Why Not Try This? - Keeping Members in the Church

by Dale Galusha, President of Pacific Press

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NPUC April Evangelistic Meetings

Please pray for the 55 meetings taking place in March in these churches throughout the North Pacific Union:

- Idaho Falls, ID
- Beaverton, OR
- Oasis in Vancouver, WA
- Shady Point in Eagle Point, OR
- Vietnamese in Portland, OR
- Independence Spanish in Monmouth, OR
- Medford, OR Spanish
- Milwaukie, OR Spanish
- Monitor Spanish in Woodburn, OR
- Mosaic in Hillsboro, OR
- Salem, OR Spanish
- University Park Spanish in Portland, OR
- Vancouver, WA Spanish
- Woodburn, OR Spanish
- Woodland, WA Spanish
- Grandview, WA
- Orofino, ID
- Kettle Falls, WA
- Tonasket, WA
- Umapine in Milton-Freewater, OR
- Yakima, WA
- Fairview in Yakima, WA
- Selah, WA
- Mount Vernon, WA
- Greater Seattle, WA FilAm
- Port Angeles, WA
- North Cascade in Burlington, WA
- Willapa Harbor in Raymond, WA
- Seattle, WA Korean
- 16 different campaigns in Washington Conference Spanish Churches

Changed Lives - Finding God Off the Grid

by Ken Crawford, President of the Alaska Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Christy was a corporate executive in San Francisco. Tired of her life in a high tech world, she shed everything and moved to Alaska. She bought a remote acreage and even though she was under 5 feet tall and weighed less than 100 pounds, she proceeded to build herself a log cabin off the grid and only accessible by ATV or snow machine.

She lived there for 3 years by herself, then one night was able to catch a signal from one of our radio stations. Intrigued, she found the Tok Seventh-day Adventist Church and attended church there. She heard about our evangelistic series in Anchorage and made her way there, rented a room, and came to every one of our meetings. She returned to the bush a converted woman.

### Church Planting - SEEDS Conference

**Vancouver SEEDS Church Planting & Innovative Evangelism Conference**

**April 10 - 11, 2015**

Adventist Community Church of Vancouver
9711 NE St. John’s Road
Vancouver, WA 98665
vancouveradventist.com
(360) 696-2511

**Featured Speakers**

- **Skip Bell**
  Director
  Doctor of Ministry Program
  Andrews University

- **Tom Evans**
  Associate Director
  Church Planting, Coaching, NCD
  NADEI

- **Bledi Leno**
  Church Planter
  Life Hope Center Bryant Park
  Greater New York Conference

- **Tara VinCross**
  Church Planter
  Columbia Union Conference

**Musical Guest**

- **Josh Jamieson**
  Vocalist

**Schedule**

- **Friday, April 10**
  - 7:30 - 9:30 pm
  - **Sabbath, April 11**
  - 9:30 am - 7:30 pm

**Concert**

- **Sabbath, April 11**
  - Jaime Jorge
Media & Adventist Benefits - God in A Year Without God

Former Adventist pastor Ryan Bell has made headlines throughout the past year due to his decision to transition from believer to atheist. His journey has caused many to reflect on their own reasons for faith or disbelief. When Walla Walla University (WWU) student Randy Folkenberg did some thinking of his own, he couldn't help realizing that Bell's decision to choose a different path was made possible by freedom of choice. Read how that impacts Folkenberg's perspective on God in his blog from the WWU Collegian.

Lifelong Learning - Is Atheism Irrational?

In an interview by Gary Gutting regarding theism vs. atheism, Alvin Plantinga defended his view on why atheism is irrational. Read this interview here.

Alvin Plantinga is an emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, a former president of both the Society of Christian Philosophers and the American Philosophical Association, and the author, most recently, of “Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism.”

Gary Gutting is a professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, and an editor of Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews. He is the author of, most recently, 'Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960' and writes regularly for The Stone.

Resources - Tech Resources that (Are Supposed to) Help the Church

by Pedro Trinidad
Source: NAD Ministerial

Lately I have been compiling a list of resources that can help pastors and church administrators to be more efficient. I get e-mails all the time from different ministries with resources that are supposed to lighten the load church leaders carry. Here are a few of the resources you may find helpful in your ministry. As a disclaimer, I have not used all of these tools - some just don't fit my current context - but they sound so cool that I hope to use them sometime in the future. Some are free. Some are not. So here we go - Read More

Health & Temperance - Facts with Hope
**Facts with Hope** are evidence based health messages that may be used in a church bulletin, newsletter, or during the "Health Minute" as part of church service to motivate people to choose a full abundant life. They are published monthly in our *Health Unlimited Newsletter*.

