NPUC Names GC Session Delegates

Based on the constitutional requirements of the Adventist world church, 21 delegates have been elected by the North Pacific Union Conference (NPUC) executive committee to represent Northwest members at the upcoming General Conference session to be held July 2–11, 2015. In addition to the three NPUC officers and six local conference presidents, six non-administrative church employees and six lay members fill the remaining slots. Of those delegates who are not officers or administrators, requirements state that five are women, three Hispanic and one of African descent. See the complete list of NPUC delegates online at GleanerNow.com.
McVay Responds to Concerns About Spiritual Formation

John McVay, Walla Walla (WWU) president responded to some pastors and members who contend that negative influences of the "emerging church" and "spiritual formation" have been unchecked by church leaders. In his Nov. 20 statement, McVay says the criticisms "are low on content and high on innuendo, half-truth, and damnation by association." Furthermore, he says, "we know these people they attack to be godly and faithful Seventh-day Adventists who are working hard to draw others to truth." McVay offers several important sources where members can go for further study on the topics addressed. Read his statement online.

New Washington Leadership Posts Filled

Washington Conference has announced new team members and roles involving three important positions of leadership. Bill Roberts (left), will serve as ministerial director for the conference, after 14 years as senior pastor at the Auburn Adventist Academy Church in Auburn, Wash. Tyler Long (middle), who was working part time as an evangelism coach for the conference, will now become the full-time evangelism coordinator. Kevin Wilfley (right), current Enumclaw, Wash., pastor, will begin full-time leadership as conference prayer ministry, church growth and health ministries director. Read more about Roberts’ and Long’s appointment at GleanerNow.com and Wilfley’s appointment at WashingtonConference.org.

Do you enjoy GleanerWeekly? Don't keep it to yourself. Forward it to a friend and share!
A Little More to the Story

Puyallup Police Department posted a photo on their Facebook page with a follow up to the instrument theft at Northwest Christian School. Back in October, thousands of dollars worth of instruments were stolen overnight from the school, but the incident was caught on video. So far, detectives have recovered 30 of the 42 instruments originally stolen with the help of local media and social media coverage! View the full picture on Facebook.

Smithsonian Includes EGW in 100 Most Significant Americans

Ellen G. White is included in the latest Smithsonian magazine list of who it calls the 100 Most Significant Americans. To compile the data, Smithsonian combined its methodologies with research from Steven Skiena and Charles B. Ward, authors of the book *Who’s Bigger? Where Historical Figures Really Rank*. They separated the names into ten categories, including Religious Figures, where White is listed along with such diverse characters as Billy Graham and L. Ron Hubbard. Indeed, the variety of names, from Abraham Lincoln to Al Capone, Martin Luther King Jr. to Charles Manson, will no doubt trigger much debate. Read the list of names for yourself online.

Mel Gibson May Direct New Desmond Doss Movie

The bravery of Desmond Doss, Seventh-day Adventist World War II hero and first conscientious objector to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, may be featured in a newly proposed movie, "Hacksaw Ridge." Well-known Hollywood figure, Mel Gibson, is in talks to direct the film, which is expected to dramatize Doss’s valor as an unarmed medic in saving dozens of soldiers during the Battle of Okinawa. The story was viewed by many in the television documentary "The Conscientious Objector," directed and produced by Terry Benedict in 2004. Read more about the proposed project online.
The Old Covenant Brood

“The current tensions and polemics within the Seventh-day Adventist Church are not occurring in a vacuum. We have history behind us that has created the trajectory within which we are now living. To a significant degree the spirit and content of our present dialogues and debates are shaped by a tragic theological turn we took in our journey as a people more than one hundred years ago.” So begins a provocative blog from Ty Gibson, well-known co-director of Light Bearers ministries based in Oregon. Read more about that “tragic theological turn” from his perspective in his online blog.

What's your story?

Everyone has a story and in a recent video, Stephen Farr, Walla Walla University student, shares his story of redemption. Depression led to drugs and a party life but something changed when his sister found him. Watch his entire story at GleanerNow.com.

Currently at

- Accidental Pagans by Seth Pierce
- PAA Students Take Spiritual Lead
- Fall Festival in Enterprise
- CAA Stays Knee-Deep in Prayers
• A Shameful Christmas Story by Martin Weber

And More!

Looking Ahead

December

• 5: A Night in Bethlehem, Vancouver, WA.
• 7: Simply Delicious Plant Food Cuisine, Grants Pass, OR.
• 10–13: Journey to Bethlehem, Bend, OR.
• 12: WWU Christmas Concert, College Place, WA.
• 12: PAA Winter Concert, Portland, OR.
• 12–13: Journey to Bethlehem, Meridian, ID.
• 12–13: Journey to Bethlehem, Milton-Freewater, OR.
• 13: Impacting Your Family for Generations, Selah, WA.

More Events Online

Want to advertise in GleanerWeekly?
InPrint

December

Mix 180 young people and their leaders together on a sailing ship in the middle of a rainy October weekend, and you'll get an adventure. Learn how Northwest teens are learning leadership skills through Pathfinders in the December Gleaner.
here are your 2015 general conference delegates


Based on the constitutional requirements of the adventist world church, 21 delegates have been elected by the north pacific union conference (npuc) executive committee to represent northwest members at the upcoming general conference session to be held july 2-11, 2015. in addition to the three npuc officers and six local conference presidents, six non-administrative church employees and six lay members fill the remaining slots. of those delegates who are not officers or administrators, requirements also state that five must be women, three hispanic and one of african descent. with those parameters in mind, here are the "chosen ones."

conference presidents:

- ken crawford (alaska)
- david prest (idaho)
- merlin knowles (montana)
- al reimche (oregon)
- paul hoover (upper columbia)
- john freedman (washington)

npuc officers:

- max torkelsen (president)
- john loor jr. (secretary)
- mark remboldt (treasurer)

lay members:

- maria lopez (oregon)
- sul thorward (alaska)
- julie sanders keymer (upper columbia)
- gretchen bowers (oregon)
- shaya kyle (montana)
- pedro pozos (oregon)

non-administrative employees:

- gene heinrich (oregon)
- gary fogelquist (washington)
- kevin rhamie (oregon)
- gerizin de pena (upper columbia)
- gayle lasher (washington)
- mark waterhouse (idaho)

questions about delegate selection or the role of npuc delegates at the upcoming gc session may be directed to john loor jr. at the npuc office.
November 20, 2014

Dear Friend,

Allow me to share a personal word about accusations now all-too-regularly offered against people associated with Walla Walla University.

I imagine you to be someone positively inclined toward the excellent, Seventh-day Adventist education offered at Walla Walla University, and positively inclined toward me. Perhaps you have been a student on the WWU campus, or know me from my time at Pacific Union College or Andrews University. If so, you know what I stand for. But, of late, you may have heard floating about some pretty sinister accusations about WWU people concerning “spiritual formation” and the “emerging church.” These accusations have been shared often enough, and in strident enough voice, that you’ve begun to worry whether or not something sinister is going on at WWU.

I will offer my straightforward assessment of the situation and then suggest some strategies for you to explore these issues for yourself (because to do them justice you will need to do just that).

The attackers—“the accusers of the brethren,” if I may call them that—offer criticisms that are low on content and high on innuendo, half-truth, and damnation by association. They offer their accusations from afar without engaging the people they accuse (see Matthew 18:15-17). Those of us who know the people being attacked, who regularly listen to them teach Sabbath School classes and preach and participate in committee meetings, simply do not recognize the extreme caricature the attackers offer. We know these people they attack to be godly and faithful Seventh-day Adventists who are working hard to draw others to truth.

To explore these matters further, I would encourage you to do the following:

1. Read the statement, “Until Christ is Formed In You,” offered by the WWU Seventh-day Adventist Church and the statement offered by the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, “A Statement on Biblical Spirituality,” and ponder these questions: Does the biblical thought offered in these statements make sense to you? Should we flee from any commitment to Christ “being formed within” for fear that we might succumb to Eastern influences? Is there not a biblical and Adventist way to approach the devotional life and the effort to experience the sanctification offered by the Holy Spirit, one that should be embraced with joy and vigor?

2. Read the article on a thoughtful faith by Bill Knott, editor of the Adventist Review, “Reclaiming the Library,” and reflect on these questions: Should thought leaders be condemned for citing non-Adventist authors and engaging the wider culture? Is Seventh-day Adventist thought so fragile that we dare not read anything from non-believers? Are Seventh-day Adventist beliefs not strong and robust, able to confront and convict?
3. Read the Southern Adventist University School of Religion “Faculty Statement on the Emerging Church Movement” and think about these issues: Is the “emerging church” a simple phenomenon that can easily be defined and used as a mechanical litmus test? Or is it a more complex phenomenon that requires prayerful discernment and care?

4. The senior pastor of the WWU Seventh-day Adventist Church has now preached week-by-week for some five years. Most of those sermons are easily accessible via the church’s archives. Let me encourage you to randomly select four or five sermons, listen to them, and then ask: Are these sermons faithful, biblical, Adventist sermons, the obvious purpose of which is to draw people toward God and truth? Or are they heretical?

5. And, please, come to the WWU campus and experience our community of faith and discovery firsthand. Our campus ministries events and worship services are open to you. We are a highly residential campus, so we do weekends and Sabbath together. You will experience a vigorous, Seventh-day Adventist campus that offers a wide array of service and worship opportunities for our students—a campus that is bursting with active faith. Come and see for yourself!

I would frankly prefer to ignore all this and focus on the important work at hand. I have become persuaded, though, that unjust attacks are doing real damage to God’s Church. And I very much appreciate your willingness to engage these issues carefully and prayerfully.

If I can be of further help to you on these themes, please do not hesitate to contact me at john.mcvay@wallawalla.edu or (509) 527-2121.

Cordially,

John McVay
President
Walla Walla University
**Until Christ Is Formed In You**

September 1, 2012
Dr. Alex Bryan, Senior Pastor, Walla Walla University Church

**Introduction**

Holy Scripture places high priority on spiritual maturity. In fact, the Apostle Paul informs the church at Ephesus that a primary responsibility for church leaders is to equip the community of faith to become “no longer infants” but to “become mature” and “in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-16). Because Walla Walla University Church functions under the authority of Scripture, we embrace this Biblical ideal, and expectation. We are in the business of helping one another pursue lives of grown-up maturity in Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this sermon is to consider the work of a maturing spirituality. We will explore (using the Bible as our guide) the human story of spiritual perfection, spiritual failing, and spiritual renewal. Or, to put it another way, we will inquire into what the Bible says about our original spiritual formation by God, our spiritual malformation apart from God, and our spiritual re-formation provided by God in the person of Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit.

**Formation**

First, we take a look at our spiritual formation by God. It all began in the beginning, of course, in Genesis 1:1-2.

> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

We discover here the condition of our world, including our own human kind: We are formless. But this is soon to change. Genesis 2:7-8 reads:

> Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.

The Scriptures argue forcefully, and often, that we human beings are not mere material accidents, the product of some random, improbable, impersonal, cosmic explosion. Rather, our human form—in all of its glory—is the work of an intelligent, intentional, spiritual God. The Creator took soil and made sons; He took dirt and

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1 All Scriptural references are from the New International Version (1984). Italicized emphasis throughout is mine.
made daughters. From earth, God made Earthlings. We are His formation: physical body and spiritual, conscious mind. Here are a few examples where Bible writers make this claim:

**Ephesians 2:10**
For we are God's *workmanship, created* ... 

**Isaiah 44:2**
This is what the LORD says— he who *made* you, who *formed* you ... 

**Jeremiah 1:5**
Before I *formed* you in the womb I knew you ... 

**Psalm 139:13**
For you *created* my inmost being; 
you *knit me together* ... 

**Job 31:15**
Did not he who *made* me in the womb *make* them? Did not the same one *form* us both within our mothers? 

**Isaiah 64:8**
Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. 
We are the *clay*, you are the *potter*; 
we are all the work of your hand. 

**Zechariah 12:1** 
The LORD, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who *forms the spirit* of man within him ... 

These passages point out that God *formed* human beings *in their entirety*. He formed our conscious selves, our rational minds, our emotional sensitivities, and our physical bodies. We were formed by God, and for God. We were “made in his image” (Genesis 1:26). This means we were also hardwired with morality – with the capacity to live and act in ways aligned with the ethical composition of our Creator. The Maker made us in His moral image. Our Spirit God, with intentionality, gave us a perfect, beautiful *spiritual formation*. We were created not merely physical *matter*; we were also designed to consider spiritual *matters*.

