What of Our Future?
Contemporary Perspectives on the Role of Regional Conferences

Recently some voices in Adventism have called for an end to our racially divided conference structure in North America. The Compass Magazine introduces...
a series of perspectives on this issue.

In the first article, "... Not As I Do," Attorney Michael T. Nixon reviews the history that led us to this point. He looks at the deeper problem that keeps us apart—and why we must solve it now.

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This article is the first of several perspectives on regional conferences that The Compass Magazine plans to publish. Please see our introduction to the topic by Senior Editor Michael Younker.

On April 10, 1944, The General Conference Committee held its Spring Meeting in the convention room of the Hotel Stevens in Chicago, IL. Gathered along with the committee were the North American Division’s local conference presidents, union treasurers and auditors, college presidents, and “colored representatives who were members of a large committee appointed to study the question of our colored work.”

GC President Elder J.L. McElhany gave the devotional thought that day. He read several passages from Testimonies to the Church, Volume 8, written by E.G. White, on “The Power Promised.” Here are some of the passages that he read:

*God does not ask us to do in our strength the work before us. He has provided divine assistance for all the emergencies to which our human resources are unequal. He gives the Holy Spirit to help in every strait, to strengthen our hope and assurance, to illuminate our minds and purify our hearts. . . .

*“With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them.” Acts 4:33. Under their labors there were added to the church chosen men, who, receiving the word of life, consecrated their lives to the work of giving to others the hope that had filled their hearts with peace and joy. . . .

To us today, as verily as to the first disciples, the promise of the Spirit belongs. God will today endow men and women with power from above, as He endowed those who on the day of Pentecost heard the word of salvation. At this very hour His Spirit and His grace are for all who need them and will take Him at His word.

Notice that it was after the disciples had come into **perfect unity**, when they were no longer striving for the highest place, that the Spirit was poured out. **They were of one accord. All differences had been put away. . . .**

**So it may be now. Let Christians put away all dissension, and give themselves to God for the saving of the lost.** Let them ask in faith for the promised blessing, and it will come. The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was “the former rain,” and glorious was the result. But the latter rain will be more abundant. . . .

*The presence of the Spirit with God’s workers will give the presentation of the truth a power that not all the honor or glory of the world could give. (p. 19-22)*

Elder McElhany added a short statement before praying to open the meeting: “As we take up the work of this council,” he said, “as we consider the matters that are to come before us, **let us make the things of first importance first in our thinking and in our praying. May we be led and guided by the Spirit of God.**”

As I finished reading these words, I was left with a mixture of emotions. I was moved to go back and read the Testimonies passage again, along with the biblical references behind its inspiration, which stirred up a longing within...
me for that latter rain. Then, like an audience member watching a movie based on a familiar true story, my heart sank. All the hope and inspiration that was stirred up within me after reading this powerful passage was sucked out of me when I reminded myself of the facts: this was the date that the General Conference decided to recommend that “colored conferences be organized.”

After the prayer in the spirit of unity was given and a preliminary matter was voted on, the second order of business that day, entitled “Colored Work in North America,” was dealt with. Here are several of the measures that the committee recommended and virtually unanimously approved:

1. “that a school be established in the North where advanced training can be given to our colored youth.”

2. that a commission be appointed to study ways to provide medical and nursing education for “our colored constituency in the North.”

3. “that the Southern Publishing Association secure a colored editor for the *Message Magazine.*” (*Message Magazine* was the only Adventist publication “geared towards colored people,” yet it had not up to that point employed an African-American editor.)

4. that a small publication be created for the “colored constituency” that was “somewhat comparable to the Union Conference papers in size and style” and would give them church news and promotional information.

Then, in the spirit of the church’s “soul-winning endeavors,” the following measure was recommended:

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WHEREAS, The present development of the work among the colored people in North America has resulted, under the signal blessing of God, in the establishment of some 233 churches with some 17,000 members: and

WHEREAS, It appears that a different plan of organization for our colored membership would bring further great advance in soul-winning endeavors; therefore

WE RECOMMEND, That in unions where the colored constituency is considered by the union conference committee to be sufficiently large, and where the financial income and territory warrant, colored conferences be organized.
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This measure also included the following:

- Colored conferences would be administered by colored officers/committees.
- Colored conferences would have the “same relation to their respective union as do the white conferences.”
- Another committee would figure out how soon before or after the 1944 Autumn Council it would be possible to implement colored conferences.
- “The 1930 plan of colored organization for the Southern States” would “be adopted for all territories in North America with sufficient members, but where the constituency is not sufficiently large to warrant the organization of colored conferences.”

This wasn’t the first and certainly wasn’t the last of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s “do as I say, not as I do” moments. There was glowing talk of unity in the Spirit and oneness among brethren who share this common faith. Ultimately, in response to this picture of unity, we chose division. In the face of oneness we chose none-ness. We talked the talk, but we didn’t . . . you can finish the saying yourself.

How did we get there? How did we miss the clear message of unity that was and is supposed to drive our church when it was staring us right in the face? The inconvenient truth is that, instead of doing the hard work of dealing with
the race problem in our church, we took the easy way out under the guise of a “great advance in soul-winning endeavors.” We appeared to be so laser-focused on saving/cleansing the souls of the world whom we were supposedly trying to reach (emphasis on *appeared*) that we neglected to seek the cleansing of our own souls and the cleaning of our own house.

In order to understand where, by God’s grace, we need to go as a church, it is critical for us to analyze and understand where we were, where we are, and how and why we got here.

**1889-1929**

Most point to statements made by Elder Charles M. Kinney at the Southern Conference Campground in 1889 (where he became the first black ordained minister in the Adventist Church) as the first to broach the idea of colored (later regional) conferences. The camp meeting did not attract its usual white crowd to the Nashville, TN, campground in response to the mere presence of black members, and many in attendance began to grapple with this issue of race for the first time.

Elder Kinney made his comments in response to questions by Robert M. Kilgore, leader of the Adventist work in the South. While Elder Kinney did eventually propose the idea of separate conferences, he first made this appeal for unity:

> It is probable that my ideas may be a little different from what has been expressed by some…. In the first place, a separation of the colored people from the white people is a great sacrifice upon our part: we lose the blessing of learning the truth…. I refer to the separation in the general meeting; that is, for them [colored people] to have a different camp meeting. It would be a great sacrifice upon the part of my people to miss the information that these general meetings would give them; and another thing, it seems to me that a separation in the general meetings would have a tendency to destroy the unity of the Third Angel’s Message. Now, then this question to me is one of great embarrassment and humiliation, not only to me, but to my people also.