For more information on Facts with Hope, visit the [website](#), like us on [Facebook](#), or follow us on [Twitter](#). You can also watch Facts with Hope videos on [Youtube](#).

### Parenting Corner - When Distractions Keep Us from Our Kids

Have you ever felt the pull of technology? The attachment of that little device in your hand you can't seem to put down? Have you ever snapped at your children for interrupting you, while on that device, when all they wanted was for you to spend some time with them? You may rationalize what you're doing with excuses like, "I need to get this one thing done and then I can focus on you." Then that one thing somehow turns into five more things. If this sounds familiar, read the article [When Distractions Keep Us from Our Kids](#) by Christina Fox.

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At first retention summit, leaders look at reality of church exodus

Adventist Researcher Monte Sahlin speaks at the Summit on Nurture and Retention, Monday, November 18 at the Adventist Church’s world headquarters. More than 100 attendees examined data on why members leave the church, as well as how a focus on discipleship is key to keep members from slipping out the back door. [photo: Ansel Oliver]

1 in 3 members lost over past 50 years; personal support is key way to help members

November 19, 2013 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Ansel Oliver/ANN

The first global summit focusing on Seventh-day Adventist Church membership retention is revealing the rate and reasons members slip out the back door. It’s the first time the matter has been spotlighted in such a major way, prompting church leaders to renew their emphasis on making fruitful and growing disciples of Christ.

The Adventist world church, now with nearly 18 million members, has lost at least 1 in 3 Seventh-day Adventist members in the last 50 years, according to summit organizers. Also, in this century, the ratio of people lost versus new converts is 43 per 100.

“These figures are too high,” said David Trim, director of the Office of Archives, Statistics and Research. “There’s a theological point to this and it’s that God’s mission is to seek the lost.”

For three days this week, 100 attendees from six continents have gathered at the denomination’s world headquarters for the Summit on Nurture and Retention to examine data, which is offering a clearer picture of trends beyond long-held assumptions gained from anecdotal evidence.

Veteran Adventist Church researcher Monte Sahlin said the reasons people drop out of church often have less to do with what the church does and its doctrines than with problems people experience in their personal lives—marital conflict or unemployment, for example. What the church does that contributes to the problem, he said, is not helping people through their tough life experiences.

“The notion of people dropping out because of something the church does or a doctrinal disagreement is not apparent in the data,” Sahlin said. “It’s been shown that a member of a church board is just as likely to disagree with one of the church’s 28 Fundamental Beliefs as someone who’s been disfellowshiped.”

Several presentations showed that the Adventist Church has learned how to better conduct more realistic outreach by learning from past examples. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, many Adventist groups sponsored extravagant evangelism events—complete with mass choirs and large, multi-screen presentations. But while many sponsoring organizations were eager for the once-in-a-generation chance, many newly baptized converts joined the church thinking it was their ticket to gaining their own wealth. The church there lacked a long-term strategy and denominational infrastructure, and most of those new converts soon stopped attending church.

One presentation revealed that in South Africa, the rate of accession of new members had slowed, but membership had significantly increased due to retention. That fact prompted Harald Wollan, an associate executive secretary of the Adventist world church, to suggest to the group that future evangelism efforts should focus on nurturing
members.

“What if the church used some evangelism funds for our own members’ care? We might see a similar increase in numbers,” Wollan said.

“We will have to do that,” responded Adventist world church Vice President Armando Miranda, who was chairing the afternoon session.

One delegate, Jimmy V. Adil, from the Philippines, asked why conferences feel pressure to increase membership, often from the parent unions, whom he said feel pressure from the divisions. He asked if the world headquarters was exerting pressure for growth.

Adventist Church Executive Secretary G. T. Ng replied, “There’s no pressure for growth. Do we pressure a papaya tree to produce? … If so, we may stunt its growth.”