**Malformation**

Sadly, the story moves from there. The Bible tells us that human sin damaged a perfectly formed world. Our own beautifully designed, spiritually formed selves became *malformed*. Our journey from humus to human took a U-turn: from human to humus we now go. A new reality called death would doom us to dirt-status once
again. But in the process of dying, while still drawing the breath of life, our moral selves would become dirty. We would tragically become a people of dirty jokes, dirty tricks, and dirty old men.

Notice these three Biblical descriptions of our soiled condition.

**Genesis 6:11-12**
Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.

**Romans 3:12**
All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.

**Deuteronomy 32:5-6**
They are corrupt and not his children; to their shame they are a warped and crooked generation.
Is this the way you repay the LORD, you foolish and unwise people?
Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?

*Malformed.* That’s what we are; that is who we have become. We are angry graduate students opening fire in a crowded theater. We are delusional politicians arguing that some women are raped in a “justifiable” manner. We are football coaches engaging in the unspeakable with young boys. We are material drunkards, racking up massive credit card debt. And our tongues have become swords: gossip, slander, and bearing false witness are commonplace hobbies. We are sinners, all of us, and if we claim to be without sin, we are liars, and hypocrites. Our Father, Our Creator, He once gave us a glorious spiritual formation. And then we rebelled. The result: malformation of our minds. Sadly, we aren’t what we used to be.

**Re-formation**

The third and final movement in our story: spiritual re-formation. Scripture claims Christ as the world’s ultimate redeemer, reviver, regenerator, and spiritual reformer. Jesus, we are told in John 1:1-3, was the original Creator we learn about in Genesis 1:1-3. And it is this Jesus, through the power of his life, death, resurrection, and enduring Holy Spirit, who animates a dead humanity with fresh life. It is Jesus Christ who empowers us, and calls us to spiritual re-formation. It is a new day: the restoration of God’s creation has begun. Notice these several texts, which describe the possibility of re-formation, and urge its practice.
2 Corinthians 5:17
Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

2 Corinthians 3:18
And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Galatians 6:15
Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.

Romans 6:4
We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Ephesians 4:22-23
You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Colossians 3:9-10
Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Galatians 4:19-20
My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you ...

These passages describe the renovation of a great but damaged painting, the repair of a great but broken sculpture, the re-formation of the Master’s tattered masterpiece: humanity. This is a spiritual project, and, therefore, a work of the mind.

Spiritual Re-formation: A Work of the Mind

God, in the beginning, as we have seen, gave each human being a physical body. But He also gave each of us a mind. This God-given component of our creation means that we can know, consider, reason, and contemplate life. It also includes the ability to think spiritually: We humans have the capacity to communicate with God and to make choices about our lives that lean into, or lean away from, God. The human mind is the arena of spiritual formation, malformation, and re-formation. This is where the action resides. Here are several verses of Scripture, which call us to mold our minds with intentionality.
Romans 12:2
Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Psalm 26:2
Test me, O LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind ...

Romans 8:6
The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.

Joshua 1:8
Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night ...

Psalm 1:1-2
Blessed is the man
  who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
  or sit in the seat of mockers.
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
  and on his law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 119:27
Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.

Psalm 119:97
Oh, how I love your law!
  I meditate on it all day long.

Psalm 119:15
I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.

Psalm 48:9
Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love.

Psalm 145:5
They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works.

Psalm 77:12
I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.

Psalm 143:5
I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done.
1 Samuel 12:24
But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you.

Job 37:14
Listen to this, Job; stop and consider God's wonders.

Psalm 119:95
The wicked are waiting to destroy me, but I will ponder your statutes.

2 Timothy 2:7
Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Philippians 4:8
Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

2 Peter 3:1
Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.

Hebrews 3:1
Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.

Fixing Our Thoughts

Biblical writers expect that we will fix our thoughts. We will “meditate, consider, ponder, reflect, think,” and become fixated on Jesus Christ. We open our minds to His mind, seeking to discover His beauty, His holiness, His morality. We do this with the intent of becoming like Him. How does this happen? Intentional thoughtfulness requires an intentional Creator-creature connection, which Scripture describes as prayer. Prayer is purposeful communion with God. Prayer is the experience whereby the human mind meets the mind of God. Prayer is the work whereby we seek to become conformed to the likeness of God, who is Jesus Christ. Prayer invites us to acknowledge God as Holy Father, to desire His reign and rule on earth, to admit dependence on him even for daily food, to develop a spirit of forgiveness toward others, to desire a resistance toward sin, and an appreciation for His glory (Matthew 6:5-14).

In one sense the communion of prayer is ongoing. The Apostle Paul teaches us to “pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Prayer can also be a regularly scheduled event, each day, utilizing specific words. For example, observant Jews pray the Shema twice daily: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”
(Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Prayer can draw upon specific models in Scripture, like the prayer taught by the Lord Jesus (Matthew 6:5-14), which Christians recite both privately and in corporate settings. Prayer most often is a simple, private cry to God: we ask God to hear us; we ask God to speak to us. Jesus teaches us to pray in “private” (Matthew 6:6). Paul reminds us that we pray in “weakness” and, in fact, “We don’t even know what we ought to pray” (Romans 8:26). Above all, we simply, and intentionally pray. The example of Jesus compels us: “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35).

Prayer finds particular haven in the practice of Sabbath, a full-day, once-a-week removal of the distractions of work and other “routine” activities in favor of prayerful rest, prayer-filled worship, and prayer-bathed contemplation of God. When we quiet the noise and reduce the speed of our lives, the possibility for spiritual attentiveness increases. The Bible’s two renditions of the Fourth Commandment give two primary focal points for Sabbath practice: God is our Creator (Exodus 20:8-11) and God is our Re-creator (Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Put another way: Sabbath focuses on our original spiritual formation and our current spiritual re-formation. Sabbath is a gift to the mind: we can think about God; we can fixate on Jesus. And, in doing so, we should expect to become better, and more beautiful, human beings. Sabbath-keeping alight causes us to become more forgiving, more loving, more generous, more peaceful, and more awake to the concerns of Jesus in our world.

Prayer gains particular focus by exposure to Scripture. The Bible argues for itself as an important tool for spiritual re-formation. The Apostle Paul writes, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The transformational potency of the Bible can be discovered through surface reading, studying in-depth, visionary storytelling, disciplined memorization, and through Scriptural songs – all a content-rich basis for prayer.

Prayer is a means to quiet our fallen mind’s cursed cacophony, in order that we might discover focused, clear communion with Jesus Christ. And this is countercultural. For in our culture there is a prevailing expectation that we maintain an intense pace, an inhumane productivity, and an insensitive omnipresence, whereby mobile technology (and related multitasking) divides our attention. We can become people who are rarely fully present because we live fast, full, and fractured. In this environment, fixing our thoughts on Jesus is essentially impossible. And so we need intentionality in matters of spiritual thinking. We need the prioritized spiritual re-formation practice of prayer in order to participate in the God’s great mission, which is the renewal of our minds, the regeneration of our souls. We need prayer. Prayer in Sabbath. Prayer in Scripture. Prayer in fasting. Prayer in song. Prayer in journaling. Prayer in community. Prayer in service. Prayer
in study. Prayer in silence. Prayer in congregation. We need prayer. We need its ability to transform our minds in the ways and means of God Almighty.

**Three Cautions**

The business of such spiritual exercise is not without risk, however. We now briefly consider three areas of caution.

**Caution One: A fruitless religion**

There is danger in confusing religious activity for moral action. We can engage in work designed to produce spiritual re-formation yet find no improvement in our sullied state of spiritual malformation. God, through the Prophet Isaiah, addresses this problem in a direct way (Isaiah 1:13-17).

> Stop bringing meaningless offerings!  
> Your incense is detestable to me.  
> New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations —  
>  I cannot bear your evil assemblies.  
> Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts  
>  my soul hates.  
> They have become a burden to me;  
>  I am weary of bearing them.  
> When you spread out your hands in prayer,  
>  I will hide my eyes from you;  
> even if you offer many prayers,  
>  I will not listen.  
> Your hands are full of blood;  
>  wash and make yourselves clean.  
> Take your evil deeds  
>  out of my sight!  
> Stop doing wrong,  
>  learn to do right!  
> Seek justice,  
>  encourage the oppressed.  
> Defend the cause of the fatherless,  
>  plead the case of the widow.

The prophet says that people can be religious, but unholy. Jesus refers to those living in such a duplicitous condition as wearing “sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves” (Matthew 7:15). The Apostle Paul says these people live “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5). These are people who both pray and gossip with the same tongue, who gain Biblical knowledge but don’t know how to love, who consume Christian religion yet live as gluttons, hoarding and eating the earth’s gifts to excess. Churchgoing does not make these people *just*; they *just* go to church, without real world implications. The
purpose of Christian spiritual re-formation activity must always be a spiritually re-formed life. There is a persistent danger that religious activity becomes a tragic end in itself. Walla Walla University Church consistently teaches religious practice that seeks to change human life in the way of Jesus Christ.

**Caution Two: A Christ-less focus**

Exodus 34:14 contains an absolute claim: “Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” It is possible for us to engage in spiritual activity (worship) that misplaces its focus; we can have active spiritual minds without a focus on God. The Psalmist writes, “In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God” (Psalm 10:4). What do wicked people (like us) too often fill our minds with? The most popular alternative to God is and has always been self-centeredness. We read in Scripture that human beings are too often “lovers of themselves” (2 Timothy 3:2). Our real deity? “Their god is their stomach” (Philippians 3:19). We worship ourselves by filling our mind with lust and violence. Sabbath becomes self-indulgence. Prayer becomes humanistic meditation, where we muse on nothing but self. Scripture passages are carefully selected (and deselected) to only affirm the religion of our own bellies. Spiritual re-formation practice itself becomes malformed, and misused. Walla Walla University Church rejects any and all spirituality focused on the worship of human beings. We consistently teach religious practice that is exclusively focused on God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Caution Three: Legalism**

The Apostle Paul clarifies the power behind all legitimate spiritual progress in his letter to Titus. He begins by describing our malformed state.

**Titus 3:3**
At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

Then he describes the remedy: spiritual re-formation.

**Titus 3:4-7**
But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Jesus washes us. Why? We have become dirty in sin’s tragic work of human malformation. The decay from human to humus has been around for a long time. But
in Jesus, by His grace, His power, His action, we can experience a grand reversal: from clay to claimed, from soil to saved, from creatures of old earth to children of new earth. Our re-formation is His work, not ours. We are changed because of His Mercy, His Grace. Sabbath-keeping, praying, Scripture reading, and other spiritual activity exposes our minds to His reforming power. These actions do not change us. God does. Walla Walla University Church consistently teaches religious practice in the context of God’s work, not our own.

**Conclusion**

This sermon began by acknowledging the Biblical responsibility spiritual leaders are given to create a culture of maturing Christian spirituality. This means pastors, elders, church and school leaders, parents, teachers, and especially teachers of religion, are called to invest in this important work. Walla Walla University Church is fully committed to this effort, centered in the Biblical context we have explored: (1) Scripture teaches that God’s original creation of human beings was a beautiful spiritual formation. (2) Scripture teaches that sin has caused an ugly spiritual malformation. (3) Scripture teaches that we are now to be in the beautiful business of spiritual re-formation. This is a work of our minds, where spiritual thought and impulse exist. And so, with resolve, with regularity, and with reverence, we prayerfully commune with Him, and in the process develop “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16).
Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A Statement on Biblical Spirituality

“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”
(1 Cor 1:30 NKJV, and hereafter)

“Christ in you the hope of glory.” (Col 1:27)

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Cor 3:18)

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“The attributes of God are goodness, mercy, love, long-suffering and patience, and his followers are to possess the same attributes of character representing Christ in true spirituality.” (Ellen White, Signs of the Times, August 22, 1895)

“Train your thoughts so that it will be easy for them to dwell upon pure and holy things. Cultivate a love for spirituality and true godliness.”
(Ellen White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 315)

Introduction

We believe that the greatest and most urgent of all our needs is a revival of true godliness, which is true biblical spirituality, or having Christ formed in us by the Holy Spirit (Gal 4:19; Col 1:27). Such spirituality is not natural to the sinful person who regards it as foolishness: “The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:14).

A vital part of discipleship and the training of gospel workers at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary is to enable them to cultivate genuine biblical spirituality through justification and the process of sanctification, for it is impossible
for them to give others what they themselves do not have (Acts 4:13; 1 Cor 6:11; 1 Pet 1:2).

