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A God Who Speaks (*DEVOTIONAL*): The prophet Jeremiah experiences a hands-on, voice-from-God ordination to pursue a prophetic career during a time of dire instability in Judea. How would we--how *could* we?--answer such a call, when the people to whom we are to minister almost universally reject our calling and ministry? Debonnaire Kovacs helps us imagine....
Judas and the Gospel of Jesus, Have We Missed the Truth about Christianity? (BOOK REVIEW): When was the last time you heard a sermon with even one quote from the "Gospel of Judas"? The Judas-come-lately narrative has problems of all kinds, but it has a highly important story to tell about history and our times, writes Ella M. Rydzewski in her review.

Sheep Whisperer Changes Lives (FEATURE): In an era when women are accepting prime pastoral responsibilities in many Adventist congregations, a young woman with the quiet gift of "Sheep Whispering" is bringing special blessings in her college town.

Men Are Four (POETRY & PROSE): S M Chen turns to Scriptural history and philosophical aphorisms to help us decipher the relationships between wisdom and knowledge, good and evil, sin and repentance, punishment and mercy.

Nothing In My Hands, Chapter Thirteen (POETRY & PROSE): The continuing true story "Nothing in My Hands" finds Adventist Del Starr far on the mountainsides away from God, seeking solace and companionship in alcohol and marveling at its apparent effectiveness in helping her cope with life.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CONCERTS ALERT FOR AUGUST: The Heritage Singers will perform Sunday, Aug. 23, 6 p.m. in Minden Town Park Center in downtown Minden, Nevada; Christian
Edition will hold a concert Saturday, Aug. 29, 7 p.m. at the Loma Linda University Church Camp Meeting, 11125 Campus Street, Loma Linda, California....

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Recovering from an Arduous GC

It's been a month since we returned to our Sandy AT office, after making our home at the GC Exposition Center for nearly two weeks and distributing thousands of copies of our magazines and books. We could not have done it financially without you, as our small booth became a gathering ground for GC guests and delegates in search of information found in our special issue and in some of the writing on Women's Ordination we had available.

If you are a subscriber, this weekend you should be receiving a letter from our office, in the mail, telling a great deal more about our GC experience and the surprising discoveries we made. Our publicity and reporting team spent, literally, hundreds of hours talking to news-makers, delegates, and guests, and we brought home a deep understanding of what was going on in people's minds as they pondered whether or not some divisions should be allowed to ordain women as pastors, within their territories. That vote lost by a surprisingly narrow margin, and based on my observations at the Session, we believe we know what was going on, and why.

Look for the letter with our logo and two stacks of ballots on a scales, in the bottom, left corner. Yes, we ask for your continuing financial help, as our reserves are the lowest they've been in five years, and we're looking to raise $30,000 in the next few weeks. But even more important to us is that you plumb the report most subscribers will be receiving soon in the mail, for the essence of the sociological and theological
dynamic that AT saw at work in an amazing way at the Session....

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Adventist Denomination Again Goes to Court to Force Congregation to Stop Using Name

By Andrew Hanson, August 14, 2015: Walter McGill, pastor of The Creation Seventh Day and Adventist Church, has told Adventist Today that he has received notice of new litigation in the district court in Jackson, Tennessee. He and his assistant, Lucan Chartier, were previously jailed for their refusal to stop using the name.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church v. McGill is the latest legal action to eliminate the name “Creation Seventh Day & Adventist Church” from any “document, file, blog, bulletin board, video, post, tweet, webpage, social media page, social media account, social media post.” The legal action seeks to prohibit the use of the name in “domain name registries, domain name hosts, web servers, blog publishing services, search engines, social networks, social media companies and other service providers.”

According to McGill, if the court orders this legal action it will allow trademark law to control or the use of words or phrases in everyday communication so long as that communication is done via computer. Adventist Today has asked the denomination’s General Conference (GC) why this lawsuit is necessary, who authorized it and its potential cost. No one from the GC has returned the phone calls of the Adventist Today reporter.

McGill and Chartier will likely refuse to comply with any such court order and go to jail to protest what they consider to be a matter of conscience. McGill previously served 30 days in jail and Chartier served 10 days related to similar issues.

The small congregation is located in rural Tennessee in the southern United States, although it claims adherents elsewhere and missionary projects in Uganda. It left the denomination in 1988 because of doctrinal disagreement with the GC acquisition and enforcement of a trademark on the name “Seventh-day Adventist.”

The name “Creation Seventh Day & Adventist” was based upon what they believe to be a divine revelation received by both Danny Smith and McGill. At a meeting held in Plant City, Florida, the official Creation Seventh Day & Adventist (CSDA) was organized as an association of believers.

They believe that the name Seventh-day Adventist was given by God to describe the Adventist faith and that those who accept the Adventist beliefs must use the name in identifying themselves and their organizations, according to a Wikipedia article on the group. They consider this to be a matter of conscience equivalent to denying or affirming the name “Christian” and cite several quotes from Adventist cofounder Ellen G. White regarding the adoption and use of the name being Divinely commissioned.

The group has similar teachings to those of the denomination on the Sabbath, the imminent Second Coming of Christ, the investigative judgment and other doctrines. It says that it differs from modern Adventists on the Trinity, separation of church and state, and victory over all known sins.

The conclusion of the original litigation was a 2 to 1 split decision by a three-judge panel, with two judges deciding in favor of the denomination and one judge in favor of cancelling the trademark on the name “Seventh-day Adventist.” The dissenting judge wrote an opinion regarding the problems with treating a religious name as a property right. It can be found at: https://archive.org/details/StockerPerryVsG.CCorporationofSDAs

The Phillip M. Kirkpatrick law firm in Nashville, Tennessee, has been retained by the GC to litigate this current case. It is considered to be one of the top law firms in the nation for this type of case. The firm that represented McGill at the Supreme Court level pro bono is on record stating that it would normally cost about $1 million to file such a
claim, according to Chartier in the online edition of *Spectrum*, the journal of the largest organization of Adventist academics, July 20, 2012.

Adventist Today has previously reported on this ongoing conflict: “Is Protecting the Denomination’s Name Important Enough to Send People to Jail?” by Andrew Hanson, *Adventist Today* Magazine, December, 2012, p. 18.
Young Adult Turned Around by “Impact San Antonio”

August 14, 2015: “I arrived to San Antonio unmotivated and debating if I should continue in the Adventist Church,” said Fernanda Duran, an 18-year-old young woman from the state of Washington in the United States. She was one of the volunteers who participated in community service and outreach projects across the Texas city as the General Conference delegates debated and voted. The experience changed her life.

Duran went home and started Impact Tri-Cities where she lives, using what she learned in San Antonio as a community action worker. She used Facebook and asked her friends to get involved with the goal, “Young adults bringing hope to the Tri Cities community.”

The first project was August 1 at Creation Festival Northwest where Impact Tri-Cities volunteers helped with the booth for Compassion International, a Christian relief and community development organization. The next project is August 22 when the Adventist young adults will join other Christians in a “Convoy of Hope,” distributing free groceries, providing medical and dental screenings, haircuts, family portraits, hot meals and job opportunities to low-income families.

What happened in San Antonio? “What happened was, I was born again,” said Duran. “Jesus reminded me that being Adventist is more than the Sabbath, doctrines, Church Manual, women’s ordination and being vegetarian. Being Adventist is waiting for the second coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.” (See Matthew 25.)

“God sparked this huge flame in me, a passion so big that I couldn’t come home and do nothing. I had to impact my community and preach about His love, not just with words, but with actions.”

Pastor Gilbert Cangy, the denomination’s youth ministries director, told Adventist Today that this is just one of many examples of the young adults who participated in Impact San Antonio and caught a vision for service in their own cities. “Something good happened in San Antonio,” observed a veteran youth worker after hearing several of these stories. “There is nothing like hands-on, practical compassion to get you back to the real basics of following Jesus.”

