Love conquers

It’s been a week since Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 was shot down over Ukraine, killing all 298 people on board.

Among the victims were Mo, Evie and Otis Maslin—three siblings who were making their way home to Australia with their grandfather. In a statement released yesterday, the parents of the young victims described their pain as “intense and relentless . . . We live in a hell beyond hell.”

But they also had another message to share: Love triumphs over hate.

"No hate in the world is as strong as the love we have for our children, for Mo, for Evie, for Otis. No hate in the world is as strong as the love we have for Grandad Nick. No hate in the world is as strong as the love we have for each other. This is a revelation that gives us some comfort.”

May we continue to pray for all those affected by the MH17 tragedy—victims, families and governments alike—in a spirit of love.

The Adventist Record team would like to apologise for not gracing your inboxes last Friday with our weekly newsletter. We hope an interview with Dr Ben Carson, and a deeper discussion on love and hate, will serve as adequate compensation for our absence.
Training program inspires teens to lead

More than 80 teens from across the country gathered in Bonny Hills, New South Wales, for the Australian Union Conference’s (AUC) “CHOSEN 4” training program in July.

World’s most hated Christian

God loves. God also hates. God calls us to love. Does He also call us to hate?

Read Adventist Record

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Adventist Church's arrival in Solomon Islands. Check out the highlights of the centenary celebrations in this past week's issue of Adventist Record.

Watch/download InFocus

Making headlines:
• Smoking research shows plain packaging works
• Mosul’s last Christians flee for their lives
• Island evangelism in full swing

Do you get dyspepsia? Heartburn? Dr James Wright shares some tips on how to get rid of an upset
The doctor is in

He’s a world-renowned neurosurgeon. He’s a best-selling author. He’s a television personality and political commentator. And he’s now in the Record InFocus hot seat. Don’t miss our interview with Dr Ben Carson.

Devolution

Is there a way to harmonise theistic evolution and the biblical narrative?

This week's offering (July 26, 2014): Pacific Island Advancement Offering
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Training program inspires teens to lead

Port Macquarie, New South Wales

The future looks bright for the Adventist Church in Australia.

More than 80 teens from across the country gathered in Bonny Hills, New South Wales, for the Australian Union Conference’s (AUC) “CHOSEN 4” training program in July.

Each of the AUC’s nine Conferences was represented at the event, with local church pastors and boards selecting 14 to 16-year-olds who have demonstrated good leadership potential to attend.

AUC Youth Ministries director Jeff Parker said the purpose of the biennial training program is to encourage the Church’s young members to “step up” in their local churches.

“Attendees at the last three CHOSEN programs are already serving as great leaders in their churches,” says Pastor Parker.

Two of these leaders are Kaitlan Rath from Canberra (ACT) and Joyce Mugabashaka from Adelaide (SA). The two 19-year-olds attended CHOSEN in 2010 and are now actively involved in both local church and Conference-wide youth ministry.

Kaitlan and Joyce returned to CHOSEN this year to serve as mentors. Other Adventist youth leaders gathered from across the country to serve as trainers, including Pastor Derek McCutcheon (WA), Derek Rippingale (Vic), Graeme Frauenfelder (NSW), Sebastian Davila (NSW), Jacqui and Elisha Knight (Vic), and Sharon Witt, one of Australia’s top Christian writers for teens.

Kaitlan Rath and Joyce Mugabashaka, both of who attended CHOSEN in 2010, returned to the training program this year as mentors.

Attendees were also inspired by 2011 Australia’s Got Talent finalist, Ben Price, and former Young Australian of the Year, Glen Gerreyn, who served as guest presenters during the five-day program.

Paul Goltz from Livingston Adventist church (WA) also shared his journey of “policeman to pastor”.

Pastor Parker says the CHOSEN training programs, developed by former AUC youth director Pastor Tony Knight, are an unbelievable way of helping a large group of teens to realise their full potential for God and the Church.

“I have seen the fruit of CHOSEN for many years, and I know this year’s event will be no different,” says Pastor Parker. “To see switched-on teens stepping up in local churches is truly inspirational.”
Fred Phelps, arguably the most hated Christian in the United States, died on March 19. Phelps was the founding pastor of the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) in 1955. WBC is an independent Baptist church with no connection to mainstream Baptists.

His church of about 40—mostly family members—has gained national and international notoriety as the church of hate that pickets funerals of gays and American soldiers with hostile placards.

Their church website not only condemns gays but tells you God also hates America; Islam; and the media. There’s even a video, God hates Australia. And, in case any should feel left out, God hates the world.