Trim, the research director, said the problem, though, is common in some regions. On Tuesday, he revealed that 30 percent of church clerks in one particular division had been pressured to inflate baptismal numbers. “It’s a sin to lie about anything in the Adventist Church, but for some reason, too many people think it’s OK to lie about membership numbers,” Trim said.

Increasing membership audits by divisions are combating incidences of membership inflation in some regions. Trim said several regions have made the audits a priority, including South America, Southeast Asia and West Africa.

“Accurate membership records: that’s a secretary’s contribution to [the church’s current focus on] Revival and Reformation,” said Onalapo Ajibade, secretary for the West-Central Africa Division, based in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. “We must have accuracy. God cannot bless a lie.”

On the meeting sidelines, the youngest attendee, Cheryl Simpson, said she was encouraged by the summit because she said it showed church leaders wanted to encourage young adults like her.

Simpson, who is a senior psychology student at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, United States, said she was glad that church leaders were willing to look at reality.

“For me, this is essential because it’s showing me that theologians aren’t afraid to face the facts,” Simpson said.

—See more photos, including presentation slides and statistics, in the ANN Flickr account.

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By Marella Rudebaugh

by Dale Galusha, President of Pacific Press

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**1. Get the new member reading the Conflict of the Ages!**

Ellen White wrote: “Many will depart from the faith and give heed to seducing spirits. *Patriarchs and Prophets* and *Great Controversy* are books that are especially adapted to those who have newly come to the faith, that they may be established in the truth” (*Evangelism*, p. 366).

This was written before she completed writing the Conflict of the Ages series. I believe she was saying that when a member understands the “Great Controversy theme,” it will hold him or her in the church. All the doctrines of Adventism make sense in the context of the great controversy theme brought out so clearly and so beautifully in the five volumes of the Conflict of the Ages.

That’s why many churches **give a Conflict of the Ages set to each newly baptized member.**

With the importance of this in mind, Pacific Press has produced a workbook to help individuals or small groups study their way through the great themes of the “Conflict” set. It’s called *The Great Controversy Countdown* and it is a simple-to-follow study guide designed specifically for those who are studying the Conflict set for the first time. CLICK HERE!

**2. Start a New Members Bible Class!**

In addition, the General Conference has partnered with Pacific Press to develop a four-quarter Sabbath School curriculum for new members. It combines a study of our beliefs with training for discipleship. These quarterlies, *New...*
3. Send a missionary magazine to new members!

Another effective way of retaining new members is to send them a year’s subscription to the appropriate missionary journal—*Signs of the Times*, *El Centinela*, or *Message Magazine*. These monthly visitors can reinforce beliefs as well as give the person a sense of membership in the church family. These magazines offer twelve visits a year to the home via the mail for about $1 a visit. A subscription, combined with pastoral visits, helps solidify new members in the church.

4. Encourage new members to share their faith!

Another factor that keeps new members in the church is their involvement in sharing their new faith with friends and family. Your Adventist Book Center has a variety of sharing tracts, booklets, and books that members can use to share their faith and that will also re-enforce the Adventist message in their own minds.

5. Help new members develop a daily devotional plan!

Helping members develop a regular, daily devotional plan is another crucial way to tie them more securely to their Lord and to His church. Our church produces new daily devotional books for all ages each year. CLICK HERE to see the 2015 line-up of great devotionals.

These are just a few of the resources available to help churches and pastors keep members in the church. It was the influence of printed materials that helped bring many of these members to our church, and it is that same influence—the printed page—that will help keep them in the family. Find all these items, and many more in your local Adventist Book Center.

-  1-800-765-6955
-  www.AdventistBookCenter.com
At the beginning of last year, Ryan Bell, an ex-adventist pastor, began what he called a “Year Without God.” Nine months prior to the beginning of this “Year Without God,” Ryan Bell resigned from pastoring the Hollywood Seventh-day Adventist church because of theological and practical disagreements he had with the Adventist denomination. That was in March, and by December of 2013, Bell had decided to not only separate himself from Adventism, but to separate himself from all those who believe in God. Over time Bell had begun to doubt the very existence of God and wanted to live a year as an atheist to test it out.

Just a couple of weeks ago, Bell completed his year without God, concluding that God probably doesn’t exist.