If you would like to encourage Duran and her organization, you can reach them by Email at impacttricities@hotmail.com and she can tell you where to send contributions and/or sign up to help.
ADRA Provides Education to Displaced Iraqis in Kurdistan

From News Release, August 12, 2015: Violence in Iraq has displaced at least 3 million people, 50 percent of which have fled to the Kurdish-controlled areas in the north of Iraq, where the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is working. ADRA is the humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

For more than six months, ADRA has been operating in Baharka Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camp providing services to families who have fled fighting in Iraq. ADRA’s programs focus on informal education, protection and restoring livelihoods for the most vulnerable families in the camp.

Through ADRA's programs, volunteer teachers are providing informal education to small children with materials from UNICEF, while following guiding principles established by the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq.

“During the school holidays and the fasting month, ADRA is the only nongovernmental organization focusing on providing informal education to children ages 4-5 in the Baharka IDP Camp at this time,” said Leyn Gantare, ADRA country director in Kurdistan.

The agency is also providing one nutritious meal to each child in attendance and organizing recreational activities for 400 children. Children’s recreational activities include sporting events, drawing competitions, music and games.

“These kinds of activities allow children to express themselves and stay socially connected with other children,” said Gantare. “Our activities are especially targeting girls and children with disabilities.”

ADRA partner UNICEF is providing tents for education and child-friendly spaces that will allow children to spend their time in constructive and safe ways.

To increase the resilience of the displaced population, ADRA is offering small grants that will enable families to start their own small businesses. ADRA community mobilizers and social counselors are following-up regularly with the business owners as well as providing training in cash and business management. Additionally, the agency has been providing Kurdish lessons to help adults and children integrate with the local communities.

ADRA programs in Kurdistan also include awareness campaigns to both displaced Iraqis and the host Kurdish community about hygiene, the dangers of child marriage, children’s education, good community relations and cooperation, and inclusion of persons with disabilities.
Denominational Leaders Elected in San Antonio: Comprehensive Overview

August 11, 2015: More than 125 individuals were elected to full-time, employed leadership positions in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination during the General Conference (GC) convened in July in San Antonio, Texas. There have been many announcements dribbled out over time in various media. Adventist Today has brought the entire list together here with some general observations about the overall group.

Who are these people? We have tried to identify the background of each individual and also describe the various entities within the overall structure. Of the top 30 positions, the majority of those elected were ordained ministers, while another 17 percent were educators and 27 percent were from other backgrounds, including business administration. Only one in five were women. Nearly half (47 percent) were from North America, 17 percent from Africa, 12 percent from Latin America, 10% each from Asia and Europe, and six percent from Australia.

Top Officers

Adventist Today has already reported on the three top officers of the denomination. Pastor Ted Wilson was re-elected to another five-year term as president, as was also Dr. G. T. Ng, the secretary or number-two officer. Juan Prestol-Puesan was elected treasurer; he had been the undertreasurer or second-ranking officer in the GC treasury and prior to that was treasurer of the denomination's North American Division.

Famously only six GC vice presidents were elected at the specific request of Wilson and over a number of objections by delegates, dumping two veteran top leaders while three new men were elected. The new vice presidents are Pastor Guillermo Biaggi, who was a missionary serving as president of the Euro-Asia Division and originally from Argentina; Pastor Abner de Los Santos, who was vice president of the Inter-American Division; and Pastor Thomas Lemon, president of the Mid-America Union Conference in North America. Re-elected as vice presidents were Dr. Ella Simmons, the only woman serving at this level of the denomination’s leadership and a veteran educator in the United States; Pastor Geoffrey Mbwana who started denominational service in Africa; and Dr. Artur Stele, director of the Biblical Research Institute and formerly seminary dean in Russia, currently most well known for chairing the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC).

The denomination’s general secretariat now includes Pastor Myron Iseminger who was re-elected as undersecretary or the second-ranking officer in that unit. Before joining the GC officer group five years ago, he was a church administrator in a local conference in the United States and a missionary in Egypt and the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. Re-elected as associate secretaries were Pastor Gary Krause, an Australian who directs the GC Office of Global Mission and is working on a doctoral degree in urban ministry at the University of Queensland; Karen Porter, one of the few women who serve in the top ranks of the denomination and has long coordinated personnel policy related to missionaries; and John Thomas, a faculty member at Union College in Nebraska before joining the GC staff in 2010. New associate secretaries elected were Pastor Hensley Moorooven, previously an officer in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division; Pastor Claude Richli, previously associate publisher of the two official GC journals, *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World*; and Pastor Gerson Santos, previously secretary of the Greater New York Conference in North America.

The treasury staff now includes J. Raymond Wahlen as the new undertreasurer. He had previously been an associate treasurer at the GC, directed development of the denomination’s accounting software and was a missionary in Asia. George Egwakhe and Daisy Orion were re-elected as associate treasurers. Egwakhe has served for ten years at the GC and was originally from Nigeria although he has also served as a missionary in Asia and a treasurer in Africa. Orion is one of the few women serving in the denomination’s top ranks and entered...
Denominational service in the Asia-Pacific region. Timothy Aka was also elected as an associate treasurer, having joined the GC staff in 2014 as an investment manager. He is a Canadian who previously worked in the finance industry at Edward Jones and at T.D. Waterhouse. And Pastor Delbert Pearman was elected an associate treasurer. He was director of planning in the GC Office of Adventist Mission and previously treasurer of the Adventist Church in Bermuda.

Directors of Departments and Ministries

Three new directors were elected; Dr. Ganoune Diop as director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) who has been an associate director representing the denomination at the United Nations; Pastor Duane McKey as director of Sabbath School and Personal Ministries who was vice president of the Southwestern Union Conference in North America; and Pastor Almir Mauricio Marroni as publishing director who has been a vice president of the South American Division.

Re-elected were Pastor Mario Ceballos, director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries; Linda Mei Lin Koh, director of Children’s Ministries; Pastor Williams Costa, communication director; Dr. Lisa Beardsley-Hardy, education director; Dr. Willie Oliver, director of Family Ministries; Dr. Peter Landless, director of Health Ministries; Pastor Jerry Page, secretary of the Ministerial Association; Heather-Dawn Small, director of Women’s Ministries; and Pastor Gilbert Cangy, director of Youth Ministries.

In two cases the incumbent was asked to continue to function until the end of the current calendar year so that a replacement can be found. Pastor Gary Dodge is director of planned giving and trust services for the GC and Pastor Erika Puni is director of stewardship.

At least 29 individuals were voted as associate directors in the GC departments of which six are new and the others were re-elected. Adventist Today has not listed all of these nor included them in the statistics in this story not because the work they do is not important, but just because readers undoubtedly have a limit as to how much detail they can think about.

Division Officers

The GC has 13 divisions or regional field headquarters for the denomination around the world. The leaders in this units are elected at the GC Session every five years, but the nominations originate in caucuses that include the members of the nominating committee from each division and are then reported to the entire nominating committee for vote before they go to the entire delegation for official confirmation.

Six new division presidents were elected in San Antonio. Each has roots within the region he now leads: Pastor Leonardo Asoy was president of the South Philippine Union Conference before being elected president of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. Pastor Mario Brito was ministerial secretary in the Inter-European Division before being elected president. Pastor Michael Kaminsky was secretary and vice president of the Euro-Asia Division before being elected president. Pastor Ezras Lakra was president of the Northern India Union Conference before being elected president of the Southern Asia Division. Pastor Glenn Townend was president of the Trans-Pacific Union Mission and earlier president of the Western Australia Conference before becoming president of the South Pacific Division. Dr. Elie Weick was a department head in the West-Central Africa Division when he was elected president.

Seven of the division presidents were re-elected: Pastor Dan Jackson in North America, Pastor Raafat Kamal in the Trans-European Division; Pastor Ertom Kohler in South America; Pastor Jairyong Lee in the Northern Asia-Pacific Division; Dr. Israel Leito in the Inter-American Division; Dr. Paul Ratsara in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division; and Pastor Blasious Ruguri in East-Central Africa.

Each division has a secretary and a treasurer. Only six of these 26 individuals were new, with 18 people re-elected and two vacancies yet to be filled. Among the 36 division officers only three are missionaries; the others are all from the region in which they serve.
General Conference Auditing Service (GCAS)

The auditors for the denomination operate from an internal auditing service which is structured to achieve a degree of independence and is, in turn, audited by an outside firm. Paul Douglas was re-elected as director of GCAS. He is a native of Jamaica who first joined GCAS in 1997 and was first elected director in 2007.

