Beauty out of ashes

It’s been two weeks since the world watched on in horror as 21 Coptic Christians were beheaded by Islamic State terrorists in Libya. It was an act of pure evil—one with Satan’s fingerprints all over it. But our God is bigger, and He has a countermove for every one of the devil’s schemes.

Undaunted by the slaughter of 21 Christians in Libya, the director of the Bible Society of Egypt saw a golden gospel opportunity.

“We must have a Scripture tract ready to distribute to the nation as soon as possible,” Ramez Atallah told his staff the evening an ISIS-linked group released its gruesome propaganda video. Less than 36 hours later, ‘Two Rows by the Sea’ was sent to the printer.

One week later, 1.65 million copies have been distributed in the Bible Society’s largest campaign ever.—Christianity Today

Click HERE to discover how Libya’s martyrs are witnessing to Egypt (seriously, it’s well worth the read). Also, don’t forget to check out the stories in this week’s edition of Record eNews.
San Pathology sold

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Kenya's president praises Adventist Church

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CHIP charging on, changing lives

More than 250 people gathered together at Avondale College of Higher Education in Cooranbong (NSW) for the

Watch/download InFocus

Making headlines:
- Church volunteers help with cyclone clean-up
- Christians offer forgiveness after Libyan massacre
- Tech experts say the future of ministry is gaming!

Lyle Shelton from the Australian Christian Lobby says FreeTV’s proposed changes to the commercial television sector’s classification regime are a watering down of standards that will expose children to more sex and violence.

Are your plastic bottles poisoning you? Aussie nutritionist and dietician Sue Radd with the lowdown on the health risks of food and drink stored in plastic.
biennial Complete Health Improvement Program (CHIP) Summit from February 12-16.

Do numbers count?

In the book of Numbers, God counts his people. In the 1930s, Adolf Hitler counted the Jews. Do numbers count? And if so, do they count for something good or bad?

Simple lifestyle changes for better health—Paul Rankin

Paul Rankin has not only extensively researched the positive impacts of a balanced lifestyle and plant-based diet, he's also seen spectacular results for himself. Find out more about CHIP, the Complete Health Improvement Program.

On The Web

Meet the “Post-Seculars”—the one in five Americans who no one seems to have noticed before in endless rounds of debates pitting science vs religion.

Lucre

Want to see an Adventist dance? Just have a big donor play the right tune. "Money, money, money, money . . . money!"

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How Libya's Martyrs Are Witnessing to Egypt

Jayson Casper in Cairo / February 23, 2015

Undaunted by the slaughter of 21 Christians in Libya, the director of the Bible Society of Egypt saw a golden gospel opportunity.

“We must have a Scripture tract ready to distribute to the nation as soon as possible,” Ramez Atallah told his staff the evening an ISIS-linked group released its gruesome propaganda video. Less than 36 hours later, Two Rows by the Sea was sent to the printer.

One week later, 1.65 million copies have been distributed in the Bible Society's largest campaign ever. It eclipses even the 1 million tracts distributed after the 2012 death of Shenouda, the Coptic "Pope of the Bible." [A full English translation is posted at bottom.]

The tract contains biblical quotations about the promise of blessing amid suffering, alongside a poignant poem in colloquial Arabic:

Who fears the other?  
The row in orange, watching paradise open?
“The design is meant so that it can be given to any Egyptian without causing offense,” said Atallah. “To comfort the mourning and challenge people to commit to Christ.”

The Bible Society distributed the tract through Egypt’s churches, but one congregation went a step further.

Image: Jayson Casper

Poster at Isaaf Evangelical Church

Isaaf Evangelical Church, located on one of downtown Cairo’s busiest streets, hung a poster on its wall at eye-level with pedestrians. “We learn from what the Messiah has said,” it read over the background of an Egyptian flag. “‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you…..’”

Pastor Francis Fahim said the poster was meant to express comfort to all Egyptians, Muslim and Christian.

As CT reported on Thursday, the beheadings by the Islamic State in Libya have resulted in unprecedented sympathy for Egypt’s Christians, who are increasingly finding common identity across denominational lines. The martyrdoms have also allowed Copts a platform to witness to the realities of their faith, as they publicly forgave the terrorists.