To atheists looking on, Bell’s final conclusion is of no surprise and is being proclaimed as a victory for their side. But what about Christians? Where is God in this godless year? Should it cause us to doubt our belief in God? While I am definitely saddened by Bell’s conclusion, it has in no way weakened my belief in God. In fact, through this article I hope to share one of the many ways that I see God in a Bell’s “Year Without God.”

At the very core of Christianity and at the center of the Gospel is the principle of love. Love is arguably the most powerful thing in the world. It can bring families back together, reunite whole countries, prevent unkindness, and forgive the worst of wrongs. I’m reminded of a Rascal Flatts’ song, “To Make Her Love Me,” which is pretty much a prayer of a heartbroken guy to God. The main point of the song comes part way through the chorus when the guy says to God, “You made the heavens and the stars, everything, come on how hard could it be to make her love me?”

At first it seems to me that the man’s request to God is perfectly legitimate. After all, God can do anything, right? Soon, however, I realize that this man’s request just isn’t going to be answered. Let me explain: The power behind love is free choice. Love cannot be forced; it must be chosen, which means our guy in the country song is out of luck. It is this concept of love being a choice I see God in “A Year Without God.” Because God is love and love is a free choice, a belief in and relationship with God must also be a choice. The fact that Ryan Bell was doubting the existence of God is actually evidence of God’s love; it testifies to free choice. Put it this way: if God had created and structured the world in such a way that his existence was undeniable and unquestionable, all people would have no choice but to acknowledge his existence, meaning that belief in God would cease to be a choice. God, because He is love, wants our believing in Him to be a choice, not a mandate. In other words, Ryan Bell’s choice to not believe in God was literally made possible by the love of God.

Each day we are faced with choices. Some choices are small and seemingly insignificant while others are big. The biggest choice that I believe we each have to make is, like Bell, a choice regarding God.

At some point or another we will all ask, “Is there really a God out there? If there is, does He really love and care for
“Who am I?” As we search for the answers to these questions in a host of different places, let’s not forget that the question itself might actually be giving its own answer.

Comments
Is Atheism Irrational?

By Gary Gutting

The Stone is a forum for contemporary philosophers and other thinkers on issues both timely and timeless.

This is the first in a series of interviews about religion that I will conduct for The Stone. The interviewee for this installment is Alvin Plantinga, an emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, a former president of both the Society of Christian Philosophers and the American Philosophical Association, and the author, most recently, of “Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism.”

Gary Gutting: A recent survey by PhilPapers, the online philosophy index, says that 62 percent of philosophers are atheists (with another 11 percent “inclined” to the view). Do you think the philosophical literature provides critiques of theism strong enough to warrant their views? Or do you think philosophers’ atheism is due to factors other than rational analysis?

Alvin Plantinga: If 62 percent of philosophers are atheists, then the proportion of atheists among philosophers is much greater than (indeed, is nearly twice as great as) the proportion of atheists among academics generally. (I take atheism to be the belief that there is no such person as the God of the theistic religions.) Do philosophers know something here that these other academics don’t know? What could it be? Philosophers, as opposed to other academics, are often professionally concerned with the theistic arguments — arguments for the existence of God. My guess is that a considerable majority of philosophers, both believers and unbelievers, reject these arguments as unsound.

Still, that’s not nearly sufficient for atheism. In the British newspaper The Independent, the scientist Richard Dawkins was recently asked the following question: “If you died and arrived at the gates of heaven, what would you say to God to justify your lifelong atheism?” His response: “I’d quote Bertrand Russell: ‘Not enough evidence, God! Not enough evidence!’” But lack of evidence, if indeed evidence is lacking, is no grounds for atheism. No one thinks there is good evidence for the proposition that there are an even number of stars; but also, no one thinks the right conclusion to draw is that there are an uneven number of stars. The right conclusion would instead be agnosticism.

In the same way, the failure of the theistic arguments, if indeed they do fail, might conceivably be good grounds for agnosticism, but not for atheism. Atheism, like even-star-ism, would presumably be the sort of belief you can hold rationally only if you have strong arguments or evidence.

G.G.: You say atheism requires evidence to support it. Many atheists deny this, saying that all they need to do is point out the lack of any good evidence for theism. You compare atheism to the denial that there are an even number of stars, which obviously would need evidence. But atheists say (using an example from Bertrand Russell) that you should rather compare atheism to the denial that there’s a teapot in orbit around the sun. Why prefer your comparison to Russell’s?