Twelve individuals were elected lay members of the GCAS governing board. The GC Working Policy specifies that there is to be one such person from each of the 13 world divisions who, along with four of the top GC officers, make up the board. They are to be “qualified auditors and/or knowledgeable professionals in related fields” who are not denominational employees.

Dr. Jack Krogstad serves as chairman of the board. He holds an endowed faculty chair in accounting and management and is an associate dean of the business school at Creighton University, a Catholic university in Omaha, Nebraska. He is an Adventist, a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) and has served as an academic fellow with the U.S. Securities Exchange Commission.

New to the board, elected at this session, will be Esther Abayo, chief executive officer of Penuel Financial Services in Tanzania; Elirie Aransas, a CPA and business school lecturer, in Cebu, Philippines; Lyudmila V. Chyzhevskaja from the Euro-Asia Division; Margaret Dines, a CPA with Super Forte, SMSF Auditing Service in Melbourne, Australia; Nnamdi Onyenmuru, managing partner at Martin Onyenmuru and Company in Nigeria; and Masao Yanaga, professor of law and accounting in the business school at the University of Tsukuba in Japan.

Re-elected as lay members of the board were Ailton Doral from the South American Division; Hyden Gittens, a CPA who is a partner in the accounting firm Versant Accounts and Consultants in Saint Maarten where he was appointed governor of the island of Saint Eustatius in the Netherlands Antilles by Queen Beatrix; Phillip Ndlovu, a Chartered Accountant and managing partner for P Ndlovu and Associates in South Africa; Frensly Panneflek, regional manager at Lloyd's Register Nederland BV in the Netherlands; and Dr. John Stanley, principal consultant with Quintesse Consultants in India.
Is It Beginning?: “A Time to Marginalize” says Bill Knott, editor, Adventist Review

by Ervin Taylor, August 12, 2015:  Some may have thought that various institutional Adventist church establishment figures might wait a respectful period of time before they began a media campaign to try to shut down any dissenting voices following the disastrous vote on women’s ordination and the adoption of fundamentalist language in FB#6 at the St Antonio General Conference session.

We apparently need to wait no longer. Perhaps it has already begun as if on cue from the reelected General Conference(GC) president whose sermon is being highlighted in the same issue.

The editor of the Adventist Review (AR), Dr. Bill Knott, published an editorial entitled “A Time to Marginalize” online on August 10, 2015. His editorial and the above noted sermon of the GC President will appear in the upcoming AR print issue.

Dr. Knott begins by commenting on the “sad history” in United States history of the process of marginalizing “successive waves of those who didn’t fit the self-image of the dominant Anglo-European culture.” He then intones “Social marginalization is a real—and painful—issue that God’s remnant must consistently redress by illustrating that it is still the welcoming and inclusive community envisioned in the teachings of both Jesus and the apostle Paul.”

But are there exceptions? Dr. Knott says, well, of course, there are exceptions. The Adventist denomination must marginalize certain individuals and the ideas they proclaim. He says that “There is a kind of marginalization that is both healthy and necessary for the church to practice. Recent events have underscored why now may be the moment for God’s people to thoughtfully and systematically exclude those elements that have proved themselves hostile to our life together.” Readers of his editorial can’t complain that he is beating around the bush here. His message is clear. We must “systematically exclude” those that are “hostile to our life together.” The problem is that he never tells us exactly who these people “hostile to our life together” may be.

What might be the motivation of this plea to marginalize certain individuals and ideas? Perhaps it goes something like: “There are troublemakers in our ranks. Their ideas constitute a threat to Adventist orthodoxy and uniformity—oops, I mean unity—in belief and practice that we need to establish. We need to get rid of them. However, we can’t say it that way. That’s not nice. Let’s use another term. Ah, I have it. We need to ‘marginalize’ them. That sounds better. But it gets the job done.”

What exactly is the problem that Dr. Knott sees? He says: “In the cacophony of opinions swirling before the recent General Conference Session in San Antonio, we quickly learned that there were honest, constructive voices—even when they disagreed with each other—that deserved to be part of the necessary conversations in which the church was engaged. They spoke with civility, practiced humility, and left us all the better for the good thinking they caused us to do, even when we weren’t initially attracted to their ideas.”

So we learn that there are “honest, constructive voices . . . [who speak] with civility, [practice] humility, [and engage in] good thinking.” So civility, humility and good thinking are o.k. I think I understand civility and humility but what might be an example of “good thinking”? Dr. Knott might have expanded a little on that.

So we know that there are honest, constructive voices. But, Dr. Knott says there is “the other.” There is always “the other,” that individual or group that is not like those of us who know “The Truth.” He states: “But there were—and are—other voices who by their shrillness and their vitriol gave ample illustration that they don’t have the health of the
body in mind, but instead, their own advantage.” Their own “advantage?” One might wonder what that means.

Dr. Knott continues: “They [the ones who are in it for their “own advantage”] make their living off our pain: they build their reputations even as they wound and rend the body of Christ. Unrighteous ad hominem attacks upon church leaders, respected theology teachers, and almost all who disagreed with them became their stock in trade. And sadly, the collective Adventist media rewarded them in just the way the national advertisers reward the angry pundits who slash and burn on Sunday morning television.”

So what should the good Adventist do? Here is Dr. Knott’s solution: “So here’s a call to shut our ears, protect our pulpits, change the channel, and withhold our dollars from those of whatever ideological camp who practice the uncivil and unrighteous behaviors we witnessed before San Antonio. Yes, move them to the margins; draw the boundaries of our community in such a way that only repentance and changed behavior will again allow them full inclusion. It falls to the body of Christ to defend itself when it is under attack from foes without—or within.”

It would be very helpful if Dr. Knott were to tell his readers exactly what organizations and individuals he has in mind that “practice the uncivil and unrighteous behaviors we witnessed before San Antonio.”

First of all, what is this “change the channel” and “withhold our dollars” statements all about? What Adventist TV ministry is “living off our pain”? He certainly can’t be referring to the “Amazing Facts” organization of Doug Batchelor, can he? Or Danny Shelton’s “3ABN” operation? Readers perhaps have suggestions as to which TV ministry or ministries Dr. Knott may have in mind.

And who might have made the “unrighteous ad hominem attacks upon church leaders [and], respected theology teachers?” Is the problem that the alleged ad hominem attacks were “unrighteous”? So would “righteous” ad hominem attacks be okay? Again, readers may wish to make nominations as to who Dr. Knott might have in mind as the source of the ad hominem attacks against church leaders.

One might wonder if this is just the opening salvo in a campaign that seeks to silence those opposed to the decisions rendered at the San Antonio GC session with respect to women’s ordination and FB#6. Or perhaps we are misunderstanding Dr. Knott’s targets. Perhaps his targets are on the right wing of the church that opposes women’s ordination and is working to foster fundamentalism in the Adventist Church.

Until Dr. Knott names who he has in mind, we are left to speculate. Speculations welcomed.
North Korea is proud of its many virtues. They are a model of uniformity.

By Jack Hoehn

There have been many repressive, oppressive, and idolatrous nations throughout history, but the most repressive, oppressive, and idolatrous nation today is the dishonestly named so-called “Democratic People's Republic of North Korea” with its unholy trinity of dead Grandfather, dead Father, and living Son of the Kim family as absolute dictators and worshiped megalomaniacs.

Kim Il-sung (the family name comes first in Korean, like Hoehn John Byron “Jack” would be my name Korean style) the present dictator’s grandfather, started the dynasty as a communist general fighting the Japanese and became the Supreme Leader of North Korea in 1948, and by his death in 1994 he had turned the entire nation into a personal cult. He was not even willing to share the glory with Marx and Lenin of his Russian and Chinese partners, so he replaced communism with his own even stricter and personalized totalitarianism called “Juche.”

At his death North Koreans bowed before his ubiquitous statues and wept for their Supreme Leader, who replaced not only all other men, but all other gods with his so called benevolence. Even today young North Korean men stand guard over his Teaching Centers (that are the feature of every village and town in the country as if temples of a passed god), standing guard “in honor” of Kim Il-sung all night long even during the coldest winters.