As in all matters of faith, Christians of the twenty-first century need to safeguard their beliefs and practices about spirituality to ensure that they do not depart from biblical principles. In today’s postmodern, pluralistic world, with its multiple influences from Eastern non-Christian religions, animism, New Age and other sources, the meanings of concepts related to “spirituality” and “spiritual formation” have become ambiguous and conflicted. Some terms once used freely by Adventists have become controversial. For example, the term “spiritual” is now used by some in today’s culture as a generic, all-inclusive word for sensory emotional, physical, intellectual, or relational experiences intended to build a positive relationship with a nebulous “higher power” either inside or outside of the self. Sometimes spirituality is associated with non-biblical practices such as “centering prayer,” or “prayer labyrinth.” Part of the challenge is that some words used to convey biblically faithful meanings can also be used to convey biblically unacceptable meanings.

**Principles of Biblical Spirituality**

Biblical spirituality can be defined as the process of the divine restoration and healing of the broken relation between the Triune God and humanity. As such, biblical spirituality is the response of a repentant human heart and mind to the loving heart and mind of God (1 Cor 2:12-13; Rom 8:14). God created us in His image with the capacity to communicate with Him in a personal relationship. This
capacity and relationship were fatally distorted by sin (Gen 1:27; 3:1-9). It is God who calls us to Himself, vivifies the lifeless spiritual capacities of the sinful human heart and leads us to know, love, depend upon and obey God (Gen 3:9; John 17:3; Col 1:21-23; Eph 1:17-19; 2 Pet 1:2-3). Initiated by God, biblical spirituality is a conscious walk with God in which we enjoy His awesome presence, and live in dependence upon Him. The Holy Spirit, through the Holy Scriptures, reveals to us the deep things of God (1 Cor 2:9-10; Eph 3:14-20; 4:13), our sinfulness and lostness, and our need for the Savior Jesus Christ who took upon Himself our sins and died in our place (John 3:16-17; 16:8-11).

Biblical spirituality is further deepened as the Holy Spirit prompts spiritual desires and leads us to consider and accept instruction from God’s written Word (1 Cor 2:13; Ezek 37:4-6; Eph 6:17; Heb 3:7; 4:12; 6:4-5; 2 Pet 1:21), and to behold and experience God’s character of love (Exod 34:6-7; Rom 5:5; 1 John 4:16). By beholding the attributes of God (1 Chron 29:9-13; 2 Cor 13:14; Jude 20; Heb 12:2; 1 Pet 1:2; Rev 1:4-6) we are inwardly changed (2 Cor 3:18), transformed by the renewing of our mind (Rom 12:1-2), where our vision of God causes the spirit of this world (1 Cor 2:12; Eph 2:2; 1 John 4:3) to lose its influence and power upon us (Rom 6:11-13; 8:10; Eph 2:1-10; Gal 6:14). Concerning this Ellen White states: “As we meditate upon the perfections of the Saviour, we shall desire to be wholly transformed and renewed in the image of His purity” (Steps to Christ, pp. 88, 89). Thus, self is crucified with Christ and Christ lives in us (Gal 2:20). The repentant sinner experiences blessedness and joy (Ps 1:1-2; 32:1-2; Rom 4:7; Phil 4:4), peace with God (Rom 5:1), assurance of salvation (Rom 8:1), no fear of judgment before
God (Isa 35:4; Dan 7:22; Luke 1:74, 75; John 5:24; 1 John 2:28; 4:17-18), and love for one another (John 13:35). Upon invitation, the Holy Spirit causes a spiritual person to walk in all the commandments of the Lord (Ezek 36:26-27; John 14:15), which otherwise are impossible to observe (Josh 24:19). Spiritual growth results in the presence of the fruit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit for service to others (Gal 5:22, 23; 1 Cor 12; Col 3:12-15; 2 Pet 1:4-11).

This dynamic spiritual life born of God gives victory over the powers of darkness (2 Cor 2:14; Eph 6:10-18; 1 John 4:4). It springs into a desire to surrender self to God in faithful obedience, heartfelt worship, and unselfish service to others (Isa 6:1-8; Matt 25:31-46). Repentance, confession, and consecration become an integral part of our enduring connection with God (Ps 32:1-2; Joel 2:12-18). To live is Christ (Phil 1:21), and there is reason to boast in His cross alone (Gal 6:14; Jer 9:23-24). All of life is lived in the blessed hope and anticipation of Christ's soon return (1 John 3:3; 1 Thess 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-14; Rev 22:10-15).

In sum, a divinely effected spiritual life stands in direct opposition to living according to the flesh (John 3:6; Rom 8:5-14; 1 Cor 2:12-14; Gal 5:16-6:1). Biblical spirituality means to be born of God (John 1:12-13; John 3:5-8; 1 John 4:7), be changed by the grace of Jesus Christ (Rom 12:1-2), surrendered and obedient to the Spirit, living according to the Spirit (Rom 8:4-11), and consequently empowered by the Spirit to draw others to find life in the Spirit. This is the process of sanctification concerning which Ellen White writes: “The sanctification of the soul by the working of the Holy Spirit is the implanting of Christ’s nature in humanity” (Christ Object Lessons, p. 384). Thus, biblical spirituality both reflects and engenders a worldview
about the holy, gracious and attractive Triune God in relation to the human self in which the true restoration and healing of the broken relationship between God and humanity is vitally experienced in the context of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, good and evil.

**Personal Practices of Biblical Spirituality**

In our study of personal practices of spirituality at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary we uphold biblical principles and reject non-biblical concepts.

1. **We affirm** the priority of Scripture to guide our lives. The Word of God is the medium through which God communicates with the minds and hearts of individual humans and is foundational to any genuine spirituality. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom 10:17). It is through the Word that we are sanctified (John 5:39; 17:17).

2. **We affirm** the love of God for a lost world. Scripture states that God’s love for humanity is the basis of His attempts to establish a relationship with us (John 3:16; 1 John 4:8-10; Gen 3:9). The more clearly we perceive the love and character of God, the more we love and worship Him and love and respect our fellow humans.

3. **We affirm** the preeminence of Christ. Scripture states that there is no fullness of coming to God without Christ who is the fullest revelation of God’s character and life (John 14:9-11), and who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). While ministering for us in the heavenly sanctuary, Christ imparts His life, merit, and grace to our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:8; 1 John 2:1, 2; Heb 2:9-11; 8:1, 2).
4. **We affirm** the substitutionary atonement of Christ. Biblical spirituality revolves around one’s need for a Savior who died for us on the cross (Rom 3:24, 25; 1 John 3:16). Elements of repentance, confession, surrender, cleansing of the heart, and renewal are part of one's new life, as well as radical transformation of life—we no longer live for ourselves but for Him who lived and died for us (Gal 2:20).

5. **We affirm** the work of the Holy Spirit. Biblical spirituality is not possible except at the initiation of God through the Holy Spirit (John 3:6-8; 16:8-11; 1 Cor 6:9-11; Titus 3:5-7). He is the one who brings life, mediates and illuminates the Word of God to our minds, taking our innermost groanings to God (Eccles 3:11; John 14:26; 16:13; Rom 8:22-27), helps us to discern spiritual things (1 Cor 2:14), and leads us in our spiritual journey (John 16; Rom 8:14). We live, pray, and come to victorious life in the Spirit (Gal 5:25; Jude 20).

6. **We affirm** that communion with God takes place at His initiation through His revelation to us in Jesus Christ. Christ’s presence with us and in us is realized by the influence of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God (1 Cor 2:10-13) as well as through providential workings of His grace and thought impressions (Eph 1:17, 18). All such influences, however, are to be tested by the Word (2 Tim 3:16).

7. **We affirm** the role of the human mind in Christian spirituality. Biblical spirituality results from our renewed mind coming into contact with the mind of God through Scripture and the Holy Spirit as we meditate on and accept the Word of God (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Cor 2:10-13; Phil 2:5; Ps 1:2; John 7:17).

8. **We affirm** the role of the physical human body. That the human being is a living soul rather than having a separable soul is key in understanding the nature of
biblical spirituality. The mind and the body form an integral unity that cannot be divided (Gen 2:7). The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19).

9. **We affirm** the positive role of human feelings and experience in biblical spirituality as represented in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22, 23). As noted, we believe all human experience is to be tested and evaluated by Scripture (Isa 8:19, 20; 2 Tim 3:16).

10. **We affirm** the proper appreciation of the good things in nature that God has given to us as witnesses of His kindness and other attributes (Ps 19:1-2; 139:13-18; Rom 1:19-21; Acts 14:17), which prompt us to worship Him as our living and loving Creator (Rev 14:7).

11. **We affirm** the healing power of Christ (Matt 9:35) from sin and the results of sin (Ps 147:2; Is 51:3; 1 Cor 1:3-4). His healing power continues to be manifested through the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 3:6), proper lifestyle, godly physicians, ministers and mental health professionals as well as human families as they express God’s love to one another (2 Cor 1:3; Matt 10:1). God also works through miracles of healing as He wills (Jas 5:14-15; Acts 3:3-10; Mark 16:17-19).

12. **We deny** that all study of the Word of God, all prayer, and all behaviors of service and devotion are performed under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Sinful humanity has the ability outwardly to do some of these good things, but for the wrong motives or sometimes in a routine fashion devoid of meaning. It is easy for the un-renewed human mind to become blinded by human learning and service and not be actuated by the Spirit (1 Cor 1:20-25).
13. **We reject** methods of seeking to “experience” God by an emptying of the mind or an altered state of consciousness.

14. **We deny** that humans have a soul which connects with God apart from our physical brains and bodies.

15. **We reject** all varieties of so-called “spiritual” practices that are inconsistent with Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. Following is an illustrative list of practices we reject: invoking ancestral and other types of “spirits” and various “deities” like the “goddess mother” (Rom 1:21-23; 2 Thess 2:10-12); invoking cosmic powers, sun, moon, stars, and other things such as rivers, oceans, mountains, trees, and animals; the idolatrous use of objects for worship or contemplation (Exod 20:3-6); the veneration or worship of humans, living or deceased (Acts 14:12-15); prayer labyrinths, mantras, tantric rituals, prayer wheels, or yoga contemplations; magic, fetishes, or spiritualistic séances; practices that intend to manipulate or coerce God to reveal the future, solve human problems, heal illness, or provide benefits.

**Dynamics of Biblical Spirituality**

In our understanding of the dynamics of spirituality we uphold biblical examples and teachings and reject non-biblical concepts.

1. **We affirm** biblical devotional practices. The Bible speaks of regular patterns of personal spiritual disciplines such as prayer (Matt 6:4-15), reading and meditating on God’s Word (Matt 4:4; Luke 10:26), personal and corporate worship (Luke 4:31), and fasting (Matt 6:16-18; 17:21). Prayer is central to the spiritual life
of the believer (Eph 6:18). It is the pouring out of the heart before a loving heavenly Father, in confident expectation, and yet humble submission. Spiritual practices also include matters of stewardship (faithful giving of tithe and offerings—Matthew 23:23; 6:2-4; how we relate to finances and the things of this world—Acts 20:35; 1 Tim 6:7-10) and Sabbath-keeping (worship of God the Creator, service, rest, and celebration—Exod 31:13; Luke 4:16; Mark 2:27, 28; Matt 12:9-14; Acts 16:13; Heb 4:9, 10).

2. **We affirm** the importance of following the example of Jesus in one’s daily life and in the practice of spiritual disciplines (Mark 1:35; Luke 4:15, 31; 1 John 2:6). Other key biblical patterns of spirituality include, but are not limited to: Daniel (Dan 6:10; 9:3), David (Ps 119:97), Elijah (1 Kings 19:9-18), and other prophets in Israel (2 Kings 19:1, 2).

3. **We affirm** the role of service in the development of a Christian’s spiritual life. For some there is a disconnect between their views of service and spirituality. Yet service is an integral part of spiritual growth and some of the greatest truths about ourselves and God are experienced in the context of service (2 Tim 2:21). Service is about having the mind of Christ for a lost world, for the hurting and broken hearted. It is a willingness to spend and be spent for the sake of others and the gospel (2 Cor 12:15), driven by an inner desire to share Christ (Matt 25:31-46). The sharing of Christ includes regular involvement in all aspects of the mission of the church such as studying the Scripture with others and preaching the good news. According to Ellen White, receiving the mind of Christ develops a spiritual condition
in the Christian in which “duty becomes a delight and sacrifice a pleasure”

*Education, p. 297*.

4. **We affirm** the role of community. Spirituality today is often seen as individualistic rather than communal, thus one assumes that one can be spiritual but not religious, spiritual and not part of a faith community. But biblically the community is the context for spiritual growth, nurture, accountability, expressing our spiritual gifts, service, and learning tolerance and unity. Corporate worship is also an integral part of our spiritual growth (Acts 2:44-47; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4:11-15; Heb 10:25).