A.P.: Russell’s idea, I take it, is we don’t really have any evidence against teapotism, but we don’t need any; the absence of evidence is evidence of absence, and is enough to support a-teapotism. We don’t need any positive evidence against it to be justified in a-teapotism; and perhaps the same is true of theism.
I disagree: Clearly we have a great deal of evidence against teapotism. For example, as far as we know, the only way a teapot could have gotten into orbit around the sun would be if some country with sufficiently developed space-shot capabilities had shot this pot into orbit. No country with such capabilities is sufficiently frivolous to waste its resources by trying to send a teapot into orbit. Furthermore, if some country had done so, it would have been all over the news; we would certainly have heard about it. But we haven't. And so on. There is plenty of evidence against teapotism. So if, à la Russell, theism is like teapotism, the atheist, to be justified, would (like the a-teapotist) have to have powerful evidence against theism.

G.G.: But isn't there also plenty of evidence against theism — above all, the amount of evil in a world allegedly made by an all-good, all-powerful God?

A.P.: The so-called “problem of evil” would presumably be the strongest (and maybe the only) evidence against theism. It does indeed have some strength; it makes sense to think that the probability of theism, given the existence of all the suffering and evil our world contains, is fairly low. But of course there are also arguments for theism. Indeed, there are at least a couple of dozen good theistic arguments. So the atheist would have to try to synthesize and balance the probabilities. This isn’t at all easy to do, but it’s pretty obvious that the result wouldn’t anywhere nearly support straight-out atheism as opposed to agnosticism.

G.G.: But when you say “good theistic arguments,” you don’t mean arguments that are decisive — for example, good enough to convince any rational person who understands them.

A.P.: I should make clear first that I don’t think arguments are needed for rational belief in God. In this regard belief in God is like belief in other minds, or belief in the past. Belief in God is grounded in experience, or in the sensus divinitatis, John Calvin’s term for an inborn inclination to form beliefs about God in a wide variety of circumstances. Nevertheless, I think there are a large number — maybe a couple of dozen — of pretty good theistic arguments. None is conclusive, but each, or at any rate the whole bunch taken together, is about as strong as philosophical arguments ordinarily get.

G.G.: Could you give an example of such an argument?

You don’t even need arguments to have a rational belief in God. Belief in God is grounded in experience.

A.P.: One presently rather popular argument: fine-tuning. Scientists tell us that there are many properties our universe displays such that if they were even slightly different from what they are in fact, life, or at least our kind of life, would not be possible. The universe seems to be fine-tuned for life. For example, if the force of the Big Bang had been different by one part in 10 to the 60th, life of our sort would not have been possible. The same goes for the ratio of the gravitational force to the force driving the expansion of the universe: If it had been even slightly different, our kind of life would not have been possible. In fact the universe seems to be fine-tuned, not just for life, but for intelligent life. This fine-tuning is vastly more likely given theism than given atheism.

G.G.: But even if this fine-tuning argument (or some similar argument) convinces someone that God exists, doesn’t it fall far short of what at least Christian theism asserts, namely the existence of an all-perfect God? Since the world isn’t perfect, why would we need a perfect being to explain the world or any feature of it?

A.P.: I suppose your thinking is that it is suffering and sin that make this world less than perfect. But then your question makes sense only if the best possible worlds contain no sin or suffering. And is that true? Maybe the best worlds contain free creatures some of whom sometimes do what is wrong. Indeed, maybe the best worlds contain a scenario very like the Christian story.
Think about it: The first being of the universe, perfect in goodness, power and knowledge, creates free creatures. These free creatures turn their backs on him, rebel against him and get involved in sin and evil. Rather than treat them as some ancient potentate might — e.g., having them boiled in oil — God responds by sending his son into the world to suffer and die so that human beings might once more be in a right relationship to God. God himself undergoes the enormous suffering involved in seeing his son mocked, ridiculed, beaten and crucified. And all this for the sake of these sinful creatures.

I’d say a world in which this story is true would be a truly magnificent possible world. It would be so good that no world could be appreciably better. But then the best worlds contain sin and suffering.