Suki Kim

The following is from the firsthand reporting of a woman named Suki Kim, who has written a book about living in North Korea as a teacher at a special University reserved for the sons of North Korea’s ruling elite, where she taught them English under very restricted circumstances. Her book is called “Without You, There Is No Us” after one of the many slogans used by North Koreans in their worship of their dictators.

Korean television consists entirely of three channels and those are mostly available in the capital city of Pyongyang. KECN (Korean Educational and Cultural Network) is on just a couple of hours each day. Mansudae TV is on only on weekends and only for residents of Pyongyang. So the only functioning channel for most of the country is Chosun Central TV, on from 5 pm to 11 pm in the evenings. The main event is the 7 pm evening news for 25 minutes. It is almost exclusively about their dictator. When Kim Jong-il was still alive, the news was his visiting factories and the news was whatever he said at that occasion, verbatim. I presume the same is now done for his successor son, Kim Jong-un.

International news is rarely given and only when it is negative for South Korea or the United States of America. All Korean boys are taught these are their enemies and that to kill a South Korean or an American enemy would be their highest honor. From childhood and from morning till night, and then through the night standing at guard duty, they are fed the same lies: North Korea is the most prosperous and happiest nation in the world; all the world longs to have the same Kimchi-soured cabbage that Koreans pickle by the ton to help them survive the cold long winters;
all the nations of the earth honor and respect their system of *Juche* as the wisest political system in the world; the draconian limits on any personal freedoms are “for the good of the motherland.”

After the evening news the next program is 30 minutes of Government-sponsored music programs with lyrics scrolled across the screen karaoke-style. The songs have titles like “Defend the Headquarters of Revolution” which describes the North Korean people as “bombs and bullets.” There are no commercials, of course, but the news is sometimes interrupted by Kim Jong-il quotations.

Then another music program comes on, this time featuring a group of men playing the accordion to a song about Kim Jong-il. Movies or plays that are shown are invariably from Communist China or before Perestroika Soviet Russia. When their North Korean soap opera released in 1972 was shown in China they were told, “The streets of China are empty because every one in China is home watching it.” “The Flower Girl” was, of course, written by their Eternal President Kim Il-sung! It starred a 17-year-old who became one of Great Leader Kim Jong-il’s mistresses. No one anyplace, including China, would be interested in this 45-year-old film, but the North Korean people are fed the same lies over and over and over again.

**Difficult to Have to Think**

The hardest part of the English lessons taught the bright North Korean college student is to teach the writing of an essay. The concept that you should write to prove an idea to your readers by offering an argument and then giving evidence to prove it is foreign to boys taught from childhood to believe whatever the Great Leader said is true, and to parrot it back, without the benefit of thought or proof being necessary. They of course have no access to the World Wide Web; this is strictly forbidden except to those employed in cyber warfare under complete secrecy that no North Korean knows about.

But Suki Kim writes, “Misinformation and lack of information were not the only problems in teaching them how to write an essay. In their storytelling, a conclusion was always predetermined.” “At the end [of a skit or drama they had produced] the whole cast again burst into a song about their gratitude to the Workers’ Party. The exact reason why they suddenly thanked their Party was unclear, but all of the skits ended, regardless of plot, with a song of gratitude to either their Leader or their Party.”

The students find it hard to think for themselves, because all their lives they have been taught and required on pain of punishment, banishment, or death to blindly repeat their dogmas. “In [t]his country there was no proof, no checks and balances—unless of course, they wanted to prove that the Great Leader had singlehandedly written hundreds of operas and thousands of books and saved the nation and done a miraculous number of things. Their entire system was designed not to be questioned, and to squash critical thinking...The writer of an essay acknowledges the arguments opposing his thesis and refutes them. Here, opposition was not an option.”

**Dogma Controlling Education**

The teaching at Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST) is completely controlled. All teaching plans have to be approved by North Korean “Counterparts,” or minders. All classes have formal monitors in them to report any deviation from protocol. Students themselves have assigned buddies, and they are expected to report any unfaithfulness to their monitors. These partnerships are regularly replaced to prevent true friendships from forming. The phone calls and conversations of the foreign teachers are always monitored. No unsupervised travel is permitted off campus without minders in attendance.

This totalitarian state has 24 million people under complete governmental control. For nearly 70 years they have a uniform united belief that has not been seriously questioned. This is a little larger than the estimates of membership in the SDA church, but there is not a whiff of dissent seen in that congregation.
**North Korean Pride**

There are no homosexuals in North Korea, there is no formal mechanism for divorce, they have free health care and free education, and pornography is non-existent. Women are said to have equal rights, but fill no leadership positions, and the young elite males at PUST feel that fellow female students are pleased when the male student gives a female student his laundry to be done by her. The government rewards women who contribute to the good of the Party by allowing them access to plastic surgery. There are no high female leaders in the Worker’s Party except wives or concubines of the top male leaders.

All young people do obligatory gardening or other manual labor weekly “for the good of the nation.” The students have daily exercises at 5 am before breakfast and classes, summer or winter. The North Koreans even have their own chronological system. All dates begin for North Korea with the birth of their Great General Kim Il-sung on April 15, which is a national holiday and the starting date for their calendar as year zero. Their other holidays are Great Leader Kim Jong-il’s birthday, February 16. They have a December 24 holiday too, but it is not Christmas Eve; it is the birthday of Great Leader’s wife, and the day he was given the title of Supreme Commander of the Korean’s People’s Army, surely a wonderful day for all believers to celebrate. On January 1, at start of the New Year, everyone gets up early and goes to statues of both Great Leaders to give thanks for all the blessings they receive.

So, by control of access to information for 24 million North Koreans, by constant repetition of the same dogmas week after week after week, by misinterpretation of the world as a dangerous place and each North Korean a soldier ready to die to kill South Korean and American enemies, by demanding belief in dogma without questioning those beliefs, North Koreans have been led to behave, believe, and parrot back their dogmas without questioning them. They believe that their world, as far as anything counts, is 115 years old.

**A Nation of Slaves**

18 million Seventh-day Adventists have been told by the vote of the General Conference and our Great Leader, that against all the information available the earth was created in six 24-hour days, like our present American week, and this happened recently. Not perhaps exactly 6,000 years ago, but surely not thousands or millions or billions of years ago!

Against all probability or possibility, we are now told that the land of Noah covered by the flood had to include the entire globe, even though the Bible knows nothing of a globe. We are told this and require our teachers to teach this, even though knowledgeable people know it cannot be and is in fact not true.[ii] For the sake of “unity” and for “the good of the church,” we must teach this error to our children, and have them parrot these beliefs back without thinking too much about evidence for them.
Caption: Great Leaders of course have an Executive Committee to keep them in line.

North Korea proves that the same lies and half-truths repeated religiously and drummed into people discouraged from even acknowledging that there are other interpretations available for the same data, by dishonest and one-sided use of data, by putting dogma before facts, and twisting any facts to fit the dogma, have created a nation of slaves.

How Error Becomes Sin

The worship of a cherished interpretation of the Bible stories over the facts available to all who wish to know them is an idolatry that must not stand. The elevation of ignorance to fundamental belief is our shame and our battle cry. When we were ignorant of the age of the earth, it was still an error to believe earth was about six thousand years old. Now that we know the facts, it is no longer an "error" to hold to a recent chronology; it is a "sin."[iii]

If being true to the Bible requires lies and deception, there is something wrong with our use of the Bible. The following dates are not exact but they are in fact correct in scope, if not in detail.

- **The universe is about 13.8 Billion years old, from when God said, “Let there be Light.”**
- The physical Earth was created in just the right place at just the right time; about 4.5662 billion years ago it was “formless and void.”
- The moon was created by a cosmic collision 40 million years later, creating the essential conditions for life.
- The creation of an atmosphere that could support carbon-based life started with bacteria about 3.8 billion years ago, the necessary “firmament.”
- The creation of ferns and then sea creatures and then dinosaurs and then birds and then mammals has largely happened over the last 600 million years or so.
- The creation of modern humans in the image of Godlikeness to rule this world happened sometime 60,000 to 200,000 years ago, although these dates are less certain than the other dates listed. Archeology has shown a cultural “big bang” 40,000 to 45,000 years ago, perhaps after Noah’s flood. But there are caves in South Africa with engraved ostrich eggs dating back 60,000 years, and heat-treated microlith blades between 70,000 and 80,000 years ago. DNA mutation rates of the Y-chromosome back to the genetic Adam and of mitochondria back to the genetic Eve are more speculative, but yield estimates of from 50,000 to 300,000 years ago, with a consensus hovering about 100,000 years ago.[iv]

Anyone who tells you creation happened about 6,000 years ago, is someone who lived and wrote more than 50 years ago before this information became available, is ignorant of the recently established facts, blinded to them by their dogma, or ruling North Korea. I regret being so blunt but someone has to tell the emperor he has no clothes.

