In recognition

Ever noticed how much the movie industry loves giving itself awards? There's the BAFTAS, the Oscars, the Palme d'Or and let's not forget the Logies. But that's just the beginning. In the United States alone there are 38 major industry film awards, another 30 major critics awards and so many film festival awards. It could well be that no one has a complete list of them all!

There's a lot about Hollywood we want to avoid, but this habit of recognising the contributions of others is something we might actually want to emulate. You see, sometimes we in the Church can be a little stingy with our recognition. This Sabbath, let's spread a little bit of the love around. After all, the contribution people in our churches make every week is something worth recognising!
The elegant solution

In 2011, Sir Richard Dawkins, the world’s foremost evolutionary biologist and a man feared by many creationists, said God's plan of salvation "doesn't do justice to the grandeur of the universe." Is he right? Is there a disconnect between the grandeur of the universe and the simplicity of the plan of salvation?

More Features

Cities, hope and despair

What images come to mind when you think of a city? Bright lights and bustling crowds? Historic architecture and harbourside apartments? Food, arts and culture? Or how about beggars and drug addicts? Homeless people sleeping in doorways? Slums and shanty towns featuring mazes of twisting alleyways and open sewers?

More Editorials

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Away from your church one Sabbath and missed an issue of RECORD? Never fear! All past issues are available online at record.net.au.

Watch/download InFocus

Australia falls short of international human rights standards. Shock over a witch-burning in Papua New Guinea. And cyclists ride against poverty along the Great Ocean Road. More news, views and interviews on this week's episode of InFocus.
Spiritual glasses

Through His word, God has given us "spiritual glasses" so we can see things more clearly. The disciples had trouble using theirs at times, focusing their eyes on earthly matters rather than heavenly things. Are we guilty of doing the same?

More Devotions

*This week's offering (February 23, 2013): Adventist Youth Offering
"He believes that the creator of the universe, the God who devised the laws of physics, the
laws of mathematics, the physical constants, who devised the parsecs of space, billions of
light–years of space, billions of years of time; that this Paragon of science, this Genius of
mathematics, couldn’t think of a better way to rid the world of sin than to come to this little
speck of cosmic dust and have Himself tortured and executed so that He could forgive
Himself. That is profoundly unscientific. Not only is it unscientific, it doesn’t do justice to
the grandeur of the universe. It’s petty and small-minded."

With that terse, vitriolic salvo, Sir Richard Dawkins, the world’s foremost evolutionary
biologist and a man feared by many creationists, began his debate with Oxford University
Professor John Lennox, one of the most respected mathematicians and sought–after
speakers on the philosophy of science. Lennox is a Christian and one of the most articulate
defenders of the faith currently at work on the cosmos. The debate is well worth the 121
minutes that it takes to view on YouTube.

Why evolutionists feel a compulsion to explain the finer points of Christian theology is
beyond me. Dawkins’ understanding of salvation is akin to my understanding of
evolutionary biology—that is to say, non–existent. Perhaps some scientists wax theological
in response to creationists who venture onto the “sacred ground” of science, but if
evolutionists want us to respect their turf, surely they ought to respect ours—if for no other
reason than the fact that theology appears to have birthed science. One can scarcely
separate the faith of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo or Pascal from their scientific endeavours.
This truth is no more evidenced than in the life of arguably the greatest scientist of all, Sir Isaac Newton. In “The Faith Behind the Famous: Isaac Newton,” a wonderful 1991 article published in Christianity Today magazine, Charles Hummel wrote: “For Newton the world of science was by no means the whole of life. He spent more time on theology than on science; indeed, he wrote about 1.3 million words on biblical subjects. Yet this vast legacy lay hidden from public view for two centuries until the auction of his nonscientific writings in 1936.”

Hummel chronicles Newton’s early faith development and his vast study of sacred texts, especially the Torah. Dawkins’ statement about a “petty” God whose best cure for the sin problem is to torture Himself on a cross would have hit Newton’s ear with all the subtlety of a stiletto. Newton believed in a Creator and the rational intelligibility of the universe. It could be argued that he believed in natural laws because he believed in a Lawgiver. Newton would have been nonplussed by Dawkins’ militant antagonism toward the Christian faith.

That said, is Dawkins right? Is there a disconnect between the grandeur of the universe and the simplicity of the plan of salvation? Perhaps the answer lies in the eye of the beholder. Most people who stumble on a $400,000 Ferrari while strolling though the forest would behold a simple mode of transportation, albeit a beautiful one. Peek below its sheet metal, however, and the simple becomes quite complex. To divorce the God of creation from the God of salvation is analogous to peeking below the sheet metal while missing the car. In salvation, the complex and the simple come together, most astonishingly, in the Person of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus declared, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NASB), He expressed a truth so beautiful that mere words cannot capture it. Try this when you have some time. Make a list of all the ways God could have solved the sin problem on earth other than through the death of His Son. Then, ask yourself if any of those options are as “elegant” as the one He chose.

God could have snapped His heavenly fingers and fixed the sin problem forever, but He chose instead to identify with His human creation—to suffer what they suffer, feel what they feel and save them (see Hebrews 4:15).

Perhaps the greatest compliment one can pay to creativity is the ability to make the complex simple. It’s what Apple has figured out and Microsoft has not. In science when one finds an ingeniously simple solution to a difficult problem the word "elegant" is often used to describe it. In my opinion, no other act of creativity is more deserving of this designation
than the plan of redemption. God’s fix for the sin problem not only gave us a way out, it also exposed the innermost recesses of the Divine Heart for all the unfallen to see. Love was God’s elegant solution to our sin problem.

What could be more creative than that?

1. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0UIbd0eLxw


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What images come to mind when you think of a city? Bright lights and bustling crowds? Historic architecture and harbourside apartments? Food, arts and culture?