G.G.: O.K., but in any case, isn’t the theist on thin ice in suggesting the need for God as an explanation of the universe? There’s always the possibility that we’ll find a scientific account that explains what we claimed only God could explain. After all, that’s what happened when Darwin developed his theory of evolution. In fact, isn’t a major support for atheism the very fact that we no longer need God to explain the world?

A.P.: Some atheists seem to think that a sufficient reason for atheism is the fact (as they say) that we no longer need God to explain natural phenomena — lightning and thunder for example. We now have science.

As a justification of atheism, this is pretty lame. We no longer need the moon to explain or account for lunacy; it hardly follows that belief in the nonexistence of the moon (a-moonism?) is justified. A-moonism on this ground would be sensible only if the sole ground for belief in the existence of the moon was its explanatory power with respect to lunacy. (And even so, the justified attitude would be agnosticism with respect to the moon, not a-moonism.) The same thing goes with belief in God: Atheism on this sort of basis would be justified only if the explanatory power of theism were the only reason for belief in God. And even then, agnosticism would be the justified attitude, not atheism.

G.G.: So, what are the further grounds for believing in God, the reasons that make atheism unjustified?

A.P.: The most important ground of belief is probably not philosophical argument but religious experience. Many people of very many different cultures have thought themselves in experiential touch with a being worthy of worship. They believe that there is such a person, but not because of the explanatory prowess of such belief. Or maybe there is something like Calvin’s *sensus divinitatis*. Indeed, if theism is true, then very likely there is something like the *sensus divinitatis*. So claiming that the only sensible ground for belief in God is the explanatory quality of such belief is substantially equivalent to assuming atheism.

G.G.: If, then, there isn’t evidence to support atheism, why do you think so many philosophers — presumably highly rational people — are atheists?

*Some people simply don’t want there to be a God. It would pose a serious limitation for human autonomy.*

AP: I’m not a psychologist, so I don’t have any special knowledge here. Still, there are some possible explanations. Thomas Nagel, a terrific philosopher and an unusually perceptive atheist, says he simply doesn’t want there to be any such person as God. And it isn’t hard to see why. For one thing, there would be what some would think was an intolerable invasion of privacy: God would know my every thought long before I thought it. For another, my actions and even my thoughts would be a constant subject of judgment and evaluation.

Basically, these come down to the serious limitation of human autonomy posed by theism. This desire for autonomy can reach very substantial proportions, as with the German philosopher Heidegger, who, according to Richard Rorty, felt guilty for living in a universe he had not himself created. Now there’s a tender conscience! But even a less
monumental desire for autonomy can perhaps also motivate atheism.

**GG**: Especially among today’s atheists, materialism seems to be a primary motive. They think there’s nothing beyond the material entities open to scientific inquiry, so there’s no place for immaterial beings such as God.

**AP**: Well, if there are only material entities, then atheism certainly follows. But there is a really serious problem for materialism: It can’t be sensibly believed, at least if, like most materialists, you also believe that humans are the product of evolution.

**GG**: Why is that?

**AP**: I can’t give a complete statement of the argument here — for that see Chapter 10 of “Where the Conflict Really Lies.” But, roughly, here’s why. First, if materialism is true, human beings, naturally enough, are material objects. Now what, from this point of view, would a belief be? My belief that Marcel Proust is more subtle than Louis L’Amour, for example? Presumably this belief would have to be a material structure in my brain, say a collection of neurons that sends electrical impulses to other such structures as well as to nerves and muscles, and receives electrical impulses from other structures.

But in addition to such neurophysiological properties, this structure, if it is a belief, would also have to have a content: It would have, say, to be the belief that *Proust is more subtle than L’Amour*.

**Related**

**More From The Stone**

Read previous contributions to this series.

**GG**: So is your suggestion that a neurophysiological structure can’t be a belief? That a belief has to be somehow immaterial?

**AP**: That may be, but it’s not my point here. I’m interested in the fact that beliefs cause (or at least partly cause) actions. For example, my belief that there is a beer in the fridge (together with my desire to have a beer) can cause me to heave myself out of my comfortable armchair and lumber over to the fridge.

But here’s the important point: It’s by virtue of its material, neurophysiological properties that a belief causes the action. It’s in virtue of those electrical signals sent via efferent nerves to the relevant muscles, that the belief about the beer in the fridge causes me to go to the fridge. It is *not* by virtue of the content (*there is a beer in the fridge*) the belief has.