Your Bible tells this same story (without dates attached) in an outline form as a beautiful poem of creation, more precisely and beautifully than any of the creation stories before or after it.[v]
The first angel’s message in Revelation 14 tells all the world to worship Him WHO made it; not a word, however, is mentioned about worshiping WHEN or HOW God created.[vi]

**Scientific and Religious Truth Both Progressive**

Let Seventh-day Adventists get on with our job of being truth tellers and truth seekers. All that North Korea needs is full access to the truth, and they could join the civilized world again.

Caption: Women have their place in North Korea, marching in uniformity to the Great Leader’s command.

All that Adventism needs is full acknowledgment of the truths of science, so we can combat the errors of science. Evolutionists are wrong about mechanisms and purposes of creation. Young Earth Creationists are wrong about the chronology of creation. Until we admit where they are right on the age of the earth, we have no standing to show them where they are wrong crediting materialism with the power of design.

Until we accept the truths God has given us through science, we are in rebellion against truth and the God of truth. Hiding behind the pages of the Bible against solid scientific facts damages both the credibility of the Bible and the credibility of the truth denier. Science is often wrong, but its strength is that it is willing to change based on evidence. Religion must likewise be open to change. Here is how Great Leaders of Adventism have expressed it:

“*The great principle … that truth is progressive, that Christians should stand ready to accept all the light which may shine from God's holy word, was lost sight of by their descendants… Though a few faithful men arose, from time to time, to proclaim new truth and expose long-cherished error, the majority, like the Jews in Christ's day or the papists in the time of Luther, were content to believe as their fathers had believed and to live as they had lived. Therefore religion again degenerated into formalism; and errors and superstitions which would have been cast aside had the church continued to walk in the light of God's word, were retained and cherished.*” [vii]

“You shall know the Truth and the Truth will set you free.”[viii]

North Korea and Adventism both need to listen to these truly Great Leaders and return to a platform of Truth.
FOOTNOTES:


[ii] There are Adventist theologians who argue for the sake of their interpretation that it *should be* true, but there are no Adventist geologists who argue that it is or can be true.

[iii] James 4:17. *Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*


[v] Biblical Hebrew has no word for era or age, except *yom*, which means day, or “back in the day.” The Biblical translation “evening and morning” is not the usual way to describe a 24 hour day (we use “morning and evening”) so in Genesis it can be translated as “darkening” and “lightening” suggesting each Creation Day was imperfect or dark at the start of the age like a night, and was better or light after God’s creative action at the end of the age like daylight. See: Hoehn, Jack. *Adventist Today*, The Greater Controversy. Winter 2015, pages 14-21.


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COMMENTS? Positive useful comments or corrections are welcome. Negative comments should say more than “you are wrong.”
A God Who Speaks

By Debbonnaire Kovacs, posted Aug 13, 2015

Our God is a God who speaks. What would it be like to be one of his mouthpieces? If you would like to know, study Jeremiah’s whole life, from reluctant youth with a tendency to blame God and doubt his dealings to mature prophet who speaks the word of God in love and boldness. Here is one way to imagine his call. Based on Jeremiah 1:1-10, 17-19.

Background:

Jeremiah lived in the priest-city of Anathoth. When he was called, he was about twenty years old, and King Josiah, who had ascended to the throne at the age of eight, was only twenty-one. Josiah had already done a great deal in an attempt to lead his people to reform (II Kings 22, 23). But Judah, though at first they seemed to reform, simply would not really commit their lives. They had plenty of false prophets saying, “Don’t worry, you are God’s chosen people, nothing can happen to you.” Judah preferred to listen to them.

Jeremiah tells us nothing about where he was or what he was doing when the word of the Lord came to him. We are free to imagine the setting in any way we please.

*                 *                  *

Yahweh! Speaking to me!

My heart beats like a war drum, and my palms feel wet. I remember the story of Isaiah, who saw a vision of the courts of Heaven, and thought he would die because he had seen God. But what is this He is saying?

“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you.”

Me? I have a wild, momentary notion that He has gotten me mixed up with someone else. Consecrated me for what?

“I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Oh, no! I can’t be a prophet! What do I know about being a prophet? And what does He mean, “to the nations”? No other prophet has been told to prophesy to any other people than his own. I force words from my mouth, and they jerk out, dry-sounding.

“Ah, no, Lord God! I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth!”

But He stops me. “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak.”

I bow my head. It is His will. He does mean I shall prophesy to other nations. But with His words. (They will hate me.)

He knows my thoughts. “Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you.”

I look up again, and feel my fear receding. Then He reaches forth His holy hand to touch my very unholy mouth—a wonderful and awful experience! “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”
I am growing frightened again. Not very reassuring words, these. They really will hate me. But when He has shown me strange visions of an almond rod and a boiling pot, and declared troubling judgments against Judah, He ends with promises.

“But you, gird up your loins; arise and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them. And behold, I make you this day a fortified city, and iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its princes, and the people of the land. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, … to deliver you.”

And He is gone. All seems dark, bereft of His brightness.

I cannot help wishing He had chosen someone else. But I am His to command. Let me not be found wanting. May my words be His, and not mine, all the days of my life.

I wonder, will prophesying make me tremble as I am trembling now?

No matter. He promised to protect me. Whom shall I fear?

Yahweh has spoken.
Judas and the Gospel of Jesus, Have We Missed the Truth about Christianity? (BOOK REVIEW)

by N. T. Wright, Baker Books Grand Rapids, MI, 2006. Reviewed by Ella M. Rydzewski, August 13, 2015:  As a renowned scholar and the Bishop of Durham of the Church of England, Wright has authored more than 30 books. He wrote this one to shine the light of New Testament history on a Gnostic document discovered in the 1970s but not translated for 30 years. In 2006 it was edited and published with a commentary by Bart Ehrman. Ehrman is a liberal New Testament scholar at the University of North Carolina and is featured in the Great Courses DVDs.

Its publication became a center of excitement since, as Wright says, its first editors, Meyer and Ehrman’s comments “reveal precisely that longing for new evidence to set against classic Christianity.” He infers it can be no coincidence it came out just before Easter and sported a snazzy-up cover for popular consumption.

Wright says this new “Gospel of Judas” tells us nothing about the real Jesus or Judas. Its enthusiasm only exposes the agenda in a quest for an “alternative Jesus” and provides sensational material made popular in books like Dan Brown’s The Da Vinci Code. Having written extensively elsewhere about Jesus of Nazareth in His historical context Wright does not repeat that material.

The document has proved authentic from third-or-fourth-century Egypt and reveals why second-century Christians rejected the Gnostic Christian alternative. But it doesn’t disprove Christianity. It does tell how some in the past reinterpreted that faith and how some want to reinterpret it now.

There were different varieties of Gnosticism, Christianity, and Judaism in the second century, but they held common central beliefs. Irenaeus says they referred to themselves as “people of knowledge” or gnostikoi. According to Wright, Gnosticism has four major features:

1) A dark dualism in which the material world of space and time are perceived as bad and created by an evil god; this includes humans in their physical bodies.

2) The world was made by a bad god, but there is a pure, wise, and true divinity different from the creator god and sometimes called “Father.”

3) The human goal is to escape the wicked world and human existence; salvation is to obtain deliverance from the material cosmos.

4) The way to this salvation is through a “secret” knowledge acquired by learning about the true god. This comes through a revealer (Jesus was seen as a revealer) from the upper spiritual world to the chosen few that have “within themselves the spark of light, the divine identity hidden deep in their shabby, gross outward material form.”