5. **We affirm** an end-time context to spirituality. The biblical teaching about the time of the end frames biblical spirituality in such a way that Christians can experience now a fellowship with God and yet at the same time sense an incompleteness to such a relationship with God. Furthermore, there is an apocalyptic dimension to biblical spirituality which heightens one’s experience with God and life lived in the world (1 Pet 4:7). There is an urgency of experience that is ours because of our view of the return of Jesus—we long to see Jesus and the nearness of His coming heightens our expectation (Titus 2:11-14). At the same time we are warned to be aware of false spiritual revivals (Matt 24:23-26; 2 Thess 2:9-12).

6. **We deny** that spiritual practices earn us any increased standing with God. Our salvation is through the sacrifice of Christ alone, by His grace accepted through faith (Eph 2:8-10).
Conclusion

Biblical spirituality, at its core, refers to a life of discipleship intentionally lived in personal relationship with God through Christ by the Spirit. The life lived with God is such that “we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days” (Luke 1:74-75). Thus, biblical spirituality includes conversion, justification, and sanctification (1 Cor 6:11). It is about everything that we are and do in life, because even the common things reflect our spiritual orientation.

The biblical teaching regarding spirituality emphasizes God’s initiative in establishing a relationship with humanity and provides multiple examples of how one can grow spiritually until “we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). Thus, a spiritual person is one who has been converted to God, accepting from Him new life; who seeks to live continuously in the presence of God; who is grateful for His gifts; who loves truth, justice, and service; who is nurtured by spiritual disciplines; and who is humbly mindful of his/her weakness and ignorance (Mic 6:8; Matt 25:35, 36).

Biblical spirituality in terms of walking with God implies being in relationship with God as were Enoch and Noah (Gen 5:22; 6:9)—conversing with Him, believing in and actively seeking His companionship in all the valleys, mountains, and plateaus of life. We do not have to go anywhere special or do anything exceptional to seek God. He is seeking us through His Holy Spirit, and we are responding to His love continuously drawing us. We respond to Him in faith
(Heb 11:6), by talking with Him as a friend (John 15:15) in formal and informal prayer, reading and meditating on His Word as did David (Ps 119:97), confessing our sin and accepting His cleansing (Ps 51), praising Him (Ps 146:2), and assembling with His people (Matt 18:20; Heb 10:25); and serving God and humanity (Jas 1:27; 2 Pet 2:11, 12; 1 John 3:16-19).

**Seminary Faculty Affirmation**

While voted by the Seminary faculty, this statement makes no claim to finality. Nonetheless, it offers us an opportunity to exalt our heavenly Father, to uplift our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, and to marvel at the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. We experience a renewed sense of our dependence on God in these end times, and a deepening desire to be used of God to facilitate biblical spirituality in the lives of our Seminary students.

**For Further Study**

Seventh-day Adventists value the insights Ellen White provides on the subject of biblical spirituality. Some of the best material on various spiritual disciplines and spiritual growth is found in the following books: *Education*, pp. 250-261; *Selected Messages*, book I, p. 121; *Steps to Christ*, pp. 85-101; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 315; *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings*, pp. 102-122.
Introduction

The Emerging Church movement (EC) began as an attempt to be relevant to a postmodern and post-postmodern culture. The EC in its various forms seeks creatively to reinvent church in the twenty-first century, "emerging" in protest from traditional Christianity to form a new "post-Christian" worldview. Like postmodernism, which defies clear lines of definition, the EC is eclectic and diverse, focusing less on distinctive biblical teaching and emphasizing the authenticity and spiritual experience of the individual. How a person lives is more important than what he or she believes. This emphasis that “faith without works is dead” and that true Christianity will display itself in a life which is consistent with the truth is commendable. However, this emphasis also betrays one of the drawbacks of the EC--that experience very easily becomes the essential standard of authentic spirituality without the framework of Scripture or the guidance of an organized faith community.

The EC is committed to accepting philosophical pluralism, denying that any system (or religion) offers a complete explanation of God or truth. Rather than bouncing between arguments of relativism and absolutism, EC leaders insist on a “Third Way” that dialogues and ultimately embraces the multi-faith world and does not judge faith issues and movements within traditional lines of Christian interpretation. While theological humility is laudable, within the EC this view seems all too often to lead to positions which are relativistic in fact, if not in name.

The EC reduces Christianity to “one voice” among many and is strongly ecumenical, seeking to experience God in dialogue and by adopting beliefs and worship practices in the multi-faith world of religions such as Islam, Judaism,
Catholicism, Buddhism, Eastern mysticism, and even non-religious atheism. EC leaders embrace such practices as symbolic, multi-sensory worship; centering prayer; prayer beads; icons; spiritual direction; labyrinths; and *lectio divina*. While some of these practices have merit, the semantic elasticity of many of these terms, as used by proponents of EC, contributes to the problematic nature of the movement. For instance, “spiritual formation” is a key term which has been enlarged by the EC to encompass mystical practices. The worship of the EC may include charismatic and post-charismatic elements, and its music varies from hymns to contemporary Christian music and secular forms.

The EC is disillusioned with the organized church and seeks to deconstruct modern Christian worship, evangelism, and community by providing a new theology for post-Christianity. Within our own denomination and in many others, the lack of emphasis on personal spiritual experience has left many faithful believers hungering for a deeper relationship with God. It is this reasonable desire and genuine need that the EC attempts to address. However, despite some positive contributions, we must be cautious of its theological views and spiritual recommendations. In response to the growing impact of the EC in Seventh-day Adventist churches, colleges, and universities, we, the faculty of the School of Religion at Southern Adventist University, wish to encourage spiritual revival and reformation and to offer this affirmation of authentic biblical belief as expressed in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

1. We affirm that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the infallible revelation of God’s will. The Bible has authority in all areas of Christian teaching, life, and practice because it is the inspired Word of God, and all truth is consistent with this revelation (Is. 40:8; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; 2 Tim. 3:16).

The Bible is not merely a “library of diverse voices making diverse claims.” On the contrary, it speaks in unity and harmony to the world. We therefore cannot accept that “faithful interaction with a library means siding with some of those voices and against others,” for “Scripture cannot be broken” (Jn. 10:35). While we acknowledge and appreciate the role of God’s Spirit in guiding the church, we insist that the Spirit confirms and conforms to the Scriptures. Therefore, we believe in the unique authority of the Bible and understand that it is not merely one way among many to understand God. Rather, Scripture is the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history. We cannot accept that “Sola scriptura . . . tends to downplay the role of God’s Spirit in shaping the direction of the church,” as some in the EC assert, or that sacred texts outside of the Bible are metanarratives of equal authority to that of the Bible. Personal experience; culture; and ancient, modern, and postmodern philosophies cannot replace the Bible as the basis of all “doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).

2. We affirm that Jesus created all things, that He was and is forever truly God and also became truly man to live and perfectly exemplify the righteousness and love of God. We affirm that He died a substitutionary and expiatory death, was bodily resurrected from the dead, and ascended to heaven to minister there in the presence of the Father in the heavenly sanctuary (Jn. 1:1-14; 8:58; 10:30; Heb. 1:6; Phil. 2:10-11; Gal: 4:4; Matt. 1:1; Jn. 1:30; Rom. 3:25; Isa. 53:5-12; 1 Cor. 15:3, 14-17; Luke 24:36-43; Heb. 8:1-2).

Jesus was not merely a good moral leader: He was truly the divine Son of God. It was an act of unfathomable love for God to send His Son Jesus to die on the cross and for the Son to consent to come. It was not an act of “divine child abuse,” as some in the EC have asserted. Though Jesus’ death on the cross was indeed an example to humanity of authentic, missional living, it cannot be limited to that. It is also the atoning sacrifice which redeems us from our slavery to sin, as well as the unique basis for the reconciliation of humans to God. God’s grace is channeled to the world through Christ and cannot be found where enlightenment is sought within the person. As revealed in God’s Word, it is a gift bestowed by Jesus Christ and cannot be acquired by the skill of humanity or merited by human goodness. Though Jesus, as God, is ever-present through the Holy Spirit, the pantheistic notion that Jesus is a Cosmic Christ “woven into Creation
and all of life" misrepresents the fundamental distinction between creature and Creator.

3. We affirm that this world is the focus of a great cosmic controversy between Christ and Satan over the character and government of God, His eternal moral law, and His sovereignty over the universe (Ezek. 28:12-17; Is. 14:12-14; Rev. 12:4-9; Job 1:6-7; 1 Cor. 4:9; Matt. 4:3).

Satan is not simply a metaphor for evil. He is a fallen personal being, working actively today to confuse humanity into believing that there are many avenues to God other than Jesus Christ, who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn. 14:6). To the extent that other philosophies and faiths identify alternative links between God and humanity, they are mistaken. Just as the means of access to God are unique and irreplaceable, so also God’s law is not a mutable metanarrative, subject to change over time and place. It was written by God’s own finger in stone as a permanent, comprehensive moral and spiritual revelation of His loving character to humanity (Ex. 31:18; Deut. 10:1).

4. We affirm the biblical revelation of the fall of humanity after a perfect creation, and we acknowledge that sin is the transgression of God’s eternal law (1 Jn. 3:4; Gen. 3:1-10; Jas. 2:10; 4:17). Obedience to God’s law through the empowering of the Holy Spirit is Christ’s command to His followers: “If you love me, keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15; Jn. 15:10; Matt. 5:18; 19:17; Heb. 8:10).

Although personal experience is an essential element in Christianity, it is not the standard by which we test truth. Christianity is not all about us or our subjective experiences, for it was humanity, relying subjectively on the senses, which disobeyed God and plunged the earth into sin. The work of the Holy Spirit is to lead sinners to Jesus Christ, rather than to self. Our faith must rest in Christ, as revealed in Scripture, and not on our own spiritual inclinations, feelings, or experiences: “Test the spirits to see whether they are from God,” says the apostle John, “because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 Jn. 4:1).

5. We affirm that the church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who are called out from the world to join together for worship, fellowship, service, proclamation, instruction, and celebration of the Lord’s Supper (Matt. 16:13-20; Eph. 2:19-22; 3:8-11).

The church is not an amorphous and unbounded gathering of persons who hold dissimilar views of the Bible and Jesus Christ. Scripture teaches that there were clear and non-negotiable expectations, both of belief and of practice for members of this community, and it specifically warns us of the danger of false teaching (2 Pet. 2:1-2). Church organization is vital to accomplish the mission which Christ has entrusted to His followers. While diversity of means and methods is vital to the church (1 Cor. 12:12-20), this does not imply that any doctrine, any spiritual practice, or any ethical standard espoused by a person claiming Christ is approved by Him or should be accepted by the church. The church is sent to all nations (Matt. 28:19) and strives to become “all things to all people” (1 Cor. 9:22), but the church expresses this diversity within Scriptural guidelines, being commissioned by Christ to teach all that He has commanded (Matt. 28:20) and not “another gospel” (Gal. 1:8-9).

6. We affirm that in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. The remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness to call God’s people out of error and apostasy (Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4; 2 Cor. 5:10; Jude 3, 14; 1 Pet. 1:16-19; 2 Pet. 3:10-14; Rev. 21:1-14.).
The message of Christ is unique: it is not just one metanarrative among the many metanarratives of other world religions, all of which lead to truth. God's end-time call to all faithful people is to leave all falsehood and sin and to unite themselves with Him and His faithful and obedient people by upholding biblical doctrine and practice. Therefore, the Seventh-day Adventist Church cannot minister as, to, or with postmoderns, but must, rather, minister for postmoderns, calling them out of the confusion of relativism into God's eternal truth.

We must not blur the boundaries of truth and error, whether through the revisionist critique of Protestantism and the advocacy for “post-Protestantism and post-Christianity,” or by returning to any historic Christian tradition (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, or Celtic, or even some indistinct blending of these) or by any syncretistic merging with world religions that would displace or redefine the everlasting gospel.

We affirm that the final test of humanity at the end of time will be over the issue of faithfulness to God and obedience to his expressed will, including a call to return to the observance of the original seventh-day Sabbath of Creation (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11; Rev. 14:7-9, 12).

The seventh-day Sabbath is not a transitory expression of religious practice, but from Creation it has been a memorial of God's power and love and a sign of faithfulness to Him, and it will remain the test of worshipful allegiance at the end of time. God’s truth is unchangeable, and His will is immutable. Those who are recognized by heaven as God's own people at the end of history will conform to the same standards of belief and practice which have characterized the righteous in all ages.

We affirm that “true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth” and that our spiritual practices ought to be those taught by the Lord, directed by the Holy Spirit, and confirmed by the Scriptures (Jn. 4:23; Luke 11:1; Rom. 8:26-27, 2 Pet. 1:3-4; Ps. 1:2; 119:97).