Elder Kinney then proposed four thoughts to be considered while finding a solution:

1. “The course that shall be taken shall be pleasing to God;
2. “A position will be taken that will not compromise the denomination;
3. “The position that is to be taken will be to the best interest of the cause; and
4. “A position will be taken that will commend itself to the good judgment of the colored people, that they may not be driven from the truth by our position on this question.”

After providing those considerations, he gave the following first solution to the matter:

> I am glad to state first that the Third Angel’s message has the power in it to eliminate or remove this race prejudice upon the part of those who get hold of the truth. Second, that the Third Angel’s message is to go to all nations of people; that it cannot take hold of them if there is some obstacle in the way, and that the truth of the Third Angel’s message will enable us to remove that obstacle. The colored-line question is an obstacle…. The very presence of the colored people in church relations and in our general meetings is an obstacle, is a barrier that hinders the progress of the Third Angel’s message from reaching many of the white people.
That last sentence foreshadowed every meaningful action taken on the topic after it was made. Church leadership developed a line of thinking that said it was too hard to do the work of coming together in unity. Not even the power of the Holy Spirit and the motivation of the Third Angel’s Message could overcome the reality that worshipping together would hinder the church’s ability to reach White people, and that was too high a price to pay.

The rest of Kinney’s remarks included the various ways that those in the “colored work” would try to not interfere with those laboring in the white conferences, due in large part to the fact that there were not any meaningful voices screaming for unity from the “other side.” Toward the end of his remarks he said:

[I]n view of the outside feeling on the race question, and the hindrance it makes in accomplishing the work desired among the whites, the attendance of the colored brethren at the general meetings should not be encouraged, yet not positively forbidden…. I would say in this connection that in my judgment a separate meeting for the colored people to be held in connection with the general meetings, or a clear-cut distinction, by having them occupy the back seats…would not meet with as much favor from my people as a total separation. I am willing, however, to abide by whatever the General Conference may recommend in the matter, and advise my people to do the same…. Christian feeling between the two races [should be] zealously inculcated everywhere, so that the cause of separation may not be because of the existence of prejudice within, but because of those on the outside whom you hope to reach.

In 1890 the Adventist Church began operating under the policy proposed to the General Conference by Kilgore, in which he said that the work in the South for the white population could not succeed unless Adventists set up separate congregations for whites and blacks. Previous attempts to ratify such policies had always been shot down because they were seen to be out of line with Scripture. But the General Conference voted to adopt this policy, stating that it was the most expedient thing to do.

Nothing substantive was done on the issue of separate conferences until 1929, when the General Conference appointed a commission of 16 constituents (11 white, 5 black) to discuss the issue of what should be done with the colored members of the Adventist Church in North America. Much had been said by African-American ministers and lay members in the lead-up to this moment. The majority of what they said focused on how the leadership of the GC and North American Division (NAD) could help facilitate better relations between black and white membership inside as well as outside of the church.

J.K. Humphrey, an African-American minister serving a prominent role in New York, was one of the constituents invited to serve on the commission. After the meeting concluded, Humphrey stated that the white members of the commission met separately and asked the black members of the commission to rubber-stamp their decision that establishing black conferences was not appropriate. Black leaders were told not to bring up the subject again.

Sadly, after years of resisting the urgings of former black Adventist ministers, Humphrey decided to leave the Seventh-day Adventist Church due to the lack of movement on this as well as other issues. This sad event brought back memories of Kinney’s 1889 plea that the church’s position on this issue would not drive colored people from the truth.

1943

In 1943 Lucy Byard, an African-American lay member of the Adventist Church, died of pneumonia as a result of being refused treatment at the Washington Sanitarium (Adventist hospital). In response to this and other inhumane and heinous racial practices of the church, a group of Washington, D.C., laypersons formed “the National Association for the Advancement of Worldwide Work Among Seventh-Day Adventists" geared toward addressing
the racial wrongs in the church and making a call for equality.

In 1944, these laypersons penned a protest document entitled: “Shall the Four Freedoms Function among Seventh-Day Adventists?” In outlining the purposes and goals for their document, they stated that it was written in hopes that colored people would be estimated as:

- “brethren”;
- individuals just as “capable of attaining eternal life as the white man;
- “travelers to the same heaven to sit down at the same table as the whites”;
- “worshipers of the same God” as the whites;
- people with talent, ability, quick perception, bright minds, and reasoning power.

They felt that the duty of the white Adventists in helping to achieve reconciliation was:

- “to repair as far as in their power past injury done to the colored people”;
- “to show ‘exact and impartial’ justice to the Negro race”;
- “to increase the force of colored workers”;
- “to throw their influence against the customs and practices of the world.”

The document then listed several of the injustices being conducted by the church, including the following:

- Colored people were not generally admitted to Adventist institutions/sanitariums as patients/students/nurses. (In contrast, they mentioned that an Adventist “colored girl” was pursuing nursing at Bellevue in New York City; Catholic University was accepting colored students; City College of New York, Hunter College, the University of Chicago, Harvard, Northwestern, DePaul, and Toledo all employed African-American professors; Johns Hopkins Hospital and Sandy Spring Hospital were accepting African-American patients; etc.)
- There was no “standard satisfactory creditable academy” for colored youth.
- Emmanuel Missionary College (later my alma mater Andrews University) assigned colored students to sit in the rear during worship at chapel and made them wait for their meals until there was a “quota” of colored students to fill a table.
- Among other differences in treatment, the Secretary of the Colored Department at the GC did not have enough administrative authority (in other words, none). In addition, the Secretary was segregated for his meals. (At this time in Washington, D.C., the document noted, white and colored people ate together daily without friction in the cafeterias of the Library of Congress, Union Station, the National Art Gallery, etc.)

The document listed several different organizational solutions for these problems (none of which included racially segregated conferences), but what stood out most to me were the spiritual solutions that they offered to solve this difficult problem:

> There [should] be no intimidation of our colored clergymen and workers supported by the conferences when they attempt to better the conditions of their brethren…. Campaigns for colored work [should] be given the prominence and dignity that are given to all other phases of the work.

We have discussed what came next. The Spring Council of 1944 led to the formation of colored conferences. Many of the first presidents of those colored conferences were told that they would come crawling back. In the face of that adversity, these conferences all pressed on, persevered, and have grown into an essential part of not just the North
American Division but the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a whole.

In spite of our lack of unity as a church, the Lord has used us across the world in mighty ways. But the painful reality is that the call to unity made by Kinney in 1889 and the D.C. laypeople in 1944 has remained unanswered.