**GG**: Why do you say that?

**AP**: Because if this belief — this structure — had a totally different content (even, say, if it was a belief that *there is no beer in the fridge*) but had the same neurophysiological properties, it would still have caused that same action of going to the fridge. This means that the content of the belief isn’t a cause of the behavior. As far as causing the behavior goes, the content of the belief doesn’t matter.

**GG**: That does seem to be a hard conclusion to accept. But won’t evolution get the materialist out of this difficulty? For our species to have survived, presumably many, if not most, of our beliefs must be true — otherwise, we wouldn’t be functional in a dangerous world.
Materialism can’t be sensibly believed, at least if, like most materialists, you also believe in evolution.

**AP:** Evolution will have resulted in our having beliefs that are adaptive; that is, beliefs that cause adaptive actions. But as we’ve seen, if materialism is true, the belief does not cause the adaptive action by way of its content: It causes that action by way of its neurophysiological properties. Hence it doesn’t matter what the content of the belief is, and it doesn’t matter whether that content is true or false. All that’s required is that the belief have the right neurophysiological properties. If it’s also true, that’s fine; but if false, that’s equally fine.

Evolution will select for belief-producing processes that produce beliefs with adaptive neurophysiological properties, but not for belief-producing processes that produce true beliefs. Given materialism and evolution, any particular belief is as likely to be false as true.

**GG:** So your claim is that if materialism is true, evolution doesn’t lead to most of our beliefs being true.

**AP:** Right. In fact, given materialism and evolution, it follows that our belief-producing faculties are not reliable.

Here’s why. If a belief is as likely to be false as to be true, we’d have to say the probability that any particular belief is true is about 50 percent. Now suppose we had a total of 100 independent beliefs (of course, we have many more). Remember that the probability that all of a group of beliefs are true is the multiplication of all their individual probabilities. Even if we set a fairly low bar for reliability — say, that at least two-thirds (67 percent) of our beliefs are true — our overall reliability, given materialism and evolution, is exceedingly low: something like .0004. So if you accept both materialism and evolution, you have good reason to believe that your belief-producing faculties are not reliable.

But to believe that is to fall into a total skepticism, which leaves you with no reason to accept any of your beliefs (including your beliefs in materialism and evolution!). The only sensible course is to give up the claim leading to this conclusion: that both materialism and evolution are true. Maybe you can hold one or the other, but not both.

So if you’re an atheist simply because you accept materialism, maintaining your atheism means you have to give up your belief that evolution is true. Another way to put it: The belief that both materialism and evolution are true is self-refuting. It shoots itself in the foot. Therefore it can’t rationally be held.

*This interview was conducted by email and edited.*

Gary Gutting is a professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, and an editor of *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews.* He is the author of, most recently, *"Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960"* and writes regularly for *The Stone.*
Ministry Partners

Tech Resources that (Are Supposed to) Help the Church

By Pedro Trinidad

Lately I have been compiling a list of resources that can help pastors and church administrators to be more efficient. I get e-mails all the time from different ministries with resources that are supposed to lighten the load church leaders carry. Here are a few of the resources you may find helpful in your ministry. As a disclaimer, I have not used all of these tools – some just don’t fit my current context – but they sound so cool that I hope to use them sometime in the future. Some are free. Some are not. So here we go –

1. **Open.church** – free videos, curriculum, art, etc. to use in sermon series, small group study, etc.

2. **Develop.me** – an awesome resource that helps you keep track of staff members, Develop.Me is a performance review tool that helps churches promote a staff-wide culture of continuous, collaborative growth.

3. **Church Metrics** – Track everything that happens in church. Attendance, Giving, Volunteers, “Salvations”, and customize it to track other things like how many cars in the parking lot, how many kids in each class,

4. **Weebly.com** – Inexpensive and nice website that can be built by anyone with an imagination. Important: These sites automatically convert to mobile friendly when on phone.
   - Yes, I know that [AdventistChurchConnect](http://www.adventistchurchconnect.com) is free for every single Adventist Church in North America. But they are so hard to work on and their templates are well… Why do you think so many of the churches that use them treat them like parked cars that don’t get moved?