True worship must be defined biblically. No doctrine, behavior, or spiritual practice, however great its antiquity or wide its acceptance, can be approved, except by its conformity to the Word of God. Regular study of Scripture, unceasing prayer, constant attention to the leading of the Spirit of God, and frequent spiritual conversation with fellow believers, both in daily life and during weekly Sabbath rest, are indispensable elements of true biblical spiritual discipline, which leads to the formation of Christian character. Other spiritual practices (such as centering prayer, contemplation, meditation, lectio divina, eucharistic devotion, icons, and labyrinths), whether of non-Christian or medieval origin or of recent devising, must be evaluated by Scripture.

We affirm the movement of history toward the final culminating event of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, who will return literally, personally, and visibly with the heavenly hosts to take up the elect for an eternal kingdom that will be established in heaven during the millennium, followed by the descent of the New Jerusalem on a restored new earth (Matt. 7:22-23; 16:27; 24:30; 25:11-12; Jn. 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 4:16; Jude 14-15; Rev. 1:7; 19:12-16).

The Kingdom of God is not merely a better life to be established politically or socially on this present earth through an ecumenical movement where all religions “are revelations of the same reality.” Though it has begun on this earth through the teachings of Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit, the hope in Jesus is that its culmination will be in a world that will be cleansed of all evil and perfectly restored by Christ after the millennium. The final message of the “everlasting gospel” must be faithfully preached to all the world to fulfill Christ's mission. God desires all to be saved, but those who reject the Son and show themselves unfaithful to God will be lost (Jn. 3:35-36).

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Endnotes


2 Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” *Christianity Today* 51/2 (February, 2007); accessed online Sept 29, 2013.

3 For the impact of relativism in EC, see the extensive discussion by Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 125-56; and most recently, in general, Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012); cf. Canale, “Emerging Church – Part 2,” 79-80.


6 Many of the terms employed for spiritual practices, including “contemplation,” “meditation,” “spiritual reading,” “spiritual direction,” and even “prayer,” are vague and can be accompanied with major redefinition and new application. Both the Bible (Luke 5:16; 11:2; Ps. 55:17; 1 Tim. 4:5; Jas. 5:13) and Ellen White provide extensive commentary on the importance of meditation on God’s Word and prayer (*Acts of the Apostles*, 424; *Gospel Workers*, 127). Ellen White writes, “Let the truth of God be the subject for contemplation and meditation. Read the Bible, and regard it as the voice of God speaking directly to you. Then will you find inspiration and that wisdom which is divine” (*Testimony Treasures*, 3:188). See especially White’s statements in *Desire of Ages*, 83, 363 and *Education*, 260-61.


8 For an analysis of the relationship between charismatic worship and EC worship, see Canale, “Emerging Church – Part 2,” 74-75.


10 Ibid.


13 McLaren, The Story We Find Ourselves In (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 102.

14 Selmanovic, All About God, 76-82.


16 Stanley J. Grenz, a key theologian of the EC adopts “open theism” which restricts God’s ability to predict the future and limits the gift of prophecy which is central to the prophetic voice of the faithful remnant at the end of time (Grenz in Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, Justin Taylor [Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2004], 19).

17 On these categories, see McKnight, “Five Streams.”


19 McLaren, A Generous Orthodoxy, 221-225.

20 Selmanovic, All About God, 22-23.

21 See the discussion by Carson, Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church, 172-77; Canale, “The Emerging Church: What Does it Mean and Why Should We Care?” Adventist Review (June, 10, 2010); accessed online Sept. 14, 2013, states, “The emerging church is going back to Rome. If we continue to play follow the leader, new generations of Adventism will go back to Rome, as well.”


23 Grenz places the community and tradition over Scripture as the basis for doctrine, “Our Bible is the product of the community of faith that cradled it... the writings contained in the Bible represent the self-understanding of the community in which it developed” (Grenz, Revisioning Evangelical Theology A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993], 121; see the critique by Canale, “Emerging Church – Part 2,” 79-80). In Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era ([Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006], 347), Grenz quotes Michael S. Horton favorably maintaining that the new center for evangelicalism is to embrace a consensus view of tradition (“What Still Keeps Us Apart?” in Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Analyse What Divides and Unites Us, ed. John H. Armstrong [Chicago, IL: Moody, 1994], 253). This is a reversal of the biblical and Protestant hermeneutic of sola Scriptura, see discussion by Norman Gulley, Systematic Theology, Vol. 4: Church, Final Events (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2014).

24 On spiritual discipline, see Ellen White, Christian Education, 136; on the formation of character, Fundamentals of Christian Education, 254. In contrast it should be noted that in the EC “Spiritual Disciplines are a very important part of the ‘vintage’ Christianity that emerging leaders retrieve from medieval Roman Catholic spirituality” (Canale, “The Emerging Church – Part 2,” 73).

25 On the use of monastic mysticism in the EC, see Richard Rohr, The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics.
See (New York: Crossroad, 2009), 12; Nanette Sawyer, “What Would Huckleberry Do? A Relational Ethic as the Jesus Way,” in An Emergent Manifesto of Hope, 41–50; Selmanovic, All About God, 130-141.

26 Selmanovic, All About God, 288, note 3.

27 Ellen White writes, “The messages of Revelation 14 are those by which the world is to be tested; they are the everlasting gospel, and are to be sounded everywhere” (Selected Messages, 2:111); cf. Great Controversy, 311.
New Ministerial and Evangelism Team Introduced

Washington Conference is pleased to introduce a new ministerial and evangelism team. Tyler Long will serve as evangelism coordinator, and Bill Roberts will serve as ministerial director.

Long joined the Washington Conference team in March 2014 as an evangelism coach. He partnered with Port Orchard Church members six weeks before their evangelism series with Dan Bentzinger so the church could develop a database of friends. The relational coaching helped energize the congregation.

With the departure of Bill McClendon to pastor in Baltimore, Md., Long provided interim leadership for Reach Washington coordinated evangelism this last fall. Long will now continue full-time as he plans and coordinates a relational style of public evangelism. Long and his wife, LaVonne, have two small children.

Roberts will be drawing from his 25 years of ministry experience to support, mentor and encourage pastors in western Washington. Roberts first came to the Auburn community in 1998 to teach Bible for three years at Auburn Adventist Academy and then served as senior pastor for 14 years at Auburn Adventist Academy Church. Most recently, in addition to his pastoral duties, Roberts also served as one of three ministerial department field representatives. Roberts and his wife, Dorena, have two teenage children.

“I wasn’t looking for this job, but God made it clear in my heart that this is something He wants me to do,” says Roberts, who spent two weeks fasting and praying before giving his response to this job offer.

“Bill and Tyler will be a good addition to our dedicated team of ministry leaders as we seek to follow God’s mission,” says Doug Bing, Washington Conference vice president for administration.

Heidi Baumgartner

Washington Conference communication director

Heidi Baumgartner serves as communication director for Washington Conference.
Kevin Wilfley is the new prayer ministries, church growth and health ministries director for Washington Conference.

Kevin Wilfley remembers fingering through his mother’s large home library of health books and seeing names such as nutritionist Adelle Davis and herbal remedies pioneer Jethro Kloss. They weren’t Adventists (yet), but his mother was interested in healthful living. When the family joined the Adventist church, Wilfley began reading Adventist literature about health, diet and exercise.

“From the time I first studied our health message and decided to yield my heart in this matter, I believed that the health message had great potential for introducing people to Jesus,” Wilfley says. “I see this as an opportunity to win souls for Christ as well as encouraging a healthy lifestyle.”

Wilfley, who previously served as Washington Conference prayer ministries coordinator and Enumclaw Adventist Church pastor, will be transitioning into an expanded, full-time ministry role at the conference office in January 2015. Wilfley will be serving as the prayer ministries, church growth and health ministries director for Washington Conference.

Throughout his 36 years of ministry in Upper Columbia, Oregon and Washington conferences, Wilfley focused on prayer ministry, the work of Holy Spirit, evangelism, and health.

“I’ve organized health activities in my churches for years, but never thought about leading health ministries for the conference,” Wilfley says. “This was just something I did as a part of my ministry.”

Wilfley, for example, was the founder of the Mid-Columbia Half Marathon that held a running event for 20 years with hundreds of people participating in Hood River, Ore. He also organized Refresh, a huge fair in Spokane, Wash., that spotlighted health ministry and attracted 8,000 people from the community. Additional health ministry events include cooking classes, health fairs, stop smoking clinics, addiction clinics and more.
Balanced Leadership
Wilfley finds balance in his life by spending time with his wife, Dolly, interacting with his three adult children and five grandchildren, and pursuing his classical guitar, pastel painting and woodworking hobbies.

He is a frequently requested speaker for camp meetings, pastors’ meetings, church retreats, and school week of prayers. His speaking itinerary since 1989 has taken him all over North America and even to Scotland.

“Whenever I speak on health, I always make people upset,” Wilfley says with a chuckle. “Extremes don’t lead to good health. In fact, I wish the last 10 chapters of Counsel on Diet and Foods [by Adventist Church co-founder Ellen G. White] would have been first 10 chapters. It covers balance and how to make changes. Most people don’t read that far.”

Wilfley spends hours each week researching various topics relating to evangelism, spirituality, health and wellness. “I read constantly,” he says. “I collect information and find ways to share it.”

High on his reading list: Ellen White’s book on the ministry of healing. “Ministry of Healing should be on the top three books to read about health,” Wilfley says. “It is an amazing book on health.”

Health Ministry Plans
Plans for health ministry in western Washington are already starting to take shape. In addition to a Spiritual Growth Triathlon in January 2015 that involves Bible study, prayer and exercise, Wilfley is also planning a biathlon later in the year. (The Health Van previously operated by this department is in transition to a local church.)

“Churches need to develop a practical health ministry to interface with their community,” Wilfley believes. “We need to have an easy-to-follow health guide for every member of the church about making healthy choices for them and their family.”

Wilfley hopes to offer community health education classes on topics such as exercise, balanced nutrition, and trust in God.

“These are the top three laws of health that people neglect the most,” Wilfley says. “Of all the eight laws of health, the law we violate the most is exercise.”

The eight laws of health are commonly defined in the Adventist church as nutrition, exercise, water, sunlight, temperance, air, rest and trust in God.

Beyond developing plans for increasing the health and wellness of individuals, families and churches, Wilfley has a bigger dream.

“My dream would be to have an Adventist health center somewhere in Seattle where people could come for educational classes, a deli, exercise facility, and medical help,” Wilfley says.

The first step toward this dream: developing a network of health professionals and leaders who are interested in an evangelistic approach to health ministries.

Wilfley will be hosting a brainstorming session on January 10, 2015, at 3 pm at Washington Conference office in Federal Way, Wash., for pastors, health care professionals and other interested in the ministry of health and wellness.

“We need to discuss and pray about practical ways to make health ministries evangelistic,” Wilfley says.
Attend a Health Ministries Brainstorming Session
January 10, 2015, 3 pm
Washington Conference Office in Federal Way
Pastors, health care professionals and anyone with an interest in health ministry are invited to a brainstorming session about how to make health ministry evangelistic and practical. This will be a time to talk, share, pray and glean ideas.
How much does Thomas Paine matter? More than Harriet Beecher Stowe? Less than Elvis? On a par with Dwight Eisenhower? Would you have answered these questions differently ten years ago? Will you answer them differently ten years from now? In a culture so saturated with information and so fragmented by the search possibilities of the Internet, how do we measure historical significance?

Steven Skiena and Charles B. Ward have come up with a novel answer. Skiena is the Distinguished Teaching Professor of Computer Science at Stony Brook University and a co-founder of the social-analytics company General Sentiment. Ward is an engineer at Google, specializing in ranking methodologies. Their answer involves high-level math. They subject the historical zeitgeist to the brute rigors of quantitative analysis in a recent book, *Who’s Bigger? Where Historical Figures Really Rank*.

In this fascinating book, Steve Skiena and Charles Ward bring quantitative analysis to bear on ranking and comparing historical reputations. They evaluate each person by aggregating the traces of millions of opinions, just as Google ranks webpages.

Simply put, Skiena and Ward have developed an algorithmic method of ranking historical figures, just as Google ranks web pages. But while Google ranks web pages according to relevance to your search terms, Skiena and Ward rank people according to their historical significance, which they define as “the result of social and cultural forces acting on the mass of an individual’s achievement.” Their rankings account not only for what individuals have done, but also for how well others remember and value them for it.