As we all know, once the years start going by, the history starts getting revised and the story begins to change. Why is it important for us to discuss this? Is reconciliation even necessary?

**Today**

The conclusion of this article will not amount to another criticism of the recent sermon preached by Pastor Dwight Nelson. His January 17, 2015, sermon at Pioneer Memorial Church, as well as the related petition, has revived the never-ending debate on state and regional conferences. Some felt that the sermon and petition were merely a call to shut down regional conferences so that they can “come back home.” Others felt that there is really no need to tackle this issue since everyone seems to be doing fine (not sure what definition of fine is being used).

The issue at hand is much deeper and more significant than the perceived shortcomings or overstatements found in one sermon. While I did not agree with everything that Pastor Nelson said, I know for a fact that his heart is in the right place. He showed a lot of courage by saying what he said, where he said it (I lived in Berrien Springs from 1998 to 2013, so I do not say that lightly). All in all, we miss the potential in this moment if our discussion and thought stops there.

The solution that we need to this problem was presented in 1889 by Kinney, in 1944 by the D.C. lay members and even during the decision on April 10, 1944, to racially segregate the NAD: Jesus! The Spirit of God infiltrating our entire being is the only remedy to this problem. What we need to remember is that the Spirit of God will guide us into all truth (John 16:13). If we are not interested in dealing with this issue with honesty and full transparency, the Spirit of God will not come. He will have no part in half measures, half surrenders, half truths, and shaky commitment. God wants our all, not just in our doctrine, evangelism, and diets, but also in our love—His love.

There is freedom in truth. April 10 of this year will mark 71 years since we made an official acknowledgment of our division, but in truth the division among racial lines in our church predated that acknowledgement. If we don’t do the work—the hard, sobering work—of reconciliation to each other in Christ, we will gradually fade into irrelevance. We can make a symbolic move to join together under the umbrella of our choosing, but if we do not commit to and accomplish the real work, the only difference that will exist will be ceremonial. The youth in our church will grow tired of looking past the glaring holes and contradictions in our message as compared to who we are as people. They will either find Christ elsewhere or reject Him altogether.

The GC formally instituted the division because they did not want to do the work necessary to find a way to worship as a unified body while still reaching all of the different demographics of people in our world. Since we know now, and have always known, that Christ is the only solution, why don’t we take Him up on this offer: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32, ESV).

Everyone is so worried about how a unified church structure will look and the logistics of how things should happen. We need to focus on allowing Christ to heal and reconcile us, and then trust in His Spirit to lead us into the future that He has in store for the Seventh-day Adventist mission.

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*And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in every thing he might be preeminent. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless*
and above reproach before Him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.” (Colossians 1:18-23, ESV)

The words of Paul to the Colossians are calling out to us for such a time as this. We are united not just by our day of worship, our doctrines, and our customs, but primarily by our Christ. He will reconcile us to Himself and make peace among us by the blood of His cross. If we come together and consider what Christ has done for all of us as members of His body, we will start to see how much more complete His body looks when it works and functions together.

I call out to each and every member of this body: Let God examine your heart. Let Him reveal the dark places to you, and allow Him to replace them with His light. Before we can “continue in the faith” as Paul declares, we “who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds” must be “reconciled in His body of flesh by His death” so that we may be presented “holy and blameless and above reproach before Him.” After this we will become “stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that [we] heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven”!

Do you believe that racial reconciliation is needed in the Adventist Church? What can you personally do to facilitate it? Leave a comment below with your thoughts.

God’s word has made things clear. We will not be able to proclaim the Third Angel’s Message to “all creation under heaven” until we submit ourselves to His reconciliation. It has not happened yet, and it will not happen until we are serious about being obedient to His Word.

We have a beautiful message and picture of Christ that this world needs to hear and see. If what we say does not align with what we do, we are no better than the members of the GC committees that have gone before us—people from whom we strive to distance ourselves while standing silently on the foundation that they built. If we decide it is best to continue in that way, we’d better hope that foundation isn’t sinking sand.

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* Emphasis in all quotations is supplied by the author.
Betrayed by Our Friends: The Psalmist’s Prayerful Approach to Healing a Polarized Community

Jerome Skinner

With the advent of globalization[1] coupled with multimedia resources and a plethora of varying belief systems and methods of establishing those creeds, how should we make sense of and interact with the divergent movements in society? Battle lines are drawn, opposing factions are equipped with the paraphernalia of ideologies and arms, and so-called enemies establish barriers that prevent any fruitful interaction.

This may seem like a somber and hyperbolic read of the world we live in. However, within and without the confines of religious bodies the tension is evident.

Tension, as described, is not exclusive to societal woes, but is strangely vibrant in the religious arena, as recent scrutiny of the church’s future demonstrates. What makes this intrachurch matrix more polarizing is the question of interpretation—not only of who is right and who is wrong, but of the emphasis that is put on certain texts as opposed to others. For instance, when thinking about an issue like theodicy,[2] if we read Job without hearing Proverbs, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes in the conversation, it would be very easy to develop a one-sided understanding of any topic the book addresses.[3]

This one-sided frame of thinking gives rise to polarization. Who is interpreting correctly often becomes the main issue of debate. As important as that is, we need to be careful that we do not make interpretation a god. Ellen White’s classic The Great Controversy makes it clear that those who were faithful to God in their understanding of Scripture will be in the kingdom even though they did not have the whole picture. For them as for us, confidence in Christ and His truth as absolute is paramount, yet humility in our personal understandings of Scripture ought to color the canvas of our read on any issue.

Hope or Hopelessness in the Midst of Polarization?

How do we, in constructive ways, navigate the divergent terrain that can allow us, on the one hand, to have an overly optimistic and at times naïve notion of progress, which in a secular context posits a Promethean past,[4] or, on the other hand, to capitulate to the hopeless doldrums of despair and an unhealthy critical attitude about the church,[5] which borders on nihilism?[6] I ask this because reactions to various stances on hot-button issues in the church such as women’s ordination, worship styles, sexual preferences, and faith and science perspectives have led to the polarization of bodies of believers. Exchanges on these topics have led many down barren pathways where the covenantal nature of faith is being attacked as much as belief systems.

By “covenantal” I simply mean relational in a faith context. The New Testament writings exhibit a covenantal perspective when referring to fellow believers as “brothers,” implying that faith is not simply a matter of intellectual belief, but also of lived and shared experiences with one another in the Lord. Our covenantal relationship as believers is an aspect of the complex disagreements in the church that is often overlooked. It is to this issue that the rest of this devotional speaks.