Irenaeus and other early Christian teachers document these distinguishing marks. In the Gnostic texts themselves, are the codices from Nag Hammadi and elsewhere and now the Gospel of Judas. The texts are relentlessly hostile to the main lines of ancient Judaism, even as they attempt to reinterpret the Old Testament. But much later we find Gnosticism in the Jewish movement Kabbalah. Wright notes that astral immortality was a pop notion in the ancient world, as it is today.

The author noted a familiar feel in parts of The Gospel of Judas that reminded him of letters he occasionally receives with page after page of rambling cosmological speculations, blocked letters, and underlining. I’ve seen
those sorts of letters while working for a religious magazine.

In spite of Ehrman and others' attempts to connect Gnosticism with Judaism, the author states it is clearly in opposition to a mainline Jewish worldview of the goodness of the material world. The canonical gospels are early; the Gnostic ones late. Wright shows the difference between the two.

Why suggest the Gospel of Judas offers new insights? Wright concludes some scholars in North America are eager to teach and believe a story “even at the cost of writing what most historians will regard as manifest nonsense. This is what I call the New Myth of Christian Origins.” It has more to do with social and anti-religious fashions than in historical research, he says.

I found this an intriguing book from which one can trace the current presence of dualism in Christianity through the ages. It’s a theological battle the disciples faced in the first century and still persists in different forms.

By Ella M. Rydzewski
Sheep Whisperer Changes Lives

By Debbonnaire Kovacs, posted August 12, 2015

You’ve heard the story: the one about the devoted shepherd who watches over the sheep, looks for the lost ones, bottle feeds the abandoned lambs, the shepherd whose gentle voice and calming presence make the sheep feel secure. With such a shepherd, sheep (not known for their intelligence or their confidence) willingly enter strange pens or chutes—even submit to scary things like shots and shearing.

You’ve heard the story. You just haven’t heard of the good shepherd as a grade school girl.

Shilo Stolz, age 19 at this writing, has two nicknames. Her friends and family call her Shi (pronounced Shy). It’s short for her name, but it’s also a descriptor. Shilo has been a quiet, shy person for much of her life, including when she first went to Walla Walla Valley Academy. Her other nickname is “the sheep whisperer,” because since childhood she could get the family’s Painted Desert Sheep to do pretty much whatever she wanted.

“She has this really calm spirit,” her mother, Gail Stolz, told AToday. “We would say, ‘Do you think you can go get the sheep?’ and she would go out there, and I don’t know what she would do, but she would get 25 or 30 head of sheep into the pen for immunizations or whatever we needed… She has fed many baby sheep with a bottle; she would find lost ones, or twins or triplets not accepted by their mothers, and she’d raise them. So she not only has the gift of wisdom to work with them, but also the grace to know when they need help.”

Shilo didn’t start out in an environment that would have encouraged this kind of spirit. She was born in extreme poverty and neglect in the Marshall Islands. And Gail and Milo Stolz didn’t set out to adopt an overseas baby, either. It seems to have been God’s idea from the outset.

“In September, 1996,” Gail Stolz explained, “we got call from a friend in the Marshall Islands. Someone had asked her if she knew anyone that would like to adopt a little girl who was not being taken care of and needed a family.”

The Stolzes, who already had a ten-year-old son, were surprised to be the ones to receive such a call, but after “much discussion and prayer, we were like, wow, the Lord’s calling us to do this!”

Working out the adoption was a long and complicated process including things like finding a Marshallese attorney and submitting to FBI background checks because they would have to go through a US missile range which guards some Top Secret information. In fact, in November, when Gail went there while Milo stayed home with their son, she had to go back to the nearby island with the baby every night. Why? The baby, seven months old and weighing only eleven pounds (about 5 kilos), was not a US citizen because the adoption was not finalized, so she was not allowed on the missile base.

After five days, Gail got her prospective daughter to the high court in the Marshall Islands capital city of Majuro, where the adoption was finalized.

And so the little sheep whisperer began to grow up as an American girl (Shilo has dual citizenship in the US and the
Marshall Islands). At Walla Walla Valley Academy, despite the growing confidence that learning to be a “sheep whisperer” had brought her, Shilo had her difficulties but with the guidance of fantastic teachers who helped her grow into a young adult, Shilo became known as a deeply loyal friend and one who would “give the shirt off her back” to those she loved.

Still, everyone who knew Shilo was astonished when she chose to be a Week of Prayer speaker during her senior year (2014-15).

Gail explained: “I think because she was so shy, she felt the need to tell her story. So she was one of the speakers, which amazed everyone. We were there, and when she got up front, she was really quiet. We thought, “Oh, no, can she do this?’ But she told the story of her adoption and all the mixed feelings that brought. She described her walk with God. The year before, she’d lost one of favorite teachers from cancer and she was very angry with God. She shared how she got through that and realized that God had plan for her life. She said how lucky she feels to be adopted—she probably wouldn’t have survived if she’d stayed in the Marshall Islands. Instead, she has loving parents, security, the farm… People were just speechless. Many students actually came to see the school counselor because Shilo sharing her story brought out their feelings and stories, too.”

The story didn’t end there. Every school year, the local Walla Walla Noon Rotary Club offers one $1,000 scholarship to a student selected by his or her teachers for having made the most improvement, overcome the most hurdles and adversity, come the furthest; in other words, an outstanding student, but not necessarily or only scholastically. Shilo’s teachers chose her.

She had to go to the Rotary Club meeting and accept the scholarship, and “she did a great job” of that, too, says her mother. “She can use the scholarship for any school of her choice, but she’s still trying to figure out what she wants to do with her life.”

Meanwhile, besides whispering to the sheep, Shilo loves riding her motorcycle, and does a lot of volunteering, from Pathfinders to a veterinarian’s clinic.

Gail gave a last testimonial to the influence her quiet daughter has. Last spring, a student died in an accident and a teacher had to get up and talk about it. “She didn’t think she could do it,” Gail said. “But she thought if Shilo could, she could. She got courage by thinking of Shilo.”

That’s a mighty influence. *Adventist Today* salutes Shilo Stolz and offers a blessing on her continued path with the God who has brought her this far on an amazing journey.
Men Are Four

By S M Chen, posted Aug. 12, 2015

Author's note: While this reminder may be unnecessary, any reference to the masculine in this piece is intended to be gender neutral and inclusive of the feminine.

Of the several advantages to having multiple older siblings, one was what I learned.

When I was quite young, my eldest brother came home one day and recited this Arabic apothegm:

Men Are Four

He who knows not, and knows not he knows not—he is a fool; shun him.

He who knows not, and knows he knows not—he is simple; teach him.

He who knows, and knows not he knows—he is asleep; waken him.

He who knows, and knows he knows—he is a wise man; follow him.

But we must be careful of knowledge, which sits somewhere between information and wisdom.

T. S. Eliot wrote these cautionary lines, in 'The Rock':

‘Where is the wisdom we lost in (the pursuit of) knowledge?  Where is the knowledge we lost in (the pursuit of) information?’  [Parentheses and words contained therein are mine.]

How does the above aphorism relate to matters of ultimate concern?

I might paraphrase it thusly:

Men Are Four

He who is evil, and remains evil—he is a fool; shun him.

He who is evil, and becomes good—he has accepted grace; rejoice for him.

He who is good, and becomes evil—he has lost his way; pity him.

He who is good, and remains good—he is a wise man; follow him.

Holy Writ provides ample examples of each.

Cain, many if not most of the evil kings of Judah and Israel, almost the entire population of earth before the Great Deluge, most of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah—these fit in the first category.

The last group is comparatively small.  Enoch, Elijah and Moses fit here.  Doubtless countless unnamed others, such as those resurrected at the time of Christ's ascension from earth.  And Christian martyrs, including most of the disciples of Jesus.
The third group is one about which I have some hesitation, for to generate a list (even small) requires a certain amount of judgment, something at which I am not accomplished. Begging your indulgence, I will proffer a few names.

Lucifer.

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, started off with great promise. Whether his later life will be ultimately considered good or evil, or somewhere in between, we are told that, due to his many wives and concubines, his allegiance to Yahweh weakened as he advanced in years.