But their testimony may come with risk. Prior to the beheadings, the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party speculated on its website that the Copts may have been abducted because they were evangelizing.

The claim was baseless, but CT examined similar 2013 accusations leveled against Christians in Libya in the wake of the first modern-day Coptic martyrs outside of Egypt. In the detainees’ possession was devotional material meant for the substantial community of Coptic migrant workers.

Image: Bible Society of Egypt

English tract (outside)

The new Two Rows by the Sea tract underscores how openly Christian material circulates in today's Egypt. Consider what can be found at the Arab world’s largest book fair, which draws 2 million visitors each year.

Amid the hundreds of booths at the 46th Cairo International Book Fair, held January 28 to February 12, the call of the gospel resounded from two microphoned sideshow barkers.

“The Injeel for a pound,” one announced, advertising the cut-rate price of the Arabic New Testament for the
equivalent of 13 cents.

“And a free gift for every visitor,” cried the other, offering a DVD of the Jesus film to every curious observer.

The booth belonged to Spiritual Service for Publishing (SSP), a Cru affiliate and one of two authorized distributors of the Jesus film in Egypt. They occupied a prominent central wing of the fair, alongside at least a dozen other Christian publishers.

“There has been a great response to our presence at the fair,” said Henain Ibrahim, SSP's administrative director. “Though we do not target Muslims, as the great majority in Egypt it is natural they have been the majority of our customers as well.”
San Pathology sold

Sydney Adventist Hospital (SAH) has sold its pathology services to Sonic Healthcare, an Australian international healthcare company.

San Pathology’s eight locations on Sydney’s north shore and in the Cooranbong area will continue operating under the same name.

“In recent years, funding and other commercial pressures on pathology providers Australia-wide has meant widespread industry consolidation to maintain viability,” said an official statement from Margaret Duffy, who heads up the San’s diagnostic and pharmacy services department. “Most hospitals [are now] using large pathology providers.”

Adventist Healthcare, the corporate entity behind SAH, is keen to point out its efforts to avoid job losses during the transition—only one staff member of more than 100 elected not to accept ongoing employment under the new arrangements. In December 2014 a dinner was held to mark the change and to thank employees for their contribution.

“It is recognised that San Pathology staff expertise, dedication and knowledge is critical to the ongoing success of the pathology service,” Ms Duffy said.

Sonic Healthcare, the new proprietor of San Pathology, is based in Sydney and has expanded from one pathology service centre in 1987 to hundreds of pathology, imaging and medical services in eight countries, including New Zealand, Germany and the USA.

Ms Duffy said the company “has a strong culture and set of values which emphasise service excellence, respect and honesty, responsibility and accountability, continuous improvement and confidentiality, all compatible with [Adventist Healthcare] mission and values.”
Kenya's president praises Adventist Church

Kenya’s president has praised the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a major force in improving the African country and donated $US22,000 toward a new health science building at the Adventist University of Africa.

President Uhuru Kenyatta, speaking at a fundraising event for the university building in Rongai, Kenya, said he was grateful for the church’s work in many education and health institutions across the country.

"You have established hospitals, educational facilities, and other socially beneficial amenities. You have uplifted communities, empowered our citizens, and built our nation," Kenyatta said, according to a statement published by the AllAfruca.com news site on Sunday.

Turning his attention to the Adventist University of Africa, he expressed appreciation for the fact that it stands alone among the country’s 22 public universities and 37 private universities in its strong focus on post-graduate studies.

"This university is pan-African in scope, and it is the only university which solely focuses on the provision of post-graduate studies," he said.

The university is also the only post-graduate institution in Africa to offer studies in public health and leadership, which university vice chancellor Brempong Owusu-Antwi linked to a desire by the Adventist Church to see people live healthier and happier lives.

"This is because of the philosophy of the SDA church on health status in Africa," Owusu-Antwi said.

Kenya’s president is spearheading a government drive to transform Kenya’s economy, and education plays a key role that policy. Kenyatta reminded his audience at the university that the government needs 1000 doctoral graduates yearly for the next decade to meet the planning requirements.