The Source of Pain: Brothers at Odds

As Christians we face a common and wily foe who is constantly striving to make us veer off the road of a biblically grounded faith into apostasy on the one hand or un-Christlikeness (i.e., hardheartedness) on the other. Apostasy
is usually considered to be an abandonment or renunciation of religious beliefs and practices. Un-Christlikeness is usually understood as a certain disposition toward others in the attitudinal and interpersonal realm. The question is: Have we isolated the two as if they are not interrelated and interdependent? Both apostasy and un-Christlikeness alike are modes of distorting to the world the heart and character of God.

The Bible, I believe, is clear about and holistically coherent in what it teaches on origins, ethics, and sexuality. (I mention these because they encompass the hotly debated issues in the church.) What is often missed in the dialogue is that our articulated perceptions directly affect individuals in a covenantal context (Prov. 26:24–26). Unfortunately, what we relate to others and how we relate to others is often based on secular modes of interaction rather than biblical ones. For example, Satan does not have to get Christians into a club if he can tempt them to use their language like club-goers[7] and vice versa.

Psalm 55 paints a vivid and eye-opening picture of the source of some of the deep sting that these polarized perspectives represent, but often misconstrue. Here is a lament with imagery that tells of the collision of covenant bonds and ethical dilemmas. The narrative flow can be broken into several sections based on a commonality of thought:

- vss. 1-3 (a prayer about despair),
- vss. 4-8 (the experience of despair),
- vss. 9-11 (a prayer for justice),
- vss. 12-14 (betrayal of a friend),
- vss. 15-18 (God’s vindication),
- vss. 19-21 (betrayal of a covenant),
- vss. 22-23 (a proclamation of trust).

The structure of the psalm itself addresses the tension noted earlier between despair and hope. This is a biblical model for learning to negotiate the two in a constructive way.

A Prayer about Despair

In the first section (vss. 1-3) David points out a crucial aspect of how we as believers ought to address any issue that is or can be divisive: prayer. With all the access that is available to share our thoughts through social media, sermons, and the like, there is a constant temptation to forget that understanding, transformation, and a humble perspective toward others must first be sought in prayer.

Contrary to common thoughts about the ethics of prayer in the Psalter, the pangs of brokenness with appeals of urgency illustrate the anxiety that David (and any person of faith) experiences (Pss 5:1-2; 17:1; 54:2; 61:1). His is not a cold, reserved, or stoic isolation of the emotions from the intellect. The whole person is engaged in expressing the heart’s frustration, and that frustration first stems from the silence of God (Pss 28:1; 35:22; 50:21; 109:1). Doesn’t God see the turmoil, the chaos, the defamation of His name and character? Where is God? All the psalmist hears is the clamor of the faithless.

For us the frustration seems unbearable as well. We may struggle with these same thoughts not only in a world dominated by secular thinking but also in a church that in some spaces seems to be losing its moorings on the Word of God. Here is irony. It is easy to assume that the biggest problem is what others are doing, but may our silent frustration be that God seems to just allow it to happen?
The Experience of Despair

David expresses (vss. 4-8) the physically debilitating nature and depth of anguish and fear by piling up synonyms for fear (“anguish … terrors … fear and trembling … horror”).[8] The palpitations are expressed vividly; his palms are sweaty and his breath is labored (cf. Isa 13:8, Jer 4:18). For him, a suitable option seems to be to take his leave and isolate himself in the most distant of ways from the battering forces of antagonism. The solitude sought here is even more apparent when contrasted with the city in the next section.

David’s desire to escape seems paradoxical coming from a hardened war veteran who experienced great victories in God’s name. This is the second lesson we can learn here: Experience equips none of us with emotional, spiritual, or physical immunity from the disagreements, subtle slights, accusations, or overt attacks on our person or beliefs. The temptation for us is to take flight to strongholds of polarity, only speaking with those who think like us about those who don’t. The question at hand is how we should interpret God’s silence and others’ aggressiveness.

Before moving forward, a brief word about understanding the prayers of the psalmists. When the Psalms are read, modern sensibilities often become uncomfortable with some of the language used. A large part of that misunderstanding rests on the nature of covenant and how this sets the tone for the prayers.[9] The undergirding covenantal principle of *lex talionis* (the “eye for an eye” law of appropriate retribution) is operative in those seemingly verbose outbursts. We need to keep in mind two things: 1) ethically, the psalmist lives with the principle that people should suffer for their offenses in a way that corresponds to the suffering that they have inflicted on others, and 2) the poetic nature of these prayers lends itself to hyperbolic speech or “heightened communication.” These psalms do not wish general bad things against a person, but desire a reciprocity that hopefully is instructive, as captured in that old adage, “Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling” (Prov 26:27).

A Prayer for Justice

Praying for God to intervene (vss. 9–11) is part and parcel of dealing with the confrontations we face in life. It is in essence an act of humility, because, as the psalmist says, “Who can discern his errors?” (Ps 19:12). Praying for justice is affirming God by “surrendering the last word to God.”[10] I have found in a few of my own interactions, unfortunately, that hasty judgments and critical attitudes barricaded opportunities for dialogue and prayer with others.

In the Psalms, the topic that the psalmist prays about frequently is the agent of persecution. In this case (vs. 9), the cause of antagonism is speech. This is especially important when we consider the world of woe speech can cause (cf. Pss 39:1; 50:19; 140:3; James 3:5–10). From the wilderness the focus shifts to the city, the place of protection where at the gate justice is to be carried out. But where we expect justice, only “violence and strife” and “oppression and fraud” reside.

The Bible speaks about the power of speech and the moral qualities associated with it more often than we typically think. This holds a lesson for the persecutor and persecuted alike: by analogy, the mouth that (like a city) has the capacity to protect and strengthen often becomes a place where deception, anarchy, and injustice reigns. The psalmist prays for confusion (vs. 9; cf. Gen 11:1–9) because he knows that God will hold everyone accountable for the ways in which we speak of Him and others. Gossip and slander have far more reach in our day to destroy lives since in ideological battles we tend to use speech as a vehicle to transmit our thoughts.

Betrayal of a Friend

[Image] The Compass Magazine – Betrayed by Our Friends: The Psalmist’s Pray... https://www.thecompassmagazine.com/blog/betrayed-by-our-friends-the...
Now we come to the crux of the matter (vss. 12–14). What gives distress is not the expected aggression of the enemy, but the betrayal of the covenanted “friend.” Note the difference between modern notions of church membership and David’s notion of covenantal brotherhood. This is not a slight on the deep friendships that we experience today, but expressions of such dimensions of interconnectedness are not heard as much as may be needed in coloring notions of fellowship today.