Their method requires a massive amount of big data on historical reputation. This they found in the English-language Wikipedia, which has more than 840,000 pages devoted to individuals from all times and places, plus data extracted from the 15 million books Google has scanned. They analyzed this data to produce a single score for each person, using a formula that incorporates the number of links to each page, the number of page visits, the length of each entry and the frequency of edits to each page. Their algorithms differentiate between two kinds of historical reputation, what they call “gravitas” and “celebrity.” Finally, their method requires a means of correcting for the “decay” in historical reputation that comes with the passage of time; they developed an algorithm for that, too. By their reckoning, Jesus, Napoleon, Muhammad, William Shakespeare and Abraham Lincoln rank as the top five figures in world history. Their book ranks more than 1,000 individuals from all around the world, providing a new way to look at history.

Skiena and Ward would be the first to acknowledge that their method has limitations. Their concept of significance has less to do with achievement than with an individual’s strength as an Internet meme—how vividly he or she remains in our collective memory. The English-language Wikipedia favors Americans over foreigners, men over women, white people over others and English speakers over everyone else. In their rankings of Americans only, past presidents occupy 39 of the first 100 spots, suggesting an ex-officio bias.

That’s where we come in. *Smithsonian* magazine has been covering American history in depth from its inaugural
issue, published in 1970. Among the Smithsonian Institution museums we work closely with is the National Museum of American History. By synthesizing our expertise with the systematic rigor of Skiena and Ward's rankings, we sought to combine the best of quantitative measures and qualitative judgment.

First, we asked Skiena and Ward to separate figures significant to American history from the world population. Then, rather than simply taking their top 100, we developed categories that we believe are significant, and populated our categories with people in Skiena and Ward's order (even if they ranked below 100). This system helped mitigate the biases of Wikipedia.

We have highlighted what we decided was the most interesting choice within each category with a slightly fuller biographical sketch. And finally, we made an Editors’ Choice in each category, an 11th American whose significance we’re willing to argue for.

Argument, of course, has been integral to American historiography from the beginning. When Andrew Gelman, a professor of statistics and political science at Columbia University, wrote that *Who’s Bigger?* is a guaranteed argument-starter,” he meant it as a compliment. We hope our list will spark a few passionate discussions as well.

**Buy the 100 Significant Americans special issue**

Available on newsstands or online today!

Here is our list; to read about what made each person significant, pick up a copy of the special issue at a newsstand near you.

**Trailblazers**

Christopher Columbus
Henry Hudson
Amerigo Vespucci
John Smith
Giovanni da Verrazzano
John Muir
Meriwether Lewis and William Clark
Sacagawea
Kit Carson
Neil Armstrong
John Wesley Powell

**Rebels & resisters**

Martin Luther King Jr.
Robert E. Lee
Thomas Paine
John Brown
Frederick Douglass
Susan B. Anthony
W.E.B. Du Bois
Tecumseh
Sitting Bull
Elizabeth Cady Stanton
Malcolm X

**Presidents**
Abraham Lincoln
George Washington
Thomas Jefferson
Theodore Roosevelt
Ulysses S. Grant
Ronald W. Reagan
George W. Bush
Franklin Delano Roosevelt
Woodrow Wilson
James Madison
Andrew Jackson

First Women
Pocahontas
Eleanor Roosevelt
Hillary Clinton
Sarah Palin
Martha Washington
Hellen Keller
Sojourner Truth
Jane Addams
Edith Wharton
Bette Davis
Oprah Winfrey

Outlaws
Benedict Arnold
Jesse James
John Wilkes Booth
Al Capone
Billy the Kid
William M. "Boss" Tweed
Charles Manson
Wild Bill Hickok
Lee Harvey Oswald
John Dillinger
Lucky Luciano

Artists
Frank Lloyd Wright
Andy Warhol
Frederick Law Olmsted
James Abbott MacNeill Whistler
Jackson Pollock
John James Audubon
Georgia O’Keeffe
Thomas Eakins
Thomas Nast
Alfred Stieglitz
Ansel Adams

Religious figures

Joseph Smith Jr.
William Penn
Brigham Young
Roger Williams
Anne Hutchinson
Jonathan Edwards
L. Ron Hubbard
Ellen G. White
Cotton Mather
Mary Baker Eddy
Billy Graham

Pop icons

Mark Twain
Elvis Presley
Madonna
Bob Dylan
Michael Jackson
Charlie Chaplin
Jimi Hendrix
Marilyn Monroe
Frank Sinatra
Louis Armstrong
Mary Pickford

Empire-builders

Andrew Carnegie
Henry Ford
John D. Rockefeller
J.P. Morgan
Walt Disney
Thomas Alva Edison
William Randolph Hearst
Howard Hughes
Bill Gates
Cornelius Vanderbilt
Steve Jobs

Athletes

Babe Ruth
Muhammad Ali
Jackie Robinson
James Naismith
Arnold Schwarzenegger
Ty Cobb
Michael Jordan
Hulk Hogan
Jim Thorpe
Secretariat
Billie Jean King
If the deals go through, Gibson will direct the movie, based on the life of Desmond T. Doss, the first conscientious objector to win the Congressional Medal of Honor for saving dozens of soldiers during the Battle of Okinawa while serving as a medic.

Garfield would portray Doss, who was a Seventh Day Adventist and received two Bronze Stars and three Purple Hearts.

David Permut and Bill Mechanic are producing with Cross Creek Pictures’ Brian Oliver and Tyler Thompson. Cross Creek is also financing.

Walden Media had been involved with backing the project but is no longer doing so.

Doss’ story was made into the 2004 TV documentary “The Conscientious Objector.”

Garfield starred in “99 Homes,” which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival. Gibson’s directing credits include “Apocalypto,” “Braveheart” and “The Passion of the Christ.”

The news was first reported by The Hollywood Reporter.
The current tensions and polemics within the Seventh-day Adventist Church are not occurring in a vacuum. We have history behind us that has created the trajectory within which we are now living. To a significant degree the spirit and content of our present dialogues and debates are shaped by a tragic theological turn we took in our journey as a people more than one hundred years ago.

PUSHBACK ON THE GOSPEL

Writing to Willie White in 1902, A.G. Daniells lamented the existence within Adventism of what he called, “the whole brood of old covenant men who are continually raising doubts and unbelief regarding the light that came at the Minneapolis meeting” (A.G. Daniells to W.C. White, April 14, 1902, in Manuscripts and Memories of Minneapolis, p. 321).

Fascinating choice of words from the man who was then the General Conference president! But these words are more than fascinating. They are hugely insightful regarding our history as a people and the struggles in which we are currently engaged.

“The light” to which Daniells referred was none other than the vital truth of justification by faith—aka, the gospel—which was preached with clarity and power at the 1888 General Conference Session by two young men named Alonzo Jones and Ellet Waggoner. But there was resistance to the “light” by prominent church leaders and ministers, a resistance that was advanced under the pretext of faithfulness to the truth.

And why were they resistant?

Because they had formulated a version of Adventism with such a heavy emphasis on the law that Jones and
Waggoner’s strong proclamation of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, apart from the deeds of the law, could only be regarded by them with suspicion, as if the gospel was an attack on the law.

Where the gospel is missing, papal principles of control ensue.

Daniells wasn’t name-calling by pointing to “the whole brood of old covenant men.” He was aptly describing a harbored theological perspective that was doing massive damage in the church. By its legacy, that theological perspective continues to do damage in the church to this very day. You’ll see what I mean shortly.

A CONFEderacy_of control

Earlier, in 1894, Ellen White warned of those in positions of leadership who were “looking to the formation of a confederacy that would make Battle Creek like Rome” (Publishing Ministry, p. 144). Where the gospel is missing, papal principles of control ensue. The next year, she wrote with laser clarity, pointing out that these men were oriented toward control precisely because of their theological orientation against the message of righteousness by faith:

“They are following in the track of Romanism. Those who are enjoined to represent the attributes of the Lord’s character, step from the simple platform, and in their own human judgment devise rules and resolutions to force the will of others. The devisings for forcing men to follow the prescriptions of other men are instituting an order of things that overrides sympathy and tender compassion, that blinds the eyes to mercy, justice, and the love of God. Moral influence and personal responsibility are trodden under foot. “The righteousness of Christ by faith has been ignored by some, for it is contrary to their spirit, and their whole life experience. Rule, rule, has been their course of action” (1888 Materials, pp. 1435-1436).

Don’t miss the significance of the connection she is making. God showed her that those who had rejected the message of righteousness by faith were, as a result, inclined to “force the will of others” by means of “rules and resolutions”—in other words, through political process and policy. The natural tendency of those who do not grasp the gospel will be to institute an order of things in the church that “overrides sympathy and tender compassion, that blinds the eyes to mercy, justice, and the love of God.” Rather than allow God’s people in their local fields of labor to be guided by Him in their manner of advancing His kingdom, “Moral influence and personal responsibility are trodden under foot” in favor of uniform “rules and resolutions.”

She was specifically addressing those who, in and after 1888, stood against the efforts of the Holy Spirit to incorporate the gospel into Adventist theology. They resisted the good news of God’s saving grace in favor, rather, of defining the message with an emphasis on the human responsibility to keep God’s law. This is why A.G. Daniells described them as a “brood of old covenant men who are continually raising doubts and unbelief regarding the light” of the gospel. According to Ellen White’s assessment, the deeper reason they were resistant to the gospel was because it was “contrary to their spirit, and their whole life experience,” which was to “rule” over others.

those who know not the liberating truth of the gospel will simply become more insistent on things being done their way.

She went on to warn that the efforts of church leaders to control people through political process will lead to dire
outcomes. Church members will, under such pressures, move in one of two directions:

“those who are thus oppressed will either break every fetter of restraint, or they will be led to regard
God as a hard master” (1888 Materials, p. 1436).

Then, in response to the inevitable pushback on their control, those who know not the liberating truth of the gospel will simply become more insistent on things being done their way:

“In order to reign and become a power, they employ Satan’s methods to justify their own principles.
They exalt themselves as men of superior judgment.”

Notice she warns that those who operate by “Satan’s methods” in the church do so by exalting themselves as “men of superior judgment.” Whenever men attempt to shut down dialogue by posturing themselves as the ones who have the truth while portraying those who differ from them as unfaithful to Scripture, we can know that it is Satan’s spirit that is prompting them. “These” men, she states rather straightly, “are false gods” (1888 Materials, p. 1436).

In 1903 she again sounded a similar warning:

“The development of the desire to control has been very marked, and God sent warning after warning, forbidding confederacies and consolidation. He warned us against binding ourselves to fulfill certain agreements that would be presented by men laboring to control the movements of their brethren” (Review and Herald, December 10, 1903).

Of course, she was not suggesting that physical force was being employed to exert control. It was not. Rather, she was referring to methods of political process that were being employed to control the church. The way these men were exercising control was by pressuring people into subjection by leveling accusations of unfaithfulness against anyone who disagreed with them.

Leading up to the 1893 General Conference Session, at which W.W. Prescott and A.T. Jones would be attempting yet again to incorporate the gospel into the Adventist message, Ellen White wrote with penetrating insight:

“It is not the inspiration from heaven that leads one to be suspicious, watching for a chance and greedily seizing upon it to prove that those brethren who differ from us in some interpretation of Scripture are not sound in the faith” (1888 Materials, p. 1127).

There was a mentality among the old covenant brood to narrowly define “the truth” according to their particular perspectives and then to represent anyone outside of those narrow parameters as “not sound in the faith.” This is precisely what we see taking place today in Adventism, and it is one of the most damaging influences among us as a people.

The old covenant brood yet lives!

And each of us is as liable to be a part of it as the person in the pew next to us.

The crucial point is this: what lay at the foundation of this inclination to control was a resistance to the gospel with its
inherent principles of liberty! If the gospel of grace does not flourish in a church’s theology and experience, the tendency will be to control others by political process, by majority vote, by contractual arrangements, by the formation of confederacies that advance restricting agendas upon the body of Christ. Apart from the principles inherent in the gospel, human beings do not know how to allow others the freedom to advance God’s cause in a manner that differs from what they feel themselves bound to.

LEGAL RELIGION AND ICY HEARTS

The old covenant brood included formidable figures of immense stature like G.I. Butler, who was General Conference president during the 1888 fiasco, and Uriah Smith, preacher, prolific author, and editor-in-chief for many years of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. In addition to these stalwart figures, there were numerous other leaders, pastors, and evangelists who aligned their influence against allowing the gospel to take its rightful place within the framework of Adventist theology and church governance.