Or how about beggars and drug addicts? Homeless people sleeping in doorways? Slums and shanty towns featuring mazes of twisting alleyways and open sewers?

This darker vision is the city that more than one billion people across the world know firsthand—that’s one in three urban dwellers “living in conditions characterised by inadequate shelter, sanitation, drinking water, living areas and security of tenure”.¹

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has embarked on a worldwide initiative, dubbed “Hope for Big Cities”—a project that will see the Gospel shared and churches planted in major population centres. In our region it’s Sydney, Lae, Christchurch and Apia that will see the first evangelistic efforts.

But does this initiative encompass the often neglected slums and shanty towns? Or even the tracts of public housing and despair that mark cities in developed countries? I hope we can make sure it does.

My hope is buoyed by the reality of the mission work that is done by a number of Christian individuals and organisations in the planet's abandoned corners. I think of New Zealander Viv Grigg, who, as a graduate, spent some years living and ministering in the slums of Manila, Philippines, the most densely populated region of the world. Or Jon and Lisa Owens, a professional couple who moved downmarket with their young family to one of Sydney’s
toughest suburbs, seeking to bring the presence and healing of Christ to their neighbours.

These pages have previously seen mention of the Operation Food For Life program, which reaches out to “the poorest of the poor” in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga and elsewhere. Often these are people struggling for survival in makeshift shacks on the edges of cities.

And need I invoke historical figures who have inspired us with their Christian sacrifice and love for the urban poor? People like Mother Teresa and Toyohiko Kagawa.

These godly men and women give radical expression to a concept that’s become a bit trendy in some Christian circles: it’s called “incarnational mission”. The idea is that, inspired by how Jesus left behind His perfect home and glory and became a hurting Human, Christians should genuinely participate in communities they hope to influence. In the case of slum ministries, this involves sharing meals, living conditions and the risks and hardships of poverty. Not just for a holiday, but as a lifestyle.

It’s an audacious vision that’s far from misty idealism—committed Christians, including Adventists, are doing this right now. Maybe God’s not calling us to live in a slum, but what if He did? Would I follow Him there? Would you?


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Mark 13:1–28

As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”

2 “Do you see all these great buildings?” replied Jesus. “Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”

5 Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. 6 Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

9 “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. 11 Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.
12 “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 13 Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

14 “When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. 16 Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 17 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 18 Pray that this will not take place in winter, 19 because those will be days of distress unequaled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again.

20 “If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.

21 At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. 22 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 23 So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

24 “But in those days, following that distress,

‘the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
25 the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

26 “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

28 “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.
According to the Internet, eyeglasses were invented in Italy in the 13th century. Before then, there are records of different lenses being used to enhance vision, things like water in glass bowls and even looking through jewels. Since then, however, there have been numerous advances in glasses technology. Bifocal lenses, invented by Benjamin Franklin, allow people to correct both short and long-sightedness with the same pair of spectacles. Some glasses change colour to double as sunglasses in the light. There are many shapes and styles of glasses, but what is their purpose?

To see more clearly. I've never worn glasses but I've looked through camera lenses and seen the world go from out of focus to focussed. I've watched a 3D movie, and taken the 3D glasses off and seen the blur around the edges. I understand that glasses were created to help with your sight.

In this passage, Jesus provides his followers with the glasses of spiritual discernment. “There is some crazy stuff coming,” he says. “But I want you to be ready and aware.” We all wear worldview lenses that colour, focus or blur our point of view and interaction with the world in certain circumstances. Jesus wants us to understand the things we see and experience through Him and His Spirit.

We all see disasters going on around us, and experience times of tragedy and hardship. Jesus wanted to warn us. He didn’t want us to go in blind. The first point to understand is not to trust in man–made things but to trust in God. For the disciples, the temple was the pinnacle of their culture and their faith. It was an impressive building and they were proud of it. They wanted their Messiah to affirm that pride and their faith. But Jesus knows that man–made things pass away. He knows that in 70AD the building they are so proud of will be razed to the ground and the Jews will be dispersed. And He wants His disciples to look through spiritual lenses. The building means nothing; the God it honours, everything. Things shaped by the hands of man, whether ideas, artworks, religion, buildings or palaces, will crumble but God remains.

So Jesus wants to fill you in and sharpen you. He wants His words to inform your emotions. He lists a number of things that sound terrible but then He says they are “the beginning of birth pains.” So what does He want from us? Just to use our special glasses and identify the signs and say, “we knew it, we knew it, told you so?”

No. Firstly, Jesus wants us alert and aware but not alarmed. Stuff will happen, deceptions will spring up but we must keep the faith and He emphasises how we should act. How? “And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.” We must still go about preaching the gospel and His Spirit will inform our words. There is no stopping the work. We know bad
stuff will happen so it shouldn’t surprise us. A novel or a movie is far less suspenseful if we know the ending. We know bad things might happen but there is also hope that we know the outcome.

Jesus also wants us to be bold, not fearful. He says “say whatever is given to you.” The opportunity to speak His name will come up. Sometimes in front of kings and celebrities, sometimes in a life or death situation. Yes, it’s scary but Jesus wants us to do it anyway. If we are alert, if we are looking through our spiritual understanding, and allowing our hope to bolster our faith, then there is nothing we need to be afraid of.

People have been following the teachings of Jesus for 2000 years. Each of them has had their end of the world moment. They’ve been killed for faith, died of natural causes or even suffered from famine, disease or war. The end of the world that we look for and preach about could come for us personally tomorrow. If we look at life using the tools Jesus gave, then we will not be deceived—we will keep on fighting the good fight and we will understand what is happening so that others can see that we are unafraid. After all, when everything else goes out of focus, God’s words will never fade away.