The Adventist University of Africa raised more than 50 million Kenyan shillings (about $550,000) toward the construction of the new health science building at the fundraising event, including 2 million Kenyan shillings (about $22,000) from Kenyatta.
The total cost of the new building was not immediately clear.

Several African countries are looking to Adventist education to raise living standards. Earlier this month, Rwandan prime minister Anastase Murekesi praised the church at the grand opening of a $2.4 million state-of-the-art facility that is expected to turn the Adventist University of Central Africa into a leading provider of IT and communication specialists for the region.
Cooranbong, New South Wales

More than 250 people gathered together at Avondale College of Higher Education in Cooranbong (NSW) for the biennial Complete Health Improvement Program (CHIP) Summit from February 12-16.

The event was the first Australian Summit since the new CHIP program was launched two years ago following a substantial investment by the South Pacific Division and Sanitarium Health and Wellbeing Company.

Participants travelled from as far as England and the United States to attend the event, which also featured facilitator’s training for CHIP and the Depression Recovery Program.

**Adventist physician and Depression Recovery Program founder Dr Neil Nedley spoke on the importance of “self control” at the CHIP Summit on Sabbath afternoon. [Photo courtesy: Linden Chuang]**

Featured speakers at the Summit included Dr Neil Nedley, founder of the Depression Recovery Program, Pastor Don McIntosh, health evangelism specialist from California (US), and dietician, nutritionist and internationally acclaimed speaker Brenda Davis.

CHIP founder Dr Hans Diehl and Avondale College senior lecturer Dr Darren Morton also presented during the event. The summit was hosted and organised by Dr Paul Rankin, CHIP in Churches Program director for the South Pacific Division.

“The spirit and enthusiasm of those at the Summit was amazing, I was really delighted with the way everything went,” said Dr Rankin. “God really blessed. There were some moments that you just couldn’t manufacture.”
One of those moments came on Sabbath morning when Sister Pat Quinn—the Catholic nun turned CHIP evangelist—was presented with an award for her dedication to sharing CHIP with communities around Toowoomba (Qld).

Sister Pat described herself as “75 going on 50” after losing more than 40 kilograms “and all the pain that was ever in my body” through the lifestyle education program. During the Summit, she encouraged attendees to not hesitate in sharing the life-changing message of CHIP with their friends and neighbours.

“Everywhere I go, they all say the same thing: ‘If only I knew about it sooner’,” she said.

“That was a really special moment,” said Dr Rankin on presenting Sister Pat her award. “To see Sister Pat become a CHIP evangelist is really inspiring, and demonstrates the power of the program to build bridges into the community.”

Dr Paul Rankin presents Sister Pat Quinn with her award. The Catholic nun turned CHIP evangelist received a standing ovation from Summit attendees for her dedication to the program.

A number of other testimonies of the impact of CHIP were shared on Sabbath morning. The program has already seen great success in several remote Aboriginal communities. CHIP leaders are also working with Adventist Development and Relief Agency on a new “illiterate” version of the program for communities in developing countries.

Despite the success of program over the past two years, CHIP leaders believe the program has only just begun to hint at its “world-changing” potential.

The rate of chronic diseases of lifestyle* is steadily increasing worldwide, which means lifestyle medicine has taken on a greater significance.

“We now have convincing evidence that many of the chronic lifestyle diseases can not only be prevented [through lifestyle medicine], but also arrested and often reversed,” says Dr Diehl.

The CHIP founder also said the Seventh-day Adventist Church, with its message of wholistic health, has the potential to be the “leader” in lifestyle medicine “if we are serious about it”.

Speaking on the Friday night of the Summit, Dr Morton said Adventists have “the privilege of being custodians of a real unique and distinctive message”.

“I’m passionate to see church members capture this vision,” he added. “Lifestyle medicine is the new frontier of healthcare. It will change the world.”
Avondale College’s Ladies Chapel was filled to capacity during the Summit.

For more information about CHIP, please visit <www.chiphealth.org.au>.