To David, covenanted bonds involve four aspects that need to inform our intrachurch dialogues:

1. **My equal:** In personhood, pedigree (whether social or vocational) carries no weight. Openness and vulnerability are here emphasized.

2. **A close friend:** The implication of a loving familial relationship points to cultivated interactions.

3. **My confidant:** The deepest of ways to know a person speaks against isolationist criticism from afar. Bonds in brotherhood resist detached analyses.

4. **Spiritual communion:** Close relationships, not simply similar belief systems, preserve religious identity.

While it is unclear the exact circumstances of the disintegration of such a covenantal bond, what is expressed later is informative as well as instructional.

**God’s Vindication**

What sets the tone for how David understands the issues and tension he faces is the justice of God (vss. 15-18). In a curious switch, the singular in the previous verses describing the antagonist now moves to the plural, which may indicate that the call for justice is not specifically directed at the “friend,” but at the wicked in general, with whom the betrayer affiliates by taking up their spirit. This observation sits well with the perspective in Psalm 1 that the two paths of life both have their end.

David doesn’t see himself as removed from the possibility of doing evil (Ps 7:4–6), and within the context of continually praying for justice he also prays for his own salvation—a recognition that the same remedy is needed for him and his antagonists.

**Betrayal of a Covenant**

David does not see his “enemies” as those who just disagree with his view of things (vss. 19-21). He makes it clear that the problem is their relationship to God (“they … do not fear God,” “my companion stretched out his hand against his friends,” “he violated his covenant”). The problem is covenantal, as is the remedy. The method of tension is speech; smooth words are problematic when war rages in the heart. The ability to articulate an issue well is no evidence of the heart’s condition. Wherever we find ourselves on any issue, our relationship with God becomes a central concern.

**A Proclamation of Trust**

Finally, the matter is left to God (vss. 22-23). When we have shared our faith authentically, tried to persuade our brothers and sisters to a better way, and made clear the evidences from the Word of God, we must leave the outcome to God. Of course, we live in a society where educational institutions, hospitals, churches, etc., must be faithful to their biblical mandate and act in ways to preserve that fidelity to God. What I am talking about is that God is responsible for the ultimate outcomes of our decisions. We should do everything we can to reconcile those out of the way, and if any of us choose not to be reconciled, well, we will have to talk to God about that one day.

**Humility and Care in a Conflict**
The most complex aspect of approaching any issue is understanding the position we ourselves are coming from. The myth of an Archimedean or “above on a perch” view of any issue as a disinterested observer is alive and well in the debate style of argumentation. Do we find this example in the Bible? I find none. The only One who can claim that right evidenced the most care. We always look to Jesus as our Example in all things, while at the same time trusting His grace, which reaches into places and in ways our minds, intentions, and words cannot comprehend. His is the ultimate expression of covenantal care, intercession, and objective perspective.

We need a corrective in many debates: we need to rectify the spirit in which we interact in intra-family disputes. I fear at times when the writings of Ellen White are read the reader may assume her words express a faultfinding or condemnatory spirit and use her writings to express their feelings as if those two dispositions are the same. Over the years I have come to see Ellen White as someone who took no joy in making people feel bad, loved Jesus supremely, wanted to see others come to a deeper faith in Him, and was humbled in the light of her divinely guided mission (see Early Writings, p. 19-22). If we exhibited more of this spirit in word and deed, maybe those with whom we find ourselves in tension would be more open to hear what we have to share.

Psalm 55 points out an element that will help us: a prayerful spirit. First, we should pray that our motives are surrendered and subject to Christ’s Spirit in our reading and observations (that includes practicing sound hermeneutics in our use of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy writings). Second, we should keep a covenantal view of life with God central in all our goals. Our supreme desire should be to see our brothers and sisters grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior.

Notes:

[1] Globalization is the process of international integration arising from the interchange of worldviews, products, ideas, and other aspects of culture.

[2] Here defined as the justice of God and the problem of evil.

[3] I understand these books similarly to how the Synoptic gospels are understood: different perspectives on a central figure—or in this case, image—that are not at all antithetical.

[4] Something akin to a primitive awakening of creativity, an evolutionary worldview of progress.

[5] I’m here making a distinction between criticism that is neither constructive nor restorative and leads to cynicism, versus evaluating the life of faith as described in Scripture through prayer and fellowship.

[6] While it may be too harsh to equate a negative disposition toward the church with nihilism, the temptation all too often seems irresistible.

[7] One of the sins most often condemned in Psalms is the misuse of tongue (Pss 10:3; 31:18; 109:2-3). Of course, we all need to remember that Jesus said people can do heinous acts in the name of God (John 16:2).

[8] Scripture quotations are from the ESV.


I've been reading through *Steps to Christ* again (for the hundredth time) lately, and last week I noticed a word that kept popping up repeatedly. Intrigued by the thought, I decided to search how many times the word was used in the small book and the context in which it was used. What I discovered was fascinating. And critical.

The word is “cannot,” and Ellen White uses it over and over and over again. It’s as though she is desperately seeking to help us understand something. So many times we think we can, but Ellen White wants us to understand that we cannot.

What is it that she wants us to understand we cannot do? Check these out (and look them up for yourself so you can see the full context; the page numbers are in the parentheses).

According to Ellen White, we cannot:

- Change our hearts (18)
- Purify the springs of life (18)
- Control our thoughts, impulses, affections (47)
- Change our hearts (47)
- Give to God the heart’s affections (47)
- Atone for our past sins (51)
- Change our hearts (51)
- Make ourselves holy (51)
- Resist evil (52)
- Originate or produce love (59)
- Make ourselves righteous (62)
- Perfectly obey the holy law (62)
- Become partakers of the life which Christ came to give (67)
- Bear fruit of ourselves (68)

It’s like a broken record – especially the idea that we cannot “change our hearts,” which she says three times!

Do we get it (and this doesn’t even take into account other phrases she uses that are of a kindred nature, like “It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken” [p. 18])? Do we understand that we are completely powerless – in and of ourselves – to do anything good? That we can’t save ourselves, fix ourselves, change ourselves, even give God our affections?

This tells me, among other things, that simply telling people what to do is not enough – because simply telling them what to do does not give them the ability and moral strength to accomplish it. They will simply become better informed sinners.

What we thus need is **someone else** to do it for us. We need someone to obey for us, to make us holy, to produce love in our hearts. Indeed, we need someone else to change our hearts – since we cannot do any of these things...
ourselves.