These men created a flavor of Adventism, a fundamental orientation to the message and mission of the church, which came to constitute what nearly all Adventists, to one degree or another, perceived our message and mission to be. We live and evangelize and debate issues in the legacy of their thought. And this historic trajectory has huge implications. It means, among other things, that the corporate personality of the Advent people has been shaped over the generations since 1888 by the theological construct and evangelistic approach bequeathed to us by men who, to a significant degree, barricaded the church against the entrance of God’s grace. As a result of their influence, the gospel did not take on prominence within the conceptual framework of Adventist theology and mission. Even now it is common to hear Adventists say things like, “We don’t need to preach the love of God and focus on the cross, because the other churches are doing that. We’re called to preach the three angels’ messages, the Sabbath, the law of God, the judgment, and the Second Coming.” This is a rough articulation of a mindset that manifests itself in various forms, most notably in the way we define our mission and formulate the content of our evangelistic meetings and Bible study guides. But this is a false and dangerous dichotomy that only serves to emasculate the three angels’ messages of their real power, a power that resides alone in the proclamation of God’s love in all its glorious fullness as the real substance of all biblical doctrine. This kind of thinking entirely misses the crucial fact that Adventism was called into existence by God to proclaim the gospel—not a message distinct from the gospel, but the gospel itself—with the unparalleled clarity that our doctrinal understanding affords.

Today, many of our people are largely living in the legacy of the Butler-Smith theological lineage rather than in the Jones-Waggoner lineage. The old covenant brood lives on in Adventism wherever we hear preachers preaching up storms of obligation, duty, and behavioral reform without any clear proclamation of God’s pardoning love; wherever we hear the preaching of obedience to the law and victory over sin with language of mandate rather than of promise; wherever the emphasis is on what the human agent ought to do, had better do, must do, with little or no heart-warming declarations of God’s saving grace as the power to transform our lives from the inside out.

| Adventism was called into existence by God to proclaim the gospel—not a message distinct from the gospel, but the gospel itself—with the unparalleled clarity that our doctrinal understanding affords. |

These voices are strident, loud, and prolific in Adventism, and they are draining the church of new covenant power. For many of our people these voices define Adventism, unaware of any alternative way of perceiving our message. The insistent, authoritarian voice of the old covenant brood makes many of our people afraid of any voice that speaks of God’s boundless love and free grace. Many Adventists have been intellectually and emotionally educated with such a narrow theological view that they are automatically apprehensive of any message that points too strongly to Christ and shifts the focus from their own efforts to obey.

On the other end of the spectrum something just as damaging is happening in reaction against the old covenant perspective that has ruled for so long down through Adventist history. We are now faced with an extreme breed of
liberalism that would throw out certain distinctive doctrines under the pretext of preaching Christ. “Jesus, Jesus, all we need is Jesus,” is the cry, as if Jesus were somehow vacant of doctrinal content. It is not a wispy, vacuous Jesus we need, but the one and only true Jesus, full of strength, and substance, and the irresistible beauty of self-sacrificing love.

Yes, the backlash of liberalism we see cropping up in various quarters of Adventism is, indeed, a problem. But here’s the crucial thing to grasp: the liberalism we are now facing, with its tendency to negate Bible doctrine, is largely a desperate and misguided reaction against the graceless conservatism that has characterized much of our history. We have sown legalism to the wind, and now we are reaping a whirlwind of liberalism. In other words, theological liberalism was born in Adventism as an overcorrection against rigid conservatism—and the battle lines are drawn in the sand to this day. As a result, we are a fractured and fighting people, often straining gnats and swallowing camels (Matthew 23:24). And the whole brawling mess is traceable back to the sharp right turn we took away from the gospel in 1888!

the liberalism we are now facing, with its tendency to negate Bible doctrine, is largely a desperate and misguided reaction against the graceless conservatism.

It would be difficult to overstate the adverse effect our 1888 divergence has had upon the formation of Adventism in the years that have followed. Conversely, we can only imagine the incredible theological and experiential beauty that would have resulted from a wholehearted embrace of justification by faith as the central theme of all our soul winning efforts. An acceptance of the gospel in 1888 would have generated rapid growth in Adventist theology and experience, creating a powerful fusion between the glory of the cross of Christ and sound biblical doctrine.

In 1899, G.A. Irwin, General Conference president at that time, preached a sermon in which he declared that if Seventh-day Adventists had embraced the message of righteousness by faith, "we would have been infinitely further along in the message than we are today" (G.A. Irwin, Australian Union Conference Record, July 10, 1899). By “infinitely farther along” he meant that we would have been more mature and developed in our theological comprehension. We would have seen how the gospel figures into all our doctrines and sheds brilliant light upon them. If the self-eclipsing truth of justification by faith had been embraced early in the development of Adventist theology, the message would have flowered with radiant color and dimensional depth under our stewardship.

Decades after the basic doctrinal lineup of Adventism had been composed, while evangelistic meetings were being preached gangbusters, an angel informed Ellen White that “there is much light yet to shine forth from the law of God and the gospel of righteousness. This message, understood in its true character, and proclaimed in the Spirit, will lighten the earth with its glory” (1888 Materials, pp. 165–166).

But, alas, that glorious potential was never realized!

There was something vital missing from our doctrinal portfolio. We were preaching the law, the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the investigative judgment, the Second Coming, and the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. And yet there was a need for Adventists to understand the message—note the language—“in its true character.” There was some additional, crucial light that was to be shed upon the Adventist belief system. That “light” was none other than the glorious truth of God’s faithful love manifested in the person and work of Christ. God tried to bring this light to our people in 1888 and the years that followed, but the old covenant brood barricade the church against its entrance. Ironically, they did so in the name of faithfulness to “the truth.”

In December of 1888, thinking back to the Minneapolis General Conference Session, Ellen White mused with sadness, “What power must we have from God that icy hearts, having only a legal religion, should see the better things provided for them—Christ and His righteousness!” (1888 Materials, p. 229). Here she discerned the two forces that were at odds within Adventism: legal religion versus Christ and His righteousness.
Three and a half years later, in a letter to Stephen Haskell, Ellen White again described the contrast between the two elements that were battling for supremacy in Adventism:

“The whole earth is to be lightened with the glory of God. The light is shining now, and how hard it is for proud hearts to accept Jesus as their personal Savior; how hard to get out of the rut of legal religion; how hard to grasp the rich, free grace of Christ” (Letter 10a, April 6, 1892, to Stephen Haskell).

There are three points to emphasize here:

1. She is specifically speaking here of the light of Revelation 18, commonly referred to by Seventh-day Adventists as “the loud cry,” which is to be attended by “the latter rain,” thus empowering the church to proclaim the message on a global scale.

2. Then she indicates that what constitutes the essence of this light is “the rich, free gift of Christ.” Wow! Process that, and compare it to what you know to be the content of much Adventist “evangelism” and “revival” preaching. Where are we hearing messages on “the rich, free gift of Christ”? 

3. Then she points out that what is blocking the loud cry message from taking hold in Adventism is “the rut of legal religion.” In her day, Adventism had lodged itself rather tightly in that rut, making it “hard” for our people “to grasp the rich, free gift of Christ.”

And here we are more than a hundred years later with many of our people still tightly lodged in that rut, while others are reacting against it by running off headlong into the opposite rut of liberalism because they are exhausted by the legalism. There are still insistent voices today that would keep Adventism in the rut of legal religion, preaching what they call “the truth,” but with no clearly developed theology of grace. The net effect of such preaching is that the people in the pew feel guilty, obligated, weak, and “icy cold.” As a result many of them become susceptible to equally strident voices on the opposite end of the spectrum that are preaching a version of “grace” that lacks doctrinal integrity.

GOSPEL FRAMEWORK

Now, then, carefully notice in this historical context that in the same year she made her observation regarding the “rut of legal religion,” Ellen White clearly articulated that something specific needed to be done:

“God calls upon all who claim to believe present truth, to work diligently in gathering up the precious jewels of truth, and placing them in their position in the framework of the gospel. Let them shine in all their divine beauty and loveliness” (Review and Herald, November 15, 1892).

Let her point register deeply, because the future of Adventism hangs upon whether or not we as a people will move in this direction. Our great need is that the precious truths God has given us be understood and preached within “the framework of the gospel.” But there was then, as there is now, a formidable blockade against this happening.

Writing to G.I. Butler in 1888, Ellen White quoted an angel as saying that “the church needed the ‘energy of Christ.’” And then, continuing to explain, she said the angel indicated to her that, “A time of trial was before us, and great evils would be the result of the Phariseeism which has in a large degree taken possession of those who occupy important positions in the work of God. He said that the work of Christ upon the earth was to undo the heavy burdens and let the oppressed go free, to break every yoke; and the work of His people must correspond with the work of Christ” (1888 Materials, p. 93).
This is an absolutely astounding insight, which is, come to think of it, exactly what you would expect from an angel. And it wasn’t merely insightful, but also prophetic. Notice the angel warned of Phariseeism as the element that would bring great evils upon Adventism. We are living in the fulfillment of this angelic utterance as we witness the polarization of Adventism into conservative and liberal camps with the gospel, all the while, nearly nowhere in sight. Phariseeism may be defined as the preaching of the law without the gospel, hammering the people with requirements while withholding from them the beautiful, energizing truth of God’s love. So, then, if the angel that spoke thusly to Ellen White was correct—and certainly we must concede that angels tend to be correct—this is the worm at the core of Adventism that is killing the church from the inside out.

In 1892 Ellen White wrote to Uriah Smith:

“The many and confused ideas in regard to Christ’s righteousness and justification by faith are the result of the position you have taken toward the man and the message sent of God. But oh, Jesus longs to bestow upon you the richest blessings . . . Justification by faith and the righteousness of Christ are the themes to be presented to a perishing world. Oh, that you may open the door of your heart to Jesus!” (1888 Materials, pp. 1053–1054).

Two weeks earlier she had written to Stephen Haskell explaining that the refusal to incorporate the truth of justification by faith into the Adventist message was giving “occasion . . . to the world to doubt the truth of Christianity.” Why? Because the refusal to incorporate the gospel into the message of Adventism was resulting in a cold legalism being projected to the world rather than the warm witness of God’s alluring love. She went on to make a passionate appeal to those who were standing against the gospel:

“You are living in guilty, self-deception, because you keep yourselves away from the light and rich treasures of God’s grace. You imagine yourselves to be rich when you are bankrupt. Your whole life has been a lie. . . . Will you open your heart to the sacred, softening, subduing influence of the grace of Christ? Can you keep your heart closed against His love and the riches of His grace?” (Letter 30a, September 5, 1892).

One week earlier she had written to O.A. Olsen and lamented the spirit of “contention and strife among us” and the inclination toward “watching your brethren with suspicion.” The pushback on the glorious truth of justification by faith yielded an adverse experiential effect upon the old covenant brood: “Doubt, unbelief, prejudice, and stubbornness, killed all love from their souls” (1888 Materials, pp. 1018-1031).

And there were practical, organizational outcomes as well.

In the historic context of Adventism pushing back on the gospel, Ellen White observed that something else was taking place as the inevitable byproduct. Leading up to 1888, she warned of brethren whose inclination would be toward “paring everything done after their style” and that they would “lay their hand upon God’s working and forbid it” (Letter 35, November 17, 1885, to W.C. White).

This is eye-opening language. The word “paring” means “to reduce something by cutting; to diminish or decrease gradually.” The word “style” refers to “a particular, distinctive, or characteristic mode of action or manner of acting.” What she is describing here is a mindset that dictates a reduced or narrow pattern of action, requiring everyone to conduct their labors for God after a uniform mode of action. Astounding! Think about this in relation to the current culture wars going on in our beloved church.

If Ellen White was a prophet of God, we can only conclude that the inclination to constrict the people of Jesus to a single “style” with which to advance God’s kingdom is decidedly anti-gospel, anti-Protestant, and anti-Adventist when
compared to the vision God has for this movement. We would all do well to adopt the supremely rational Protestant maxim, “In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity.”

Grace and liberty go together like water and wet (2 Corinthians 3:17; Galatians 5:1).

Legalism and control go together like ice and cold (Matthew 23:23-24; Galatians 2:4).

An acceptance of the gospel necessarily broadens a person’s mind and widens their range of motion within the large parameters of truth and love. It enlarges a person’s perspective on what is acceptable methodologically for advancing the kingdom because it ignites a passion in the soul to reach the lost for Christ. Of course this doesn’t mean absolutely anything goes, but it does mean that anything goes apart from compromising the truth and committing sin. As my friend, Gary Krause, director of the office of Adventist Mission at the General Conference, likes to say, “My mantra is to adapt everything for the sake of the most effective mission, without compromising truth.” That makes total sense: maintain faithfulness to the truth, cross no moral lines into sin, and beyond that feel free to “become all things to all men, that [we] might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). The problem is, there are those among us who cannot bear to allow anyone to feel at liberty to do anything they do not feel free to do, as if their narrow opinions and dictates constitute the standard with which all must comply or be labeled “unfaithful.”