* Chronic diseases of lifestyle (CDL) are a group of diseases that share similar risk factors because of exposure, over many decades, to unhealthy diets, smoking, lack of exercise, and possibly stress. <http://www.mrc.ac.za/chronic/overview.htm>
A number of years ago in a leafy suburb of Melbourne (Australia), a Jewish boy becoming a bar mitzvah began his first public Torah reading by asking: “How does God count people? Why does God count people? If He knows how many hairs are on your head and mine, why did He make the Israelites count many thousands of men by tribe?” The young man’s hands gripped the sides of the pulpit. He took a deep breath, steadied himself, and began an insightful and moving exploration of the book of Numbers.

A few minutes into his sermon, one point made the congregation collectively catch their breath: “The most recent person in history to count our people was Adolf Hitler.” The parallels are sharp and they illuminate very different models of counting. God counted His people by name. Hitler counted the Jewish people by number. God desired to write His law of love on foreheads and hearts. Hitler tattooed numbers on forearms. God’s counting gave His people an identity and brought them together. Hitler’s counting dehumanised, tearing families and loved ones apart.

Do numbers matter? Maybe. Maybe not. Do the “why” and “how” of counting matter? King David’s census of the Israelites indicates that motivations matter deeply to God. In this case, Satan played on the king’s pride, inciting him to take the census against the counsel of David’s best advisors and bringing heavy judgement on Israel.1 Centuries later, the call for yet another census would bring Mary and Joseph to the city of David in fulfilment of a messianic prophecy.2 In all of these scenarios God’s people were counted but each call to measure produced very different results. So do numbers count?

When it comes to measuring spiritual growth—some call this “spiritual metrics”—there are at least two strongly opposing positions. The first goes something like this: “Most of us are horrified to think that someone might attempt to ‘measure’ spiritual life. How can anyone know how spiritual a person or a group is? And if someone could know such a thing, is it the business of anyone but the individual and God?”3 The second offers another perspective: “If faith does not ‘work’ it lacks value . . . If you can’t graph positive results what is the point?”4 In between these strong views are other, more moderate positions—for example: “Measurement can be unspiritual but the best leadership is informed by facts, not practised in a vacuum.”5

Reading these statements do you find one resonates with your point of view? Do terms like “spiritual inventory” make you shudder? Or do you put aside time each year (or day or month) to prayerfully consider your growth into the likeness of Jesus’ character? Is “measure” even the right word to use or does it put us on the defence before we can engage meaningfully in this discussion?
Another issue to consider is our leaders’ role in keeping us faithful to our commission and collective vision. We are called to be disciples and to make disciples of all nations—is this happening? Is the membership of the Church really growing? Numbers can answer these questions but they often fail to reflect the deeper and more complex realities of what it is like to live daily in a posture of humility, of temperance, of sacrifice, and to experience the joy that characterises the life of a true disciple. The book of Acts can give some guidance here. Luke records not only numbers of lives daily transformed by the Spirit of Christ, he also characterises the new disciples by their actions: they were one in heart and mind; they shared everything they had; they sold their houses and put everything at the apostles’ feet . . . 6

Traditionally, Adventists measure discipleship by persons helped, literature distributed, letters written, missionary visits and persons taken to services—among other things. In case we are tempted to condemn these forms of counting as legalistic, we should pause and humbly reflect whether our spiritual disciplines are in a better or worse state today. But how would we even begin to answer that question? Do metrics matter?

US author/speaker Mike Bonem makes the point that growth in numbers is not always a good indicator of spiritual health. He gives the example of Christ Fellowship in South Florida, a “multi-site church” that decided to look closely at the fruit of their discipling labours. As one church leader explained: “The numbers were strong. We had a lot of people in life groups and taking classes but we didn’t seem to have the life we needed.” Bonem continues: “Despite ‘positive numbers’ Christ Fellowship’s leaders knew that the old model was producing participation but not the spiritual growth God desired.”7 On the other hand, a different church report boldly states: “We are all about the numbers. Because every number, every statistic, represents a life that was changed, a life filled with hope and purpose, a story of redemption and grace.”8 Clearly these numbers count.

It seems then that measuring discipleship has its advocates and opponents. But are metrics really the issue? It may be difficult to get past the theological-intellectual pros and cons but it might also be worthwhile to look closely at what our responses might reveal about our hearts. Are there any underlying reasons for pulling away from self-reflection—either individually or corporately as a Church?