Judas may well fall into this category, as may Ananias and Sapphira. And perhaps Gehazi, servant of Elisha. Uzzah, Achan, Korah, Dathan and Abiram? Who knows? Even Miriam and Aaron, at least for a time.

The group that interests me the most, however, is the second.

Virtue and its lack are more elusive than knowledge and ignorance. Knowledge, or at least information, once gained, is generally retained (for purposes of simplification, I deliberately omit the effect of aging and dementia).

Whereas the battle for men’s souls is incessant, and the pendulum may swing between positive and negative, light and darkness, good and evil daily, even moment by moment. And we choose constantly; make decisions about what to think, say, and do. And what goes on inside (our motives) counts for more than what is apparent on the outside (our actions).

Those who at one point chose something other than the Almighty (as did Lucifer, our first parents, and the vast majority of this planet’s denizens), but who, through grace, realized how fruitless it is to attempt to gratify self; it is those whose stories move me.

Joseph’s brothers, the thief on the cross, Mary Magdalene, the prodigal son, many with deathbed confessions/conversions. Rahab. Saul, who was to become Paul.

And Manasseh.

When I recently read the account of the life of Manasseh, despite having read it before, I was taken aback.

Here was the son of a good king, Hezekiah, who ascended the throne at age 12 and co-reigned for 10 years, at which time his father died. Manasseh lived in a time of prosperity and spiritual vitality. He had a godly father, who must have told him of the miraculous prolongation of his own life by 15 years in response to supplication.

Yet ‘he did evil in the sight of the Lord.’ More iniquitous was he than even surrounding heathen nations. His heinous acts are detailed in II Kings 21 and II Chronicles 33. Not only did he lead Judah in idolatry, he offered his own children as burnt sacrifices. One of the most wicked kings of Judah, he shed much innocent blood; it was likely he who was responsible for the death of the prophet Isaiah who, upon threats to his life, hid in the trunk of an oak tree, only to be discovered and subsequently sawn in half.

It would have been easy to understand God’s rejection of Manasseh. But, instead, He related to Manasseh in a manner similar to the way He interacts with us.

First, He spoke quietly. When Manasseh didn’t listen, God, with greater clarity and insistence, reminded Manasseh, through the prophets, of promises—of blessing if Manasseh obeyed, of judgment if he did not.

Manasseh was hard-headed. Willful, obstinate, and entrenched in wickedness.

So the Assyrians attacked Judah and took Manasseh captive. With a ring/hook in his nose and in chains, he went from the glory of king to the ignominy of prisoner within a short time period.
And it was there, in captivity, that he finally had an epiphany and besought the Lord.

His entreaties to the Almighty were heard.

A part of me wants to stop reading and protest, ‘But Manasseh rejected You. Time and again. Why would You listen to and succor him now?’

How much greater is God’s mercy than mine.

God did rescue Manasseh, and he was restored to his former position as king of Judah. And the latter part of his life, following his captivity and release, was exemplary. He undid much of the evil he had perpetrated during his earlier years of rule. (But he couldn’t undo some of it. The lives of his sacrificed children and Isaiah he couldn’t bring back).

He reigned for a total of 55 years—the longest recorded rule of any king of Israel or Judah.

The story of Manasseh gives me hope. And makes me more empathetic toward my fellow humans, each of whom has his own struggles.

I cannot but marvel at the forbearance, compassion, and grace of the One whose ways are past understanding and whose modus operandi has always been love.
Nothing In My Hands, Chapter Thirteen

By Del Starr, a pseudonym, all rights reserved.

Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea

Dianne now struggled between her obligations as a mother and her loneliness. She felt somehow that the two were intertwined. She had never, except for the occasions of transporting school buses, left her children in the care of a babysitter. Now, stuck in the little country area, isolated from the rest of the world, she would not be able to provide her children with a father or herself with a helpmeet. She pondered the possibility that she might have to give up the children in order to provide safety for them but in her heart, she could not. She had come this far; she would not be deterred.

Her stepsister, Kathy, came to Portland and moved in with her own son, Devon, who was the same age as Cynthia. One of the first things she noted was Dianne’s depression. “Dianne,” she said, “You must do something to make YOUR life alive. You have reached a point where you are boring and you must be boring to yourself as well.”

Dianne knew that Kathy spoke the truth. She did need something to take her attention away from her troubles. She had been sewing and doing little craft projects but she needed to interact with other people in order to maintain her sanity as she lived in a world of “little people”.

Kathy suggested that she and Dianne go out for the evening. Dianne agreed. Janetta was old enough now to care for the children in her mother’s absence. Dianne put the children to bed at nine and she and Kathy prepared to go out.

Nine o’clock at night is not the time to go to the library or take a course or any of the normal things that people do. The only choices were a movie or a bar. A movie would not afford opportunity to interact with others and so Dianne and Kathy went to a bar.

Dianne was actually stunned. Here were people laughing and joking, interacting with each other and enjoying themselves. She ordered a drink. Since she was not a regular drinker, it was not long until she was inebriated. They stayed all night. After the bar closed the two women had breakfast in the attached restaurant and then returned home. Dianne had had the most fun she had had in years and she looked forward to going out again.

It wasn’t long. Kathy enjoyed the camaraderie of the bar and was familiar with it and so she suggested that they go again. Without a moment’s hesitation, Dianne began to get ready. The bath, the makeup, the hair styling. This time Kathy suggested that Dianne wear something a “little less Seventh-day Adventist.” Dianne wasn’t very comfortable with that thought. She had always dressed in the manner that she dressed while in academy, just as she believed Ellen White had told her to dress. Her necklines came up to the third vertebrae in the back and were not below the collarbone in the front, her skirts were always at least two inches below the knee, and she dressed in sensible shoes. But Kathy had been right about her need for interaction with others, so she was probably right about the way Dianne dressed, too.

It really didn’t make any difference. Dianne wasn’t working toward heaven any longer.

She looked through her meager closet. By rolling up the waistline of a skirt and unbuttoning a couple of buttons on the blouse, she found an outfit that would serve her well. Dousing themselves with their favorite scents, Kathy and Dianne returned to the bar once more, after the children were in bed. Dianne was more comfortable this time and she smiled and laughed with the rest of the patrons. Men would ask her to dance and though she was not familiar
with dancing, she soon learned. Life began to take on some color and Dianne now was making friends.

“Going out” soon became a habit. It afforded Dianne with the time to talk with adults instead of screaming children and, with Kathy at her side, she didn’t need to be shy in any way. Kathy was a fun person and Dianne loved her.

At first they went out only a couple of times a week. Neither of them could afford to buy drinks very often. But Dianne soon learned how to smile in “just that way” that would cause a gentleman to buy her a drink. The first night that all of her drinks were paid for by others gave her enough money to be able to afford to go out an extra time that week. As the ladies became more proficient about being able to procure drinks from others, their activity increased and soon they were staying home once or twice a week, rather than going out once or twice a week. Dianne, though, was very careful that her children were cared for, and she never left the house until they were safely and snugly tucked in their beds for sleep.

Along with the increased drinking came a tolerance for alcohol and it became necessary to drink more to reach the “high” that once had taken only two drinks. Dianne began to worry a bit about her drinking but she was having so much fun that she push the worry to the back of her mind. Recognizing that they needed a “little stimulus” for their drinking and considering that drinks were costly, Dianne and Kathy went to a liquor store and purchased a pint of alcohol to mix with soda pop which they could then drink on their way to the bar.

Months and months of this activity built up a strong tolerance and soon the regular bottle of alcohol mixed with soda pop was not enough. Kathy and Dianne began to purchase a pint of 151 rum. It burned all the way to their stomachs but it afforded just the “little stimulus” that they needed before going out. Each of them drank half the bottle.

The two were always home in time to get the children off to school but many days they had to crawl into bed to sleep after the older children were gone. The little ones would awaken and play in their room until Dianne and Kathy got up.

Dancing, drinking, and men! These were the things uppermost on Dianne and Kathy’s minds and it’s what their conversation consisted of all during the day. The children didn’t mind, since food was always on the table and their clothes were ready to wear. They had their own lives and the adults had theirs.

Dianne’s moral values had slipped also and men began to be a priority. She was, after all, looking for a husband and father for her children. The only way that she was going to find one was to satisfy their needs, or so she thought. Dianne began to hop from bed to bed.