5. **FaithLife Groups** – This [blog](http://www.fiel.com) explains how awesome it can be if used by the church or a small group. FaithLife is also linked with the [Logos Bible Software](http://www.logos.com) (same company).
   - Share reading plans
   - Making Announcements
   - Creating Prayer Lists
   - Sending Newsletters
   - Discussing Sermons

6. **CrossMRKT** – Texting service to send one message that will reach as many people who sign up to receive text messages from the church. I use this service. You can do giveaways at church using text service too and the system will randomly pick the winner. That is a way to get people to sign up for the service. Most people have unlimited texting so this shouldn’t be an issue.

All right, that's quite a bit to look at for awhile. Hope this is helpful.
Pedro Trinidad is pastor of the Concord International Church in Concord, CA
“Mom. Mom. Mom!”


“Did you hear anything I said?”

“No,” I admitted.

“I think you are addicted to your phone,” he remarked.

Justifications and excuses lingered on the tip of my tongue. I wanted to tell him about the “important” email I had to send. But the truth is, he was right.

The Pull of Technology

I recently wrote an article about investing the limited time we have with our children. One of the biggest drains of our time is technology because of the access it gives us to a virtual life. Our lives revolve around this access and its pull on us is strong. There’s always email to check, texts to respond to, statuses to update, images and videos to see or post. And they must be done right away (or so we think) — putting everything else on pause.

No doubt, technology provides many benefits to our lives. But we can’t be naïve to the consequences, including primarily its impact on our in-person relationships. It entices us away from face-to-face contact and real authentic connections. More often than not, it’s a time waster. It sucks us in and consumes hours. We think we are logging in to check one thing and an hour later we finally come up for air. The limited granules in the sands of our life’s clock trickle down while our fingers swipe and click our days away. And like my son reminded me, how much of real life is missed when our eyes are glued to the screen of our virtual life?
Technology, like anything good, can turn sour when our hearts distort its role. The ability we have to read emails, texts, and status updates gives us a rush. It’s fun, and we just keep going back for more. But time is too valuable. It is a treasure in its own right. And make no mistake: the inordinate use of technology lusts for our time — our treasure — which lusts for our hearts. It subtly moves in and tries to prop up the idol of self, attempting to convince us that the virtual world of “me, myself, and I” is more important than the real life happening right in front of us.

When I really think about it, my heart is convicted. I don’t want my kids to think that I care more about responding to a message than I do about them. When I consider how much time I have wasted, time I will never get back, I’m doubly convicted. Guilt settles in. I try harder and set rules for my use of technology. I resolve to not be consumed by it.

But then sooner or later I fail again.

His Grace Is Stronger

Scripture touches all areas of our life, including this battle with how we use technology. In his letter to the Romans, Paul speaks about his own battle with sin. He expressed a frustration to which we can all relate, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” (Romans 7:15). We are all sinners. “There is no one righteous, not one” (Romans 3:10). As long as we live in this world, we will battle against our sinful nature. But Paul points us to the source of our help, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24–25).

Many of us may realize the pull that technology has on us and feel the weight of our guilt because of the wasted time. But like Paul says, Jesus is our rescuer. He came to redeem us from each and every sin, including the squandering away our time on the iPhone. His perfect life has become ours. His sacrificial death paid our debt in full. What this means is that the work of Christ is sufficient and complete to cover all our sins and empower our fight in the struggle.

Every time we fail and stumble in this battle against sin, we need to return to the gospel over and over again. Though the pull of sin is strong, and though technology tempts us with its false claims of affirmation, success, and importance, the power of God’s grace is stronger.

It is his grace that saves us from the power of sin and it is his grace that saves us from the presence of sin in our daily lives. The cross stands there for us, not as a one-time source for forgiveness and assurance of eternal salvation, but also as a source of grace for each moment of our days. And as we turn from our sin in repentance, we can respond in thanksgiving to our gracious God because though we are more sinful than we ever thought, we are also more loved and more forgiven than we will ever know.

You know it and I know it, there are more important things in our life than what our computers and phones and online platforms have to offer. As we seek to redeem our time for eternity, we must rest in the grace of Christ and cling to this promise: “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

Recent posts from Christina:

Christina Fox is a homeschooling mom, licensed mental health counselor, and writer. She lives in sunny south Florida with her husband of seventeen years and their two boys. You can find her sharing her faith journey at www.toshowthemjesus.com and at her Facebook page.