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.9 In the next few months, the South Pacific Division plans to take Paul’s counsel literally and to ask whether or not they as our leaders, and we as the Church, are fulfilling our mission statement: To make disciples for Jesus Christ of all peoples, communicating the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12.10 The plan is not to take a census but to humbly and prayerfully invite the body of the Church to reflect on—and yes, to measure—its spiritual health. Because in the end it’s not really about the numbers. Note the end of Paul’s counsel: “Test yourselves. Or do you not realise this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! (2 Corinthians 13:5).” This then is what counts: Is Jesus at the centre of our lives and our Church? And are we—truly, daily, accountable—His disciples?

So very soon you will be asked to stand up and be counted. You may join in the personal and corporate measurement of our commitment to be—and to make—disciples. You may not. The choice is yours. But before deciding whether or not to participate, please spend some time considering for yourself: do numbers count?

Finally, the young bar mitzvah’s questions were not rhetorical; the answers can be found in Numbers 1:3. God didn’t need the metrics. He was preparing His people for their biggest test, and they needed to know their army was prepared before they took their final march into the Promised Land.


Dr Lindsay Morton is a lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education.
"We have the best government money can buy," quipped Mark Twain. It's a quote that's often repeated today in Washington, DC. As catchy as it is, however, on its face it seems rather unlikely.

The US Federal Government takes in more than $US3 trillion in revenue annually. State and local governments take in another $2.7 trillion. But the richest person in the world, Bill Gates, is worth a mere $US76 billion—only 1.3 per cent of the annual tax revenue taken in by government entities every year in the US. If Mr Gates wanted to "buy" the government, and if he was willing to give his entire fortune, the US Federal Government alone would blow through it in under a week and hardly notice the difference.

So what was Mark Twain talking about when he said people can buy the government?

The problem that legislators face is this: although they control a vast reserve of money so large it's almost unfathomable, nearly all of it is dedicated for general governmental expenditure for items like the military or health care. Pity the poor legislator salivating at that untouchable surging river of cash flowing ever so close to his fingertips. Instead he has to go out and raise funds for his re-election campaign and other pet projects. And a smart donor knows the influence a little donation can have.

Why does it matter? Because remember that huge river of cash? Someone has to decide how precisely to spend it. Which company should build the next fighter jet? What regulations should govern the handgun industry? Who should be placed in key positions in the department overseeing the pharmaceutical industry? And each one of these decisions has a profound impact on the fortunes of industries and individuals. That's why so many people in the know believe giving a little money to a legislator is a very smart investment.

But what does this have to do with our faith? The "golden rule" applies inside the Church as well as outside. You remember the golden rule, don't you? "He who has the gold makes the rules." Which makes the issue of fundraising in the Church a patch of quicksand into which many a good person has fallen.

But how could a donor influence a Church that brings in a total of close to $US3.3 billion in tithes and offerings globally each year? The same way a legislator is influenced—donors give to projects that aren't funded through the
regular system. And the champions of those projects become very quickly dependent on their donors. Adventist self-supporting ministries may be even more vulnerable to the distortions that come from trying to please wealthy donors. Want to see an Adventist dance? Just have a big donor play the right tune.

The natural urge to please wealthy donors should be resisted. Why?

First, God does not need big donors to do great things. He moved in far greater ways when we were poor and ill-resourced than now when we are rich. Our deficit is spiritual, not fiscal.

Second, giving is a privilege, not a favour. Treating a donor like they are doing God a favour grossly distorts reality.

Third, we must be exceedingly careful that we don’t let money cloud our judgement or buy influence. There’s a reason Scripture says the love of money is the root of all evil. It corrupts within the Church just as effectively as outside it.

Fourth, it’s not big donors that are the backbone of our Church—it’s the “little people” who are faithful year after year, often ignored like the widow giving her mite, while we name things after and make a great fuss of those who are well off. The average Adventist gives around US $190 per year. Doesn’t sound like much, does it? But multiply that by 18 million people and you find your billions. When we give preference to the rich we dishonour the sacrificial contribution of the poor.

Fifth, the book of James says we “sin” if we provide the rich deferential treatment.

God doesn’t need our money. We need to give it. It’s a privilege. And when we give we