She finally met the man of her dreams. Joe! He was tender to her and seemed to be caring. He didn’t even ask her to go to bed with him that first night and Dianne was certain that this relationship had potential. Though she continued going out, she reserved her heart and body for Joe.

Joe shared his story with Dianne. He worked for the Freightliner Corporation and had for nearly twenty years. He had been married for twenty-three years, but he and his wife had come to a parting of the ways. He had a twelve-year-old daughter at home with his wife and an older daughter who was married and on her own, while he shared an apartment with a male friend. Joe had been having a relationship with a woman, but when she met someone with more money, she had dumped Joe flat and moved to the other end of the continent. Joe had suffered terribly over this and at first he could talk about nothing but the other woman to Dianne. Dianne knew, though, that she had hit “pay dirt.” Joe had a good track record, so it seemed, in relationships, he had a steady job, and he showed that he could love deeply. Dianne knew that if she could focus that love on herself that she would never be unhappy or lonely again. So she listened to Joe’s stories and encouraged him as he tried to regain his footing.

There is a premise that says that men who have just broken off a relationship will take up with another woman but that when it comes to marriage, they will move on as that woman knows too much about them. Dianne was determined that this would not happen to her.
She bought Joe records; Joe brought her flowers. They were so attuned to each other. They could seemingly read each other's minds. Life began to have some real meaning again for Dianne.

It was early in the morning. The older kids had left for school and the younger ones played in their room while Dianne and Kathy caught a little bit more sleep. Dianne was roused by a little hand lightly tapping on her shoulder and a little voice. It was Cynthia. “Mommy, Monmy,” she whispered, “the house is on fire!”

Dianne bolted upright, instantly awake. “Where, honey?”

“In our bedroom!”

Dianne rushed into the next bedroom and there were Randy and Devon sitting on the bed while fire dripped around them onto the covers. The fire was in the ceiling. Horrified, Dianne grabbed up the two babies and screamed at Cynthia to “go wake up Aunt Kathy!” She made feeble attempts to put the fire out but she could not access it well in the ceiling and so, pulling the children with her into her own bedroom, she called 911 for a fire engine.

When Kathy appeared, Dianne hollered for her to take the babies outside. Dianne grabbed what bedding and clothing she could, threw some out the window, grabbed some more, and raced down the stairs and out the door to where Kathy and the children waited. She had just purchased a new car and it was parked in the driveway under the windows of the bedroom that was now burning.

Dianne realized that she was still in her nightgown. She rifled through the things she had brought out and found her housecoat. She then herded everyone into the car and drove it into the garden area so that it would be well away from the burning house and also so that the fire engines would have better access to the fire.

The family huddled in the car while the firefighters battled the blaze. Neighbors came out on the street to watch the commotion. It didn’t take long for the fire to be controlled, perhaps an hour or so, and Dianne and Kathy were allowed to enter the house.

Now there was a large gaping hole in the ceiling and roof of the bedroom. Water had destroyed many more things and Dianne feared for the welfare of her children. She had been unable to fix the problems in the house already, and now this. There was one blessing. They had been without insurance, but just six months ago she had purchased a policy. BUT...

The origin of the fire needed to be determined or the insurance company would not pay. Cynthia, Randy and Devon were each taken individually into the fire chief’s car and interrogated as to how the fire started. All three told the same story. Devon had found some candles. He took his mother’s lighter from her bedside and lighted the candles, holding them up to the roof to determine what would happen.

They now knew.

Though this was devastating news for Kathy, it was good news for Dianne, for if it had been her own children who started the fire, the insurance would not have paid. But since it was Devon, they would pay for the loss and go after Kathy for repayment.

One of the neighbors took the family in until the other children came home from school. Dianne met them, still in her housecoat, and informed each one of the day’s events before they were allowed to view their home. The Red Cross came by and provided hotel lodging and chits for food and clothing. Dianne, Kathy, and the children moved into a nearby hotel.

Dianne was in a state of shock and couldn’t figure out what to do next. She called Joe to tell him what had happened and he asked what Dianne wanted him to do. Dianne, of course, had no idea, except that she needed comfort. “I just wanted to let you know,” she said weakly. Joe left it at that. This should have been a red flag for
Dianne but she was unable to see past her need for love and assurance, not to mention financial help for her children.

After a week in the hotel, with the Red Cross helping, Dianne was able to find a house to rent. It was a bit small for twelve people, but they would make do until such time as the insurance was settled and Dianne determined what she would do from that point.

Janetta had become acquainted with the son of a professor from Andrews University who was in Portland on a sabbatical, working on his doctorate degree. Janetta was too much like her mother. She felt that at age sixteen she was ready to marry and raise a family. Dianne did not agree.

Strangely enough, though there was no relation, Janetta's friend had the same last name as did Joe and Dianne and Janetta found it amusing. Janetta’s friend, Luke, was attending Walla Walla College, his tuition greatly reduced because his father was a minister. His parents had provided him with a phone in his room and Janetta would call him. When Dianne received her phone bill she had a long talk with Janetta and told her that she was not to call Luke again. Janetta had always been a good daughter and complied with her mother’s wishes. This did not prevent her, however, from talking with Luke on the phone. Dianne would hear her talking for hours, long after the other children were asleep. Dianne did not know how they were paying for it but at least it would not be on her phone bill.

A phone call came from Luke’s parents. When the phone had been installed in Luke’s room, it had been set up to prevent long distance calls. They knew of Luke and Janetta’s interest in each other and were making certain that Luke was sensible about phoning Janetta. What they had failed to recognize though, was that though Luke could not make long distance calls, he could receive collect calls. The bill had mounted to $3000 before his parents had learned of it. Dianne was embarrassed but she did not have monies to be able to help pay the bill. The phone was removed from Luke’s room, and Janetta no longer spent the hours on the phone.

Luke came home for a break and he and Janetta spent a lot of time together. Dianne didn’t really care for Luke but she had to admit that he had a tremendous sense of humor, something that had been missing from the family’s lives for quite some time.

When Luke returned to college, Dianne awakened one morning to find a note on the kitchen table. It read, “Dear Mom, I’m running away from home but I want you to know where I’m going. I’m going to Walla Walla with Luke. You can reach me there. Love, Janetta.”

Dianne was flabbergasted! Her daughter had run away from home? Even more astounding, though, was that she had told her mother where she was running. Dianne was confused, but since Janetta had been honest and forthright with her, she decided that Janetta could be in a far less safe environment than Walla Walla. So she determined that she would leave her alone to learn some of life’s experiences. She neither called Janetta nor did Janetta call her for the time that she was in Walla Walla.

Later Dianne was to learn that Luke and Janetta had passed themselves off as married. Janetta had claimed to be eighteen and obtained work in the college factory. The college officials had believed that they were, indeed, married, and had provided married student housing. Of course, this changed Luke’s status as a minister’s son, and his tuition increased.

Dianne felt sorry for his parents as they tried to unravel the tangled web that Janetta and Luke had woven. The college, too, suffered embarrassment.

Janetta returned home. Soon, she learned that her own child was on the way. It was determined that for the sake of the child, Luke and Janetta should marry after all and Luke’s father performed a very simple ceremony.

Meanwhile, Dianne had received the insurance check from the fire, and it was a large amount. Her welfare payments were discontinued because she held the check in her hands. That, too, took some unraveling and
meanwhile, Dianne could not pay her rent. She received an eviction notice. She had been working with a local home builder who had a new home which she could purchase with a down payment consisting of her insurance check and the property on which the burned house stood. God’s hand was over her, though Dianne did not acknowledge Him or His help as the papers were signed and as she and her family moved out of the rental house under threat of eviction, directly into her own new home.
**CONCERTS ALERT FOR AUGUST**

Sent by Carole Derry-Bretschen, posted Aug 13, 2015

CHRISTIAN EDITION & HERITAGE SINGERS

HERITAGE SINGERS
Sunday, August 23…
6:00 PM
Minden Town Park Center of Downtown Minden
Minden, NV

CHRISTIAN EDITION
Saturday, August 29
7:00 PM
Loma Linda University Church Campmeeting
11125 Campus St.
Loma Linda, CA