That someone is, of course, Jesus.

Such a thought is beautifully and succinctly explained in two places (among many others) — one of them in *Steps to Christ*, and another from another source. First, from the other source. Notice how Ellen White explains justification by faith:

> What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself. When men see their own nothingness, they are prepared to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. (Manuscript Releases, vol. 20, p. 117)

Secondly, this beautiful paragraph from *Steps to Christ*:

> When, as erring, sinful beings, we come to Christ and become partakers of His pardoning grace, love springs up in the heart. Every burden is light, for the yoke that Christ imposes is easy. Duty becomes a delight, and sacrifice a pleasure. The path that before seemed shrouded in darkness, becomes bright with beams from the Sun of Righteousness. (p. 59)

This second quote is just one of many from that classic book that explains it like this. The point of it all is that when we recognize our inability and cling to Christ, receiving His pardoning grace, it changes our filthy hearts, and those things we once found impossible to do in our own strength become very possible by the grace of God.

But this can only happen when we first recognize what we cannot do — indeed, when we first recognize the utter impossibility of doing any of these things of ourselves.

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The recent news of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) beheading 21 Coptic Christian men renews the profound discussion of martyrdom and witnessing. The Greek word *martus* implies a witness. The term first appeared in Christian literature in reference to the apostles as the first “witnesses” to the life, works, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 5:1). The early church was “not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation” (Rom 1:16). Believers “turned the world upside down” as the Good News of Christ spread far and near. In one generation the first disciples had reached the entire known world.

As time passed, however, the meaning of the word *martus* evolved from witness to martyrdom. Yes, the very word martyrdom comes from the same Greek word as witness. Christians were sealing their witness with their own blood. From the first centuries down through the Dark Ages, the message of Christ was oftentimes carried by the blood of those chosen to “share in the sufferings of Christ” (Phil 3:10).

These last days will be no exception to persecution and martyrdom. Revelation 12 and 13 sound the warning that those who “keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” will face persecution. Concerning these times, Ellen G. White wrote:

*All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. 2 Timothy 3:12.*

*As Christ was hated without cause, so will His people be hated because they are obedient to the commandments of God. If He who was pure, holy, and undefiled, who did good and only good in our world, was treated as a base criminal and condemned to death, His disciples must expect but similar treatment, however faultless may be their life and blameless their character.*

*Human enactments, laws manufactured by satanic agencies under a plea of goodness and restriction of evil, will be exalted, while God’s holy commandments are despised and trampled underfoot. And all who prove their loyalty by obedience to the law of Jehovah must be prepared to be arrested, to be brought before councils that have not for their standard the high and holy law of God.*

*Those who live during the last days of this earth’s history will know what it means to be persecuted for the truth’s sake. In the courts injustice will prevail. The judges will refuse to listen to the reasons of those who are loyal to the commandments of God, because they know that arguments in favor of the fourth commandment are unanswerable. They will say, “We have a law, and by our law he ought to die.” God’s law is nothing to them. “Our law” with them is supreme. Those who respect this human law will be favored, but those who will not bow to the idol sabbath will have no favors shown them.*

*In summer there is no noticeable difference between evergreens and other trees; but when the blasts of winter come, the evergreens remain unchanged, while other trees are stripped of their foliage. So the falsehearted professor may not now be distinguished from the real Christian, but the time is just upon us when the difference will be apparent. Let opposition arise, let bigotry and intolerance again bear sway, let persecution be kindled, and the halfhearted and hypocritical will waver and yield the faith; but the true Christian will stand firm as a rock, his faith stronger, his hope brighter, than in days of prosperity (Maranatha, 195).*

May God help us all to stand and be faithful witnesses to the world at such a time as this. Maranatha.
Florida’s Adventist Hospitals Offer Health Benefits to Same-Sex Couples

Valmy Karemera

Propelled by the legalization of gay marriage in Florida, the Adventist Health System voted to offer benefits to same-sex couples employed at Florida Hospital. The company already offers similar benefits to its employees in the District of Columbia, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Maryland.

As same-sex marriage becomes the law of the land, the Adventist Church and its institutions are faced with weightier issues than some that are currently debated. Here are some questions this event brings to mind:

- Whereas the Adventist Church defines marriage to be between one man and one woman, what Biblical rationale does the church provide when it extends benefits to same-sex couples?
- Whereas the church is to abide by the law of the land, what happens when the law contradicts the Bible? Are the church and its affiliated institutions afraid of expensive lawsuits that they are unlikely to win?
- By extending benefits to same-sex couples, are these church institutions endorsing same-sex marriage?
- If any tithe/offering money is allocated to such institutions that offer benefits to same-sex couples, is this wise stewardship?

Watch the news segment about Florida Hospital's benefits to same-sex couples:
I Buy, Therefore I Am: How Materialism Twists Our Identity

Derick Adu

Materialism could be defined as “a preoccupation with or tendency to seek after or stress material things rather than intellectual or spiritual things.”[1] We can also define it as “any set of doctrines stressing the primacy of material over spiritual factors in metaphysics, value theory, physiology, epistemology, or historical explanation.”[2] With this also comes the notion of material culture, which is the “totality of physical objects made by a people for the satisfaction of their needs; especially those articles requisite for the sustenance and perpetuation of life.”[3]

The Legitimate Pursuit of Material Culture

“For the sustenance and perpetuation of life,” it is legitimate to pursue material things. The desire to acquire material wealth is not in itself evil. In fact, writing in *Counsels on Stewardship*, Ellen White remarks, “The desire to accumulate wealth is an original affection of our nature, implanted there by our heavenly Father for noble ends” (p. 148).

The Bible is very positive about material wealth, to the extent that it states, “It is He [God] who gives you power to get wealth” (Deut. 8:18).[4] God blessed Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and a host of other people with material blessings. The Bible further commands that “if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thess. 3:10).

However, the Bible spells out the right relationship between God, humanity, and matter. This relationship is crucial, because once we miss it, we are bound to lose our identity and pursue material things as ends in themselves—a pursuit that amounts to a life of meaninglessness and idolatry.

God—Our Source of Identity

In the Bible, we find a triangular relationship between God, humans, and material things. Humans derive their worth from God directly. Intrinsically, we have been made in the image of God. This is so important that the Bible states it more than once. In Genesis 1:26 God said, “Let Us man in Our image, according to Our likeness,” and again in Genesis 1:27, “In the image of God he created them, male and female” (NET).