Any disaster or loss of life is seen as an act of God, for which we should be thankful as a “display of God’s almighty power”. It was God who killed the 6801 American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. A number counter on the website tells how many people God has cast into hell since the page has been opened—it goes up by about two a second. In case you’re wondering, WBC members “lose zero nanoseconds of sleep over your opinions and feeeeliiiiings”.

There’s something so unbiblical about all of this. Here’s why:

1. “God is love” (1 John 4:8).¹ That’s basic Christianity. That’s what helps us make sense of this world.

2. “God loved the world so much that He gave . . .” (John 3:16). Love acts. Always. God has acted in Jesus and offered life to “whoever”. Anyone can be a whoever—there are no racial, ethnic, religious, dress, diet, orientation or lifestyle barriers that this promise doesn’t cross. Jesus came not to condemn the world, but to save it (John 3:17).

3. When Jesus was asked what was the greatest command, He replied, “Love God with your whole being” and “love your neighbour as you love yourself” (Matthew 22:37-40). Love God; love others. This is what you’d expect from a God who is love.

4. Jesus said, “Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples” (John 13:34, 35). The church family is a place where 1 Corinthians 13 love is to be lived out.

Is that the whole story?
But there’s another side to the story. There are also occasions when we’re told God hates. How can this be? How can love and hate exist together? Aren’t they opposites that, like darkness and light, are impossible together?

Yet the Bible says: God hates those who do violence (Psalm 11:5); those who celebrate the new moon and annual festivals—at certain times (Isaiah 1:14); He hated Israel since Gilgal (Hosea 9:15); and He loved Jacob, but rejected (“hated,” NIV) Esau (Malachi 1:2, 3).

Should we, like Fred Phelps, make a list of people we hate—to follow God’s example?

Here’s the problem: Even a shallow understanding of the New Testament would make us question whether God can actually hate—at least in the ways we understand it. The love He demonstrates appears too big and broad, too all-encompassing.

Hate is a judgement call because hating involves making some kind of judgement about the individual or group being hated. It’s in understanding God’s role and our role in making judgements that we find some answers.

In the Old Testament we find various acts of God’s judgement. These include those times He used the Israelites to enact judgements on others. The story of Ananias and Sapphira in the New Testament also reveals an act of God’s judgement. Predictions of future judgement demonstrate that God is a Judge who will act when He deems it necessary.

The heart is key to understanding God’s judgement—His heart and our hearts. First, God’s heart is revealed at the time of Noah’s flood. This judgement came out of extreme sorrow; it also “broke His heart” (Genesis 6:6). This was not an act of vindictiveness or of hatred.

Then, God understands our hearts. He’s quite clear that He sees individuals not as we see them. Simply stated, “People judge by outward appearance;” God “looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7). That’s why we must leave judgement calls to God.

Jesus is specific about this: “Do not judge others and you will not be judged” (Matthew 7:1). The scary thing about this statement is that it comes from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus emphasises that even thinking of doing something is as bad as doing it.

But then you have John the Baptist openly challenging (and judging) Herod for his adulterous relationship with his brother’s wife. Doesn’t this demonstrate that there are times for a straight, pointed, condemning testimony?

Yes there are, but there’s another factor to consider. Herod was a part of the Jews, an insider. Born part-Jew (his mother was a Jew), he was a ruler of the Jews, and understood and at least partially followed the ways of the Jews. He was one of them. John the Baptist’s challenge was a forerunner of the way Christians were to take.

It works like this: Jesus came not to condemn the world, but to save it (John 3:17). Jesus’ followers are to be Jesus like. Our role is not to condemn (judge) the world, either. Within our own ranks, though, we are to expect a high standard of Christian conduct and there are times when a judgement call—and even discipline—is needed. Jesus endorsed this by giving the process as to how that should be managed (see Matthew 18:15-17).

The apostle Paul wrote about the within-without process of judging and discipline in this way: “It isn’t my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning.” And so there would be no misunderstanding: “God will judge those on the outside; but as the Scriptures say, ‘You must remove the evil person from among you’” (1 Corinthians: 5:12, 13).

Our commission is to make disciples with the weapons of light (love), not of darkness (hate). The greatest command is still to love God and love others. That’s the Christian way. Hate, a destructive force, is the enemy’s way.
The better way

Hate begets hate. Hate can never be a revelation of who God is, His ways or who He wants us to be. "God is love. Period. Are we love? Do we love? Love is the bottom line. Love is what matters most. Love is the primary measure God uses to determine what is valuable and what is worthless. Love lasts."²

Love means treating people we disagree with, with care and respect (including Fred Phelpses) because love pulls down barriers. Hate builds them up.

Ellen White was an enthusiast for this kind of approach. In an era when it was popular for Protestants to openly attack Catholics, she argued against it. She wrote a strong letter to the editor of Australia’s Bible Echo and Signs of the Times in 1896:

“Brethren, I feel hurt when I see that so many decided thrusts are made against the Catholics. Preach the truth, but restrain the words which show a harsh spirit; for such words cannot help or enlighten anyone . . . [F]or Christ’s sake heed the admonitions which have been given in regard to making scathing remarks about the Catholics . . . Satan rejoices when one word of bitterness is found on its pages.”³

One of the tragedies for Fred Phelps is that a couple of months before his death, he was excommunicated from WBC. It came after he asked for a “kinder approach” in how they dealt with each other in the church.⁴

Was this a case of the organisation and philosophy Phelps set up coming back to bite him? Hate begetting hate?

Whatever the case, I hope he understood that God loved him. God loves. That never stops for anyone. It can't, for God is love.

1. All Bible quotes from the New Living Translation.


Dr Bruce Manners is senior pastor of Lilydale church, Vic.
Life originated on earth through a God-guided evolutionary process. Theistic evolution is the predominant view among mainline Protestant denominations, and it's a view approved by the Roman Catholic Church.¹

But is there a way to harmonise theistic evolution and the biblical narrative? Not easily.

To accept theistic evolution, we must accept death before sin. So the wages of sin isn’t death (Romans 6:23). Rather, death is the natural building block of life. And when we disobey, we will not surely die as a result (Genesis 2:17); rather we will die irrespective, as everything that preceded us did in the long evolutionary chain that was God’s intent.

Not only must Moses be wrong about our origins, but the Finger that wrote in stone must also be mistaken (Exodus 20:11)—and every other biblical writer who referred to our origins (eg, Luke 3:23–38, 1 Corinthians 11:11,12). And Jesus? He was wrong about our origin too (Matthew 19:4,5). And not just wrong about the origin of human life, but the origin of sin, the nature of sin and the substance of salvation (Romans 5:12). The entire story of salvation crumbles into a heap of incoherence under the weight of theistic evolution.

Why can’t those who promote this view see the ramifications? Maybe they’re too tethered to Christianity to take their teachings to their logical conclusion. But for young people, the obvious ramification is that the Bible is a nonsensical fable, unhinged from objective reality from start to finish. So they leave Christianity. As I would, were I similarly convinced.

The Catholic Church can embrace evolution, as its claim of validity lies in its claims of authority. Protestantism, which claims its validity from the Bible, cannot. Not surprisingly, since adopting theistic evolution, mainline Protestantism has been in freefall. The Presbyterian Church USA is one such body. How has adopting theistic evolution worked out for them? In 2013, they reported: “The PC (USA) now reports 1.84 million members, less than half of its peak membership of 4.25 million members in 1965 . . .”²

The irony is that the rush to attempt to harmonise Scripture with evolution has accelerated precisely at the time when the evidentiary challenges to evolutionism are compounding. For example, the pro-evolutionism Smithsonian magazine called the discovery of soft tissue in a dinosaur bone dated 68 million years old a “dinosaur shocker”. It
went on to report: "The finding amazed colleagues, who had never imagined that even a trace of still-soft dinosaur tissue could survive. After all, as any textbook will tell you, when an animal dies, soft tissues such as blood vessels, muscle and skin decay and disappear over time . . ."\(^3\)

Of course evolutionists, like everyone else, have no problem coming up with explanations for inconvenient facts. But a 68 million-year-old piece of soft tissue? You be the judge.

It isn’t just paleontology producing new evidence that contradicts evolutionism; it’s also physics. ABC Catalyst’s Dr Graham Philips notes it’s “scientific blasphemy to even ask”, but: “it appears the universe has been fine-tuned so that intelligent beings like you and me can live here . . . to write the fine-tunings off as merely coincidences seems far-fetched”. He then explores a host of inventive, and in some cases bizarre, possibilities for why a universe without a God is so astonishingly finely tuned for life. If you doubt God created the earth, watching this pro-evolutionism episode, “Custom Universe”, might just convince you He did.

And then there’s biology. The more we find out about life, the more complex we find it is. So how could life spontaneously generate? Richard Dawkins, the evolutionary biologist currently specialising in mocking religion, has an idea: “It could be that at some earlier time, somewhere in the universe, a civilisation evolved . . . and designed a form of life that they seeded onto perhaps this planet.”\(^4\) Any explanation will do, it seems, but one: God.

Theistic evolution is entirely incompatible with Protestant Christianity. Just as well. As the time is coming when the weight of evidence will become so large, that propping up a 19th Century model for origins will no longer be sustainable. Indeed, it is already here.

4. Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed, a film by Ben Stein well worth watching.

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James Standish is editor of Adventist Record.