And why?

Because—and here’s the crucial point—their basic theological paradigm is one in which the restrictions they impose upon themselves and others have purchasing power with God for salvation. This is why Ellen White so brilliantly discerned a connection between legalism and the inclination to control others. If a person’s heart is void of the gospel of God’s justifying grace, their security with God will be threatened by the freedom others have in Christ. If anyone is allowed to do anything that is outside of the narrow system of restrictions they have set up for themselves, the fundamental basis of their salvation is shaken. Thus they feel compelled to “pare down” everything to their particular “style” of labor and forbid everything else. This is simply the outworking of their theology. They think that there is one “style” by which the mission of the church is to be executed, and it just happens to be their particular style, because their standing with God is built on the fragile foundation of their performance. In other words, the inclination to control others is inherent to the salvation by works paradigm.

Paul described those who conduct themselves in this manner as “false brethren” who “spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage” (Galatians 2:4). Those who live in an arrangement in which their deeds have purchasing power with God are naturally uncomfortable with others in the church doing anything out of sync with their way of doing things, because their way constitutes currency with God. For others to not comply with their way causes them to sense that their currency does not possess the value they have ascribed to it. So they feel insecure and tighten controls, which is the natural impulse inherent in legalism. For the legalist everything is either right or wrong, or almost everything. In keeping with their legalism, they do throw themselves a few bones of freedom in order to maintain the illusion that they actually believe the gospel. But it is not within the scope of their thinking to easily perceive freedom itself as a moral value, and it is not easy for them to perceive morally neutral categories. The impulse toward constriction, coercion, and control is the dark pathology that lurks within legalism, and the glorious gospel of God’s free grace is the only remedy.

For the legalist everything is either right or wrong, or almost everything.
Our beloved church is in the throes of an identity crisis. We are a people in conflict with one another over many issues. Where shall we go from here? May I suggest that we need to go back in order to intelligently go forward? In the light of the history we have pondered in this essay, it seems evident that we as a people desperately need to return to the place where we last saw the light and then work forward with humility and repentance from there.

In 1888, “The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through elders Waggoner and Jones. This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Savior, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God. Many had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes directed to His divine person, His merits, and His changeless love for the human family. All power is given into His hands, that He may dispense rich gifts unto men, imparting the priceless gift of His own righteousness to the helpless human agent. This is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel’s message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His spirit in a large measure” (Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 91-92).

The remedy for all that afflicts God’s church is a clearly defined, clearly preached, and experientially embraced doctrine of justification by faith. As we engage in our dialogues and debates over culture and style, over methods of evangelism and approaches to mission, over operational policies and qualifications for ministry, the most productive course we can pursue is to first and foremost proclaim the good news of God’s love in all its clarifying beauty. From that premise, our hearts will enlarge toward one another, our minds will broaden with creativity in the execution of our mission, and we will be secure enough in Christ to allow our brothers and sisters to differ from us in their service for the Lord while affirming them as faithful fellow laborers in the spreading of our Savior’s fame.

Ty Gibson Co-Director
Light Bearers
The greatest Christmas card ever bestowed upon me had gilded edges, dazzling red and green accents, and the following message:

“Jesus is the reason for the season!” TRUE!

“Merry Christmas!” FALSE!!!!

The sender had actually crossed off the holiday greeting portion and wrote “FALSE” — with multiple exclamation points so I would know this was serious.

I was confused. But thankfully the sender included a multipage letter, with festive green and red font, explaining the pagan nature of the world’s most popular holiday. If I didn’t “hang my stockings with care” (metaphorically speaking), I would be guilty of brazen paganism.

I display this card every year. It’s my favorite decoration.

Every year I run into grinches trying to steal Christmas. They lurk in church lobbies, send “concerned” emails, and manage shady websites with MIDI hymns and mismatched fonts. Their questionable hermeneutics and historiographies let you know you are on God’s naughty list if you have too much yuletide cheer.

I have written elsewhere on the methodology used to slam Saint Nick’s season, and, as an Adventist, I have pointed to many positive things Ellen White, one of our influential denominational founders, had to say about exchanging gifts (Review and Herald, Dec. 26, 1882) and Christmas trees — even in church (Review and Herald, Dec. 11, 1879). The only negative things she says about the holiday have to do with our tendency to saturate it with materialism and our selfish ignorance of those in need — counsel even people with a secular persuasion can appreciate. I tried pointing this out to a Christmas-hater once, and they countered with the “fact” that these weren’t her “inspired writings.”

#convenient

I don’t want to rehash the history of this debate anymore, but I do want to throw out an element that has bothered me — and I hope it will bother you. Why is it so easy to be an accidental pagan but not an accidental Christian?

We see people wearing apparel, jewelry, tattoos, etc., with crosses on them — but nobody would say they are secretly worshipping Jesus. People attend financial seminars and school concerts inside our sanctuaries, but does that make them believers?

Are they in danger of heaven?

When the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and built the temple of Jupiter on its ruins, would sensational pagan evangelists point out the traces of Jewish symbolism and architecture infringing on the worship of Roman gods? When evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins listens to Handel’s Messiah, does his name disappear off the Devil’s Ledger of Death and appear in the Lamb’s Book of Life?

Based on some of the reasoning I hear, it almost seems like some credit the devil with more power than Jesus. Whatever happened to the reassuring words of Jesus, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand” (John 10:28–29 ESV)?

Questions to ponder as you celebrate, or try to exterminate, this holiday season.

Accidental Pagans

gleanernow.com/news/2014/11/accidental-pagans

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Questions to ponder as you celebrate, or try to exterminate, this holiday season.
Student leaders at Portland Adventist Academy have taken initiative to begin a new chapel program for small groups.

Early in the school year, as spiritual direction was being discussed by PAA student association co-chaplains Josh Bibb and Cherith Lorenson, a new idea was born. Bibb and Lorenson developed a vision to give students a more intimate and diverse kind of worship. The small group chapel was planned and presented to staff before school began.

“We wanted to see a more diverse and close-knit spiritual community,” says Lorenson. “We want to see students mingling and discussing spiritual topics with people outside of their particular grade level or friendship group.”

PAA teachers and staff embraced the idea. “We’re committed to encouraging students to dream about what they want the spiritual atmosphere on campus to be and then to help them create that environment,” explains Monte Torkelsen, PAA chaplain.

PAA staff also recognized the small group chapels as an opportunity to emphasize and discuss the school motto, “Christ-Centered, Character-Driven.”

Small group chapels have other great benefits. Because these groups will meet five more times this year, the conversations about PAA’s core character-driven development goals (courage, leadership, belief, integrity, concern, curiosity and excellence) can be highlighted throughout the year. Having student leaders facilitate the chapel further encourages mentorship.

“What’s also exciting about small groups,” says Mechelle Peinado, PAA guidance counselor and teacher, “is that over time it can pull students together into a closer, safer and more accepting environment.”

There are warm and positive reviews of the first small group chapel. Freshman Emily Carnis says, “I enjoyed our discussion very much, and I’m looking forward to the next one and to getting to know the people in my group more.”

“I had one staff member tell me that they had been surprised and delighted to hear a very quiet international student making excellent contributions to the conversation,” says Torkelsen. “That doesn't generally happen in larger groups.”

“Some of the group leaders said they were surprised at who spoke up,” adds Lorenson. “And that's the great part. It’s a chance to hear from people we normally wouldn’t. Making new friends and hearing new perspectives is what we want.”

Although the process of coordinating 257 students into 21 locations, with 21 staff sponsors, and student discussion leaders was complicated, the challenge was worth it and paid off. Torkelsen says students have a lot to be proud of. “This has been a much larger undertaking than many students would tackle,” he says. “But it was a great start, and our students are doing a great job.”

“It was wonderful,” says Peinado. “I liked seeing students from different classes and ages and interests come together and share and encourage each other. It’s wonderful.”

+ Read more from Oregon Conference
+ Read more from December 2014
The Enterprise (Ore.) Adventist School had a fabulous turnout for the annual Fall Festival and had the highest-ever fundraising amount. The fun included a kissing booth, silly photos, bean-bag toss and many other activities. Almost 60 tickets were sold for the chili, salad and bread dinner. Dessert was available as well. The Fall Festival is a great opportunity for church members, community members, parents and students to get to know each other and enjoy quality fun.

Alina Rice

Enterprise Church communication leader
It’s often easy to get wrapped up in the day to day of academics, sports and other extracurricular school activities and forget that there is a battle for hearts going on at all times: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). This year Columbia Adventist Academy (CAA) is making intentional efforts to remain on guard and knee-deep in prayers while sending warriors into the battlefield on a daily basis.

These Battle Ground, Wash., battle plans began with a school walk sponsored by Clark County Prayer Connect. Jeff Jackson, CAA principal, led out with community members, alumni and staff walking throughout the school and praying for the students and staff. This was followed by the CAA dedication chapel, a tradition at CAA, during which the students, staff, community members and pastors from constituent churches receive a ribbon then join hands in a prayer of dedication, asking that God will be glorified throughout the school year. After prayer they tie the ribbons together and place them over a cross.

Along with these activities to remind the school community of its calling is an exciting new outreach on the part of the CAA chaplain, Aaron Payne, to involve students, staff, parents and community members in a weekly morning prayer meeting called “Tent of Meeting.” The Bible says Moses went to meet with God in a special tent called the tent of meeting. Moses spoke with God in this tent concerning the children of Israel. In a similar way this prayer group is meeting with God on behalf of CAA. Payne says, "When we accept the call of God to pray, we can expect to see God bless ‘exceedingly, abundantly' because our God is faithful."

Do prayers work? Sharon Crosby, CAA alumna, recently shared that, during her academy reunion, classmates told stories of how the prayers of a praying parent, who has continued to pray for the class to this day, had impacted their lives. “You could feel the answer to those prayers as our class went around the circle and shared how God had blessed them, been near to them in trouble, and was a huge part of the majority of our classmate's lives," Crosby shared. "Forty years later you get another perspective of your youth, and I was struck with gratefulness that I was able to spend four years in a safe environment, with mentoring teachers, great friends and now awesome memories — and, best of all, praying parents of classmates. What a legacy. Thanks CAA."

May the legacy of a praying community and being knee-deep in prayers at CAA continue until Jesus comes.

Larry Hiday

CAA Gleaner correspondent
A Shameful Christmas Story

Faithfulness to God can disrupt your life and defame your reputation. That’s our Christmas story today.

The celebrated virgin told the announcing angel, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). But Mary’s legendary submission to God’s will for her life did not spare her the pain or shame of radical faithfulness.

Her own fiancé doubted she was telling the truth. Hear her impassioned appeal to the man she loved: “I wasn’t unfaithful to you or to God — please believe me!” Joseph didn’t. He decided to get rid of her, according to Matt. 1:19: “Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.”

So Joseph was a decent fellow who didn’t wish to humiliate Mary publicly; he just needed to get her out of his life. So he “resolved” to abandon his beloved to the minimum consequences of adultery. It took a dramatic visit from an angel to convince Joseph that Mary was telling the truth. Gabriel defended Mary’s faith and faithfulness: “That which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (verse 20).

We don’t know how long Mary was in limbo with Joseph. The Bible just says “as he considered these things” (verse 20) — that is, as he considered how to implement his resolution to put her away.

Meanwhile, perhaps nobody in Nazareth believed Mary was telling the truth about her swelling abdomen. Apparently desperate, “Mary arose and went with haste to the hill country, to a town in Judah” (Luke 1:39). This was not a shopping trip to find cute outfits for the new baby. Mary got out of town “with haste” and traveled 100 miles on a lonely journey to find shelter with the only couple in Israel who knew firsthand about angels announcing miracle pregnancies.

Imagine Mary’s relief upon finally arriving at the home of Elizabeth, who greeted her with a Spirit-inspired affirmation: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (verse 42). So this young mother was blessed by God, not deserving of rejection by the man she loved. And her Baby was blessed too — not a son of shame, but Immanuel, God with us.

Mary stayed several months at Elizabeth’s crisis pregnancy shelter before returning to Nazareth’s suspicions and gossip. Ultimately Joseph did believe her, but only after another persuasive visit from the angel to Nazareth.

What can we learn this Christmas season from Mary’s time of trouble? Many things, including Paul’s assessment of the good life that comes from the obedience of faith: “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). So whatever may be our own suffering this season, we may echo Mary’s courageous commitment: “Behold the servant of the Lord; do with my life whatever you will” (Luke 1:38).

Martin Weber

Adventist product manager at Logos Bible Software

Martin Weber, DMin, served as pastor, editor, author, evangelist and police chaplain across North America and taught pastors on five continents with the General Conference Ministerial Association.