Because God created us, our identity as human beings is vertically derived from God. It is only by realizing that our value and identity are primarily derived from God that we can have absolute peace and fulfillment. It is because of this that the trials and privations of life cannot rob us of our worth. It is because of this that the Apostle Paul, for example, could rejoice in prison (Phil. 4:10) and urge others to rejoice in all circumstances (Phil. 4:4).

Understanding this truth is crucial. It underscores why every human being deserves to be respected with utmost courtesy without partiality. Extrinsic elements like riches, poverty, education, race, gender, appearance, accent, cultural background, and economic status do not define human value and identity. And nothing can rob a person of his/her identity derived from the *imago dei* (image of God). Even hardcore sinners still bear the *imago dei*, and that’s why God can reclaim them.

Man or Matter—Who Rules?
With our value, identity, and sense of worth coming from God because we bear His image and likeness, we relate to material things as gifts from God for our sustenance. In fact, in Genesis 1:28 we are commanded to “have dominion” over God’s creation. We are given this dominion not because these created entities add value or give us a sense of identity. On the contrary, our likeness to God as bearers of His image enables us to share in the divine rule over creation as stewards. Thus, any attempt to derive our worth and identity from material things and pursue them as ends in themselves can never lead to fulfillment.

Identity Crises

Our civilization is currently embroiled in identity crises. We no longer find our identity in God. On the contrary, we relentlessly pursue material things for value and identity. It seems our hearts are restless until we acquire the latest Apple computer; the flashiest car; a magnificent house in a cozy, wealthy setting; and the list goes on ad infinitum.

For example, in September 2011, UNICEF UK published a report of a comparative analysis of children’s well-being in the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Spain.[5] The research paid particular attention to the interplay between materialism, inequality, and well-being to determine how children experience this relationship.[6] The findings of this research were stunning. It disclosed how most children tie up their personal worth and identity with material things. It further revealed, “As children move to secondary school, clothing, footwear and technology brands became increasingly important in both creating identity and signaling membership of particular social groups in all countries.”[7] In addition, “the symbolic use of brands to either confer superior status or avoid bullying was much more problematic.”[8] Even more startling was the discovery that “rather than wanting to acquire things for their own sake, children seemed to use material objects and consumer goods to fulfill a range of purposes in their lives: utilitarian, symbolic and social.”[9]

This desperate search for identity once our society has severed its link with God, from whom we derive our identity, is all too pervasive. In another research project in Japan, “the Hakuhodo Institute studied the consumption patterns of Japanese youth, and reported that identity was the fulcrum for youth consumers. More than half of the young consumers believed that the products they purchased represented their identities.[10]

Even in the United States “there are more shopping malls than public high schools, one new franchise opens every eight minutes, seventeen billion catalogs are distributed annually, on-line shopping has become a multi-billion dollar industry, discount superstores dot the suburban landscape, and cruise ships carry five million passengers per year,” wrote Michael Jessup of Taylor University more than a dozen years ago. He noted the disturbing fact that “American parents spend more time shopping than playing with their children, and Americans spend three or four times as much time shopping as Western Europeans. In essence, Americans are consuming twice as much as they were forty years ago, while outstanding consumer credit rose to $1.4 trillion in 1999.”[11] (It’s now more than $3.3 trillion![12]

Materialism and the Death of Transcendence

Although the desire to acquire and revel in wealth as an end in itself is a product of the selfish heart of humanity, we can trace some historical antecedents that may have contributed to the apotheosis of materialism in our contemporary culture. Beginning from the Renaissance, humanism emphasized the role of human beings and gradually diminished the active role of God in culture. This trend was worsened by the Enlightenment project, which deified human intellect and reason. People like the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who in his *Critique of Pure Reason* “drew a sharp line of division between things as they appear to us and things as they are in themselves,” inflicted serious blows to traditional Christian faith.[13] By arguing that reason cannot know God as He is in Himself, Kant in effect slaughtered transcendence, thus destroying one leg of the God-humans-wealth triangle.

Nietzsche, who in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* declared that God is dead and “that the belief in the Christian God
has become unbelievable," further radicalized this notion.[14] In Reading the New Nietzsche, David B. Allison remarked, "We could say that God simply died of atrophy, that there was no longer felt to be need for the old God. His function as creator, confessor, balm, judge, and accountant was replaced by another agency, namely, Science, and by another faith—the faith and belief in an omnipotent technology."[15]

The French Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) in his Dialogue Between a Priest and a Dying Man dismissed belief in God as repressive superstition. Obedience to natural desires is what really matters. He insisted that abandoning faith in God is the first step to enjoying life.[16] Ludwig Feuerbach wrote that God is an invention and argued that the Christian’s belief in heaven impoverishes the one and only life we have by distracting us from its joys and concerns.[17] Karl Marx argued that the idea of God is a human creation in response to alienation experienced through the process of production. "Religion," he wrote, "eases pain by creating a dream world, especially the fantasy of a supernatural world where all sorrows cease"—a clear reference to the biblical vision of the New Jerusalem, in which there will be no pain, suffering, or weeping (Revelation 21:4).[18]

These powerful ideas have all contributed to the death of transcendence and the consequent reign of an immanent culture of materialism. We no longer search for meaning through a vertical relationship with God. Rather we pursue our quest for identity, value, and meaning horizontally. Now we look for our identity and value through omnipotent technology and its brainchild, materialism. Materialism is thus the highway to happiness as well as the last clutch of our value and identity. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the famous Russian novelist, in his 1978 commencement address at Harvard University rightly lamented, "Western civilization" is set “on the dangerous trend to worship man and his material needs.”[19]

Drinking from a Broken Cistern

Because God did not create material things to satiate the deeper inner desires of the heart, pursuing worth and value through them has proven elusive. Thus we are caught up in a relentless cutthroat pursuit, which always proves like hybel, striving after the wind, to use the words of Ecclesiastes. As a result “westerners now live in distinctly consumerist societies without an acquisitive ceiling,” which “depends precisely on persuading people to discard as quickly as possible what they were no less insistently urged to purchase, so that another acquisitive cycle might begin.” It is noteworthy that “in proportion as an individual’s identity is derived from consumption, the quest to (re)construct and (re)discover oneself is inseparable from endless acquisitions—there can never be ‘enough’ if to be is to buy.”[20]

The Destructive Midas Touch

The legend of King Midas[21] may perhaps be illustrative. Midas, a king in Phrygia, was hospitable to Silenus, the old schoolmaster of Dionysus. In appreciation, Dionysus offered Midas his choice of whatever reward he wished for. The greedy, materialistic Midas asked that whatever he might touch should be changed into gold. When he came home, he touched his food and it turned into gold; he touched his water and it turned into gold. The legend even has it that he touched his daughter and she turned into gold. Greed and unreasonable desire for riches motivated him till it almost destroyed his life.

As with Midas, our desire for material prosperity as an end in itself is destructive and unfulfilling. How many marriages are hemorrhaging because of ruthless desire to climb the corporate ladder? How many of our precious children have been sacrificed to the gods of Hollywood—immorality, violence, and filthy language—because Mom as well as Dad has no time for kids? “Despite sociological evidence to the contrary, it remains to all appearances
virtually axiomatic that the acquisition of consumer goods is the presumptive means to human happiness—and the more and better the goods, the better one's life and the happier one will be.”[22]

Contrary to the expectation of some parents from the UNICEF study in the UK, “the message from all the children who participated in the research was simple, clear and unanimous: their well-being centres on time with a happy family whose interactions are consistent and secure; having good friends; and having plenty of things to do, especially outdoors.” These “children articulately shared their views that fashionable brands did not bring lasting happiness.” [23]

Putting Things in the Right Perspective

Perhaps it is time we paid attention to Saint Augustine’s statement that “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You.” We work hard and receive more than ever, but we find less satisfaction. Could it be that our search for meaning in material things is a fiasco because it is only in God that we find our true value and identity?

This is what the Bible points to. In Luke 12:15, Jesus said, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions” (NIV). Luke 12:13, 14 introduces the question of inheritance and the proper use of possessions. The first principle Jesus lays out in verse 15 is that life does not consist in the abundance of one’s possessions.[24] As Darrell Bock remarks concerning this, “When Jesus makes this warning, he has more in mind than monetary accumulation. If Jesus were alive today he would see the attitude behind the expression ‘The one with the most toys wins’ as a prescription for failure in life.”[25]

Take to Give

For the Christian, everything that we own, including wealth, influence, power, is always a means to an end. We do not line up in the cutthroat competition of life for value or identity because our value and identity are firmly entrenched in who we are as sons and daughters of God who have been created in His image. Thus money in our hands ought to be the means to bless others. It should be food for the poor, clothing for the needy, shelter for the homeless.

In fact, this give-and-take relationship, which is itself antithetical to a materialistic mindset, is the underlying bedrock in which God designed how things should be. For instance, He called Abraham and promised to bless him, not as an end in itself, but so that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3).

In The Desire of Ages, Ellen White with poetical beauty captures this principle when she writes that “the glory shining in the face of Jesus is the glory of self-sacrificing love” and that “in the light from Calvary it will be seen that the law of self-renouncing love is the law of life for earth and heaven” (p. 20). To illustrate, she points to this law as it unfolds in nature:

No bird that cleaves the air, no animal that moves upon the ground, but ministers to some other life. There is no leaf of the forest, or lowly blade of grass, but has its ministry. Every tree and shrub and leaf pours forth that element of life without which neither man nor animal could live; and man and animal, in turn, minister to the life of tree and shrub and leaf. The flowers breathe fragrance and unfold their beauty in blessing to the world. The sun sheds its light to gladden a thousand worlds. The ocean, itself the source of all our springs and fountains, receives the streams from every land, but takes to give. The mists ascending from its bosom fall in showers to water the earth, that it may bring forth and bud. (pp. 20, 21)

However, it is sad to note that “there is nothing, save the selfish heart of man, that lives unto itself” (p. 20).
As Christians, we must remember that what we have does not determine who we are. More than being possessors of inalienable rights, we are bearers of the image and likeness of God. Thus we are valuable regardless of our gender, social status/class, and all human distinctions. All our material possessions are only the means to sustain our lives and bless the less fortunate. With this in mind, we can use our wealth not for our own glorification but for the glory and honor of God.

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[4] Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the NKJV.


[6] The research was in two phases with two qualitative methodologies: an ethnographic phase, which observed and filmed 24 families across the three countries, and a series of in-depth interviews with peer groups of over 250 children (age eight to 13) in schools.


[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.


[14] Ibid.


[17] Ibid., chapter 3, section 2.

[18] Ibid., chapter 3, section 3.


Pope Francis, Catholicism, and the American Political Landscape

Justin Kim

According to the Pew Research Center, more than 78 percent of Americans have a positive view of the current pope. It is no surprise that ever since the House Speaker, John Boehner, announced Pope Francis’s agreement to speak to a joint U.S. Congress on Sept. 24, 2015, there seems to be a “Francis Effect” taking place both in U.S. politics and among some “Evangelical Protestants, who today find themselves aligned with Catholics on many cultural issues—especially issues of life, marriage, and human sexuality.”

Time magazine correspondent Elisabeth Dias was interviewed at a Calvin College lecture event where she stated that news about the pope has been the hottest news for a while now. In addition, she mentioned that the political scene is abuzz with Catholicism. A general scan of Catholic blogs shows a heightened excitement over Pope Francis’s visit before Congress as well as a longer-than-normal list of presidential hopefuls.

Here’s a tentative list of 15 Catholic presidential candidates or hopefuls for 2016 from both parties:

**Republican**
- Jeb Bush, Former FL Governor
- Chris Christie, NJ Governor
- Bobby Jindal, LA Governor
- Pete King, NY Congressman
- George Pataki, Former NY Governor
- Paul Ryan, WI Congressman
- Marco Rubio, FL Senator
- Rick Santorum, Former PA Senator

**Democrat**
- Joe Biden, Vice President
- Andrew Cuomo, NY Governor
- Martin O’Malley, Former MD Governor

**Unknown Bid Status as of January 2015**
- Kirsten Gillibrand, NY Senator, Democrat
- Newt Gingrich, Former Speaker of the House, Republican
- Steve King, IA Congressman, Republican
- Brian Schweitzer, Former MT Governor, Democrat

**Other Prominent Catholic Politicians**

*Judicial (6 of 9 members of U.S. Supreme Court)*
- John Roberts, Chief Justice
- Samuel Alito
- Anthony Kennedy
- Antonin Scalia
- Sonia Sotomayor
- Clarence Thomas

**Legislative**

- John Boehner, House Speaker, Republican
- Nancy Pelosi, House Minority Leader, Democrat

It is of interest to note that amid this list of Catholic candidates there is also one potential Adventist presidential candidate for the first time: Ben Carson, neurosurgeon, Republican.

*This informative news post is not meant to be conspiratorial nor political in nature. It is an observation that seeks to serve our collective Adventist perspective of religion, politics, Bible prophecy, and current events in our daily witness and ministry.*