Opportunity knocks

It’s Friday, the sun in shining (here in Sydney, NSW, at least) and the Sabbath is fast approaching. However, on a day that offers so many reasons to celebrate life, thousands of people across Australia—and the world—are immersing themselves in a celebration of death.

Halloween is quite the conundrum for Christians. Today (October 31) in Rome, 300 exorcists have even assembled to combat Satan and the growing “emergency” of Halloween.

While it may be an obscene holiday, Christians should also see Halloween as a tremendous opportunity. It’s probably one of the few times of the year where you don't have to go searching for people with whom to share the love of Jesus—they’re right there on your doorstep.

For more on Halloween—as well as demons and pirates—keep reading this week's edition of Record eNews.
Hallow thanks

Australia calls itself the "Lucky Country". The way our society is embracing Halloween, however, shows how little time we take to contemplate just how fortunate we really are.

The Pope does it again … or does he?

This week, just about every major news outlet has featured headlines along the lines of "Pope Francis declares evolution and Big Bang theory are real". Don't get caught up with the hype. There is much more to the story that these catchy headlines imply.

Escaping the Devil

There are some things no six year old should ever have to
witness. Seeing your uncle being possessed by the Devil is one of them.

A pirate's life—not for me

Pirates who sail the seas aren't so different from the ones who slouch in front of screens. Both break the law and destroy lives.

Three years of forever

Jarrod Stackelroth reflects on three happy—and hard—years of marriage.
It was a simple prank, gone culturally horribly wrong. All the other kids in our small English language primary school on the island of Penang, Malaysia, were American. Halloween had arrived. And so it seemed only natural to dress up and go trick-or-treating.

After a little deliberation, I decided to go as the headless man; dad’s shirt on over my head, red scarf at the top to simulate my gruesome end, I joined my enthusiastic friends and off we went into the humid Penang night knocking on the doors of friends and acquaintances.

All went as expected, until we reached the home of our music teacher. Let no one say Asian culture lacks a healthy appreciation for the supernatural. I grew up in a world awash with haunted houses, spirit trees, trances and mystic happenings. Ghosts were not a vehicle for pop culture; they were very much a part of everyday culture.

And so, maybe with a little more thought, we might have better anticipated the reaction when we knocked on this particular door. But we were children. And we were having a fabulous night. But when our music teacher’s servant answered the door, she took one look, let out a blood-curdling scream, and bolted.

We stood there, mouths agape—in my case, shocked little face obscured under my dad’s enormous shirt.

Today, the reaction would likely be quite different. Why? Because Penang has embraced Halloween. And it’s not just Penang. Increasingly, Australia is becoming home to a Halloween culture. And why not? Three very good reasons:

First, Australia has a culture of its own. And it’s a great culture. It doesn’t mean our culture doesn’t grow and change, and even assimilate cultural practices from around the world. But there is something very disturbing about our headlong charge into embracing a TV facsimile of American culture. Have American fast food franchises blasting their “supersized” meal ads at our children night and day made us a stronger nation? Has kids trying to emulate the gang culture of LA improved our quality of life? Has our politicians trying to embrace a “presidential” style of politics projected us forward? I love America, I love Australia. I love them both being who they naturally are, not aping caricatures of each other.¹

Second, are we at a point in history when we really need more holidays centred around junk food? Isn’t there a holiday we can import that involves running vast distances while eating carrots instead?

Finally, if we were going to import a holiday from North America, why choose one focused on the macabre when there

¹
is a much better one with closer cultural ties to Australia?

We call ourselves the "Lucky Country", but it is astonishing how little time we take to contemplate just how fortunate we really are. Credit Suisse now names Australians as the richest people on earth. The richest! Australian cities and regions regularly rank among the best in world. Melbourne is the most livable city on the planet. Tasmania is one of the top ten places to visit on earth. The Barossa, Whitsundays, Kakadu, Sydney Harbour—just the names bring smiles. Even the places that don’t sound too good, are terrific—witness Rottnest.

Yes, most of us don’t feel particularly wealthy or glamorous, but the cars we drive, the food we eat, the holidays we take, the water we swim in, the air we breathe, the way we live—all speak of widespread affluence and astonishing good fortune. The rest of the world is full of wonder and excitement, and we should never fall for nationalistic bravado, but it is obscene to forget just how remarkably fortunate Australians are.

So why not take a day to give thanks for our good fortune? Yes, the Americans do that, but so do the Canadians. Germans and Japanese celebrate similar sentiments. But we don’t have to go so far afield to find an authentic Aussie day of thanks—we only have to go to our own Norfolk Island, which has had a public thanksgiving holiday for many decades. Yes, it descended from American whalers, but by now, it has a decidedly Aussie flavor to it. Why not import Norfolk’s day of thanks to the rest of the country?

A day to give thanks for the blessings God has given to us? Or, if we don’t believe in God, then a day to be thankful for the freedom to believe anything we want without being stoned, hung or sent to a gulag. It would do our culture and our souls good to pause one day a year and contemplate the depth of our good fortune to be Australian. Rather than importing a day to celebrate death from America, why not import a day to say thanks for life from Norfolk?

1. Yes, Halloween has European origins, but the version that is gaining popularity in Australia is decidedly American, as communicated through US pop culture offerings.

James Standish is editor of Adventist Record.
The Pope does it again ... or does he?

This week, just about every major news outlet has featured headlines along the lines of “Pope Francis declares evolution and Big Bang theory are real and God isn’t ‘a magician with a magic wand’”¹ (The Independent) or “Pope supports big bang, evolution”² (Science News). Why the sudden interest among journalists and science writers in what the Pope has to say? It is very hard to evaluate the motivation of writers and editors, but anyone who sees incredible headlines like this should ask whether those writing them actually read Pope Francis' address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

In his brief address, the Pope mentioned evolution and the big bang, but insists that—even if the big bang occurred and evolution occurs—these scientific explanations do not provide an ultimate cause for all things. Most reasonable people would agree. In his address, Pope Francis made repeated statements that could be taken straight from standard creationist understandings: “This hope and trust in God, the creator of nature, and in the capacity of the human spirit can offer the researcher a new energy and profound serenity.”³ He went on to say, “And so creation continued for centuries and centuries, millennia and millennia, until it became which [sic] we know today, precisely because God is not a demiurge or a magician, but the creator who gives being to all things.”⁴ The Pope, at least in this talk, doesn't even raise the specter of millions or billions of years. This seems quite different from what most people take big bang cosmology and Darwinian evolution to entail.

Some writers even go so far as to claim that, “[T]he Pope made comments which experts said put an end to the ‘pseudo theories’ of creationism and intelligent design that some argue were encouraged by his predecessor, Benedict XVI.”⁵ These unnamed “experts” may indeed have some insight into the Pope’s beliefs on these matters, but in this speech Pope Francis gives no indication that he is engaged in “a significant departure from that of his predecessor, Benedict XVI, whose advisers endorsed the theories of intelligent design.”⁶

Why is it important to get the facts straight when it comes to “news” of this sort? There are at least four reasons:

1. If believers embrace and share misunderstandings, like those suggested in the current headlines, they will quickly loose credibility with those they seek to share important truths with.

2. As Christians, we believe that truth has an intrinsic value and, whatever we may believe about the institution of the papacy, it is still a sin to “bear false witness.”

3. As long as we are distracted by untruths, we will not be engaged with what is true.

¹ The Independent ² Science News ³ "This hope and trust in God, the creator of nature, and in the capacity of the human spirit can offer the researcher a new energy and profound serenity." ⁴ "And so creation continued for centuries and centuries, millennia and millennia, until it became which [sic] we know today, precisely because God is not a demiurge or a magician, but the creator who gives being to all things." ⁵ "[T]he Pope made comments which experts said put an end to the ‘pseudo theories’ of creationism and intelligent design that some argue were encouraged by his predecessor, Benedict XVI." ⁶ "[T]he Pope made comments which experts said put an end to the ‘pseudo theories’ of creationism and intelligent design that some argue were encouraged by his predecessor, Benedict XVI, whose advisers endorsed the theories of intelligent design."
4. Understanding what is actually happening provides important insights into the state of our world at this time.

So, what is really going on with the Pope's recent address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences? On the one hand, this appears to be a case of agenda-driven journalism going viral. It is hard to know why this sort of thing takes off. It may be that to a secular mind the Pope giving up on the biblical creation undermines those who still believe the eternal truths God has given to the world in Scripture. Those who still claim to be Christians, but embrace extrabiblical beliefs like theistic evolution, may actually see the Catholic Church endorsing materialistic views as a big step forward for their reinvented Christianity. Whatever the motivation, it seems someone was so eager to hear the Pope endorse their materialistic views that they actually heard the words “big bang” and “evolution” and stopped listening.

On a more subtle level, there seems to be some equivocation over word meanings. The Pope appears to be using "evolution" to mean development and change over time. This is a perfectly legitimate use of the word that no one—other than possibly some Platonists—would have trouble with, even the most ardent biblical creationist. The difference between theists, like the Pope, and others, like atheists, involves when "evolution" is used to mean materialistic Darwinism, which denies any supernatural role in the origin of the universe and life.

There are areas in which Adventists and Catholics agree. As Christians we are both theists, we both believe Jesus Christ is the creator God and that He died then was raised from the dead. However, there are many areas in which we diverge, possibly most crucially over the authority of the Bible versus the authority of tradition. This leads to many differences, ranging from our understanding of the nature of humans to the state of the dead. These differences allow for a diversity of Catholic views about the creation. In his short address, the Pope may give some hints to belief in a kind of progressive creation, but generally what the Pope says in public is carefully crafted in a diplomatic way. It would be very surprising to find that the Pope suddenly decided to publicly embrace current scientific views at the expense of fundamental Catholic views about God and in opposition to traditional views held by the early church fathers, not to mention Catholics who share our belief in the Biblical creation. If Pope Francis did this, it seems improbable that the Catholic News Agency would report the story with the following headline: “Francis inaugurates bust of Benedict, emphasises unity of faith, science,” and yet that is the headline they gave this story. It would be unfortunate for anyone to be misled by confusing headlines into thinking that the Pope endorses materialistic Darwinism.

You can see what the Pope actually said at <http://w2.vatican.va/content/f...>. Much of it is translated into English at <http://www.catholicnewsagency...>.


4. Ibid.


8. Ibid.

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"I told you I wouldn’t let you leave. Now you’re all going to die. I’m going to kill you!" Six-year-old Everton Goncalves shivered as his uncle David’s eyes rolled back. The car sped up as David accelerated, and his aunties in the backseat began to scream. David laughed at their fear—an evil, sinister laughter bordering on maniacal. “This is it,” Everton thought. “The spirits were right. We’re going to die.”

It sounds like a Hollywood horror movie. But for the Goncalves family this was real life.

You see, Everton’s family was involved in macumba—a form of spirit worship that originated with African slaves who brought the tradition to Brazil.

“Uncle David was a medium who received messages from the spirits,” Everton explains. “They would possess him and he would begin speaking in what I can only describe as the satanic version of speaking in tongues. My parents were the translators. They interpreted the spirits' messages for everyone else.”

When Everton was six his parents decided they needed to leave the movement. They applied for a visa to Australia, knowing the only way to truly escape macumba was to leave Brazil.

When David heard their application had been accepted he was furious.

“My uncle was possessed by an evil spirit at the time,” Everton recalls. “He pointed at our family and said, ‘I will never let you leave this country.’”

A few days before they were due to leave, the family decided to go on a day trip. It was a long drive home and Everton’s father was feeling quite tired. David offered to drive and Everton’s father gladly accepted.

And then it happened.

“I could tell a spirit had possessed him,” Everton remembers. “When I saw his eyes rolling back I knew what was happening.”

His father, who was sitting in the passenger seat with Everton on his lap, knew he had to react quickly.

Without hesitation he reached over and pulled the handbrake. The car spun around two or three times, eventually
stopping by the side of the road as though it had been parked. Everton's father leaned over and pushed David out of the car. David got up and wandered off by himself, still laughing.

“He often disappeared for a few days when he was possessed,” Everton explains. “No-one would know where he went or what he was doing.”

On the day of their scheduled departure Everton’s family was understandably tense. The spirit’s words still rang in their heads—“I will never let you leave this country”. Would they really be prevented from leaving? Would something terrible happen if they did?

“No-one in our family had ever been on a plane before,” Everton comments. “Our relatives were excited to have an excuse to go to the airport. They wanted to come and see us off.”

Shortly after leaving home, however, they got a flat tyre. Everton’s dad got out of the car and changed it.

A few minutes later they had another flat tyre. This time they had to use someone else’s spare.

When they got their third flat tyre it began to feel like more than a coincidence.

“We had to use the tyre from our relatives’ car,” Everton says. “We said goodbye to them in the street because they could no longer come with us to the airport.”

They were almost there when . . . you guessed it, the fourth tyre went flat.

By the time they finally made it to the airport boarding time was over and the gates were closed.

Everton’s father begged airline staff to let his family onto the plane and his pleas were heard.

“We came to Australia determined to start afresh,” Everton says. “My father vowed we would never get caught up in something like that again.”

From left: Ani, Joao, Everton and Carina.

Shortly before the family left for Australia, Everton’s father randomly picked up a pamphlet on the street. It turned out to be a flyer advertising a quit smoking program.

“So much rubbish litters the streets of Brazil, it really is a miracle that my dad picked that pamphlet up,” Everton says.

Everton’s father didn’t smoke but his relatives did. He gave the flyer to his wife’s family and promptly forgot all about it.

Not long after the Goncalves family had settled in Australia they received a phone call from Everton’s Uncle Jose, who had some exciting news to share.

“Remember that pamphlet you gave me?”

Everton’s father did. “Did you stop smoking?” he asked.
“Even better than that!” exclaimed Jose. “I've found the truth!”

Everton’s father stiffened as Jose began to tell him about the Adventist Church. After his experience with macumba he was wary of Jose’s new religion.

“I don’t want anything to do with it,” he said firmly. “Leave me out of it!”

He hung up the phone and turned to Everton and his mother, shaking his head in disbelief. “I don’t know what’s wrong with your family—always getting mixed up in these crazy things,” he told his wife.

Meanwhile, back in Brazil, Uncle Jose was spreading the news about Adventism and converting his relatives with the message of the gospel. Pretty soon almost all of the family had become Seventh-day Adventist Christians.

But Uncle David hadn’t.

It took some convincing but David was finally persuaded to visit the Adventist Church. He was blown away by its truths and made a decision for baptism.

On the day of the baptism David was on his way to the font when his eyes began to roll back. He was being possessed.

“Leave me alone!” he snarled.

Recognising what was happening the pastor immediately began to pray out loud, asking for the Holy Spirit to come and drive the evil spirit away. The congregation began to pray too.

Eventually he calmed down and was baptised.

The once-medium is now a faithful member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

“He has never been possessed by another spirit since,” Everton says.

When Everton was nine, his mother decided to take him back to Brazil for two months.

Everton had to share a bedroom with his Uncle Gerald, who took the opportunity to tell the young boy a Bible story every night. Soon it got to the stage where Everton found himself eagerly anticipating night-time because he knew it meant he would get to hear another exciting story.

“I was amazed when Uncle Gerald told me about Jesus,” he says. “I wanted to be a Christian.”

When they returned to Australia, Everton’s mother announced that she wanted to become a Seventh-day Adventist. She began attending the Portuguese church in Ashfield (NSW) and was baptised.

Everton wanted to follow through with his decision to become a Christian but there was one problem: he loved playing soccer and soccer games were always held on Sabbath.

“When I was 12 I finally decided it was time to give up soccer and start attending church,” he says. “My dad was impressed by the changes in our family. He decided to become an Adventist too.”

Today Everton’s family still attends the Portuguese church his mother first joined. His wife Patricia is a member too.

“God is good,” he says. “It doesn’t matter what your past looks like. He has a plan for your future.”
Vania Chew is PR/editorial assistant for Adventist Record.
Hi, my name is Linden, and I’m a pirate. Not the seafaring, swashbuckling, Captain Jack Sparrow sort of pirate but the law-breaking, life-destroying, illegal downloading sort of pirate.

It’s a topic most people tend to brush aside. Admit it—how many of you have actually read through the copyright warning message that pops up at the start of a DVD? But piracy is serious. I wasn’t kidding when I said there were lives at stake.

**Law of the land**

International treaties have been established to protect the rights of authors of literary, scientific and artistic works. Copyright law itself, however, differs from country to country. For the sake of this discussion, I’m going to focus on the law in Australia.

Creative works in Australia are protected under the Copyright Act 1968. This policy protects an author’s right to "control the reproduction of their material and the right to control the communication of that material to the public".

The implications of the law are many. But in regards to content made available on the internet it’s really quite simple: "uploading, downloading or sharing unauthorised copies of a movie, album or software" is an infringement of copyright law. It’s also illegal to "save material from a website onto a hard drive without express or implied permission".

**Land of pirates**

The law is clear. Many Australians, however, don’t seem to care.

A study released in 2011 found “a third of the Australian adult population (aged 18+) is active in some form of movie piracy”. Attorney-General George Brandis has even gone as far as declaring Australia the “worst offender of any country in the world when it comes to piracy”.

Among this group of offenders are Christians, which is disconcerting given the Bible’s explicit instructions to “not steal” (Exodus 20:15) and obey the law of the land (Romans 13:1-2). Ellen White also didn’t mince her words when it came to stealing, saying the eighth commandment “demands strict integrity in the minutest details of the affairs of life".
The victims

“So it’s against the law but is it really that bad? Who’s getting hurt? Multimillionaire movie stars and musicians? A few illegal downloads wouldn’t even dent their bank accounts.”

It’s a fair argument. Fair, but flawed, for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, stealing is stealing, no matter who the victim is. Is there a difference between stealing from a minister or a mob boss? Is cheating on your taxes any less of a crime than cheating on your tithe? The Bible says “all wrongdoing is sin” (1 John 5:17).

Secondly, Hollywood superstars are not the only victims. In the 12-month period to the third quarter of 2010, movie piracy cost the Australian economy $1.3 billion. Approximately 6100 full-time equivalent jobs (a conservative estimate) were also relinquished during that same period, including “nearly 2300 forgone directly by the movie industry and retailers”.

Who’s getting hurt? Thousands of fathers, mothers and hardworking individuals trying to make an honest living.

Death by sitting

Pirates can count themselves among the victims too.

The average Australian spends more than three hours a day watching television and almost four hours online. This sedentary lifestyle is a killer. A study released in June found adults who watch TV for three hours a day “may double their risk of premature death”. Physical inactivity has also been linked to a number of ailments, including diabetes, heart disease and some types of cancers. Fellas, it also lowers your sperm count.

With more Australians—particularly the younger generations—choosing to watch their favourite TV shows online, it’s perfectly reasonable to suggest illegal downloads are serving as a major contributor to this culture of inactivity. Torrent sites and peer-to-peer sharing have given “screen junkies” unbridled access to hundreds of videos that shouldn’t be freely available. The result: hundreds more reasons to spend hundreds more hours slouched in front of a screen.

Time is of the essence

Stealing TV shows is a crime; stealing time from God is a catastrophe. Our lives are but “a vapour” (James 4:14) and we can’t afford to waste so much time staring at screens.

“Our time belongs to God. Every moment is His, and we are under the most solemn obligation to improve it to His glory. Of no talent He has given will He require a more strict account than of our time . . . The value of time is beyond computation. Christ regarded every moment as precious, and it is thus that we should regard it. Life is too short to be trifled away.”—Ellen White

Some of you may still regard excessive screen time as nothing to write home about (sorry, doing it anyway). And you’d be right—there’s a whole lot of nothingness going on. But as C S Lewis wrote, “Nothing is very strong: strong enough to steal away a man’s best years not in sweet sins but in a dreary flickering of the mind over it knows not what and knows not why.”

So as a very wise man once asked, “how long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep?” (Proverbs 6:9).

Time to cut back

Contrary to what some of you might think, television is not the problem. Like any other tool it can be used constructively or destructively. The same goes for the internet. We don’t need to go “cold turkey” on our screen time but we could all stand to cut back. Removing all illegally downloaded content from your computer or hard drive is a
good place to start. You just might save yourself thousands of dollars in fines in the process.\textsuperscript{18}

Such a step isn't easy. I know—I did it a few months ago. As far as life’s problems go, deleting a collection of pirated movies and TV shows shouldn’t be that big of a deal. However, as a movie fan, I can honestly say it was difficult. Funny how positive lifestyle changes are like that.

What I thought would be limiting, though, actually turned out to be liberating. Less time in front of the TV has meant more time reading and exercising. Playing the guitar is no longer just a Sabbath afternoon activity either.

Pirates who sail the seas aren’t so different from the ones who slouch in front of screens. Both break the law and destroy lives—behaviour not befitting of a Christian. Thus, “let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labour, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need” (Ephesians 4:28).

“Savvy?”\textsuperscript{19}

1. \url{http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/other_treaties/text.jsp?file_id=172836}


3. Visit \url{<www.copyright.org.au>} to learn more about copyright law in Australia.


5. Ibid.


10. Ibid.

11. McCrindle Research, \textit{Australia: The digital media nation}

\textit{, 2013}. A study on New Zealanders revealed similar results.


13. \url{http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs385/en/}


* Linden Chuang is assistant editor of Adventist Record—digital.
Guys look at me like I’ve just had a stroke . . . of genius—“Why didn’t I think of that?” Girls give me a look that’s hard to read (then look at their partner): “Why didn’t you think of that? That way you’d never forget.”

These are reactions to the fact I got married on my birthday, 11/11/11. Some people think it’s a disadvantage to share my birthday. I think it’s a winner. I get two presents, share my celebration with my wife and I can’t forget (at least until old age or ill health steal away my memory). Well, we’re about to hit three years of marriage so here are some things I’ve learned.

Disclaimer: Three years is not long. I’m no expert. But I’ve learned a lot and I’m still learning every day. If you’ve been married for ages, some of this may not be new to you; just reminisce and have a chuckle.

Marriage is hard. I thought marriage would be awesome—all dates and dinners, “love” on tap, special times with your favourite person. And it is. But it takes real work. The idea of marriage and actual marriage are two different things. No matter how well you think you know your future spouse it doesn’t compare to living together.

The first year of marriage is really hard. Seriously! Together you prepare for W-day. You’ve been planning towards achievable goals. Blast off! Now you’re strapped together and floating in orbit. Attitudes have to change, adjustments must be made—and while some of this change is about focusing less on yourself and more on your other, it can also leave you complacent and secure, not putting in the same effort as dating. You’ve arrived and achieved. As my wife puts it, “Letting myself go, getting too comfortable.”

Love is spelt commitment. If you commit to marriage—with time, money and talents—then your marriage will be strong. Fight for your marriage; don’t just expect it to happen. Choose to commit to each other.

Commit to forgiveness. Choose to forgive. Don’t get stuck on the marry-go-round of grudges, resentment and mayhem. Unforgiveness will undermine your marriage. As the Disney musical says, “Let it go”.

Men: marriage needs you. It is not an institution designed by women to curb your freedoms and make you change. Marriage was designed by God and it’s an equal partnership—equal parts fun and responsibility.
Paul’s challenge to men in Ephesians to love their wives as Christ loved the church hits me right between the eyes. Would I lay down my life for her? And how does that look in less extreme circumstances, in the day to day? It means putting her first no matter what she has done. This is no cheap, easy love but reflects God’s love—loving someone who hurts you deeply, sometimes intentionally, and keeps doing it.

If men need to love, women need to submit. Dr Emmerson Eggerichs in his book *Love and Respect* outlines this concept clearly. He highlights studies showing men need respect and women need love. This is not about oppressing women but about spouses using language the other can understand.

My wife says, “Hearing the word submit makes me cringe! At first, it didn’t sit well with me because I didn’t fully understand what it meant. To be honest I still have trouble understanding now but there are times I choose not to understand. For me it’s about being equal as husband and wife with our roles at home but it’s also respecting my husband.”

Equal but different. That’s something we can both agree on. That, and how blessed we are to have each other.

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*Jarrod Stackelroth is the associate editor of Adventist Record.*