child. Both my wife and I were older when, in response to supplication, she came into our lives. Six years old, she was a light in my otherwise often dark world.

“Papa,” she whispered. “Is it you?”

“Yes, my child.” I embraced her. “I am home.” I hugged her tightly, not wanting the moment to end but knowing that, while it would not last, the memory of it would.

My wife motioned me. Once outside, she whispered, “While you were gone, Sarah had some kind of sickness. She had a high fever and a rash. When the fever broke, she was blind. The rash still lingers.”

My world dissolved. I was beside myself with grief. What kind of life did Sarah have to look forward to without sight? Life was hard enough, particularly for women, without the handicap of blindness.

I fell to my knees, and, for the second time, prayed with great fervor.

I pleaded, “Lord, I have sinned, and abundantly so. Lay not my iniquity upon this, my only child. If it be necessary, restore her sight, and take mine.”

I lay prostrate upon the ground for I know not how long. It seemed like days.

But nothing happened. Sarah remained the same.

The sun rose and set as before, but I didn’t notice. Neither was I aware of the moon and stars when the light of day dimmed enough for them to be visible. Nothing other than my little girl mattered.

I put on sackcloth, sat in ashes, and besought the Lord again. And fasted. It did not escape me that my actions were similar to those of the residents of Nineveh that resulted in the Almighty sparing its annihilation.

Three times I prayed, each time hoping that, despite my unworthiness, I would be heard.

And, the third time, God responded. Unlike with some prior interactions, He said nothing.

But the following morning, when Sarah opened her eyes, she could see. All was as it was before. When her world turned from blackness to color, she smiled and hugged us, and my heart leapt within me.

She was not the only one whose vision was restored.

I, too, see more clearly, and, ever since, have been a humble, obedient servant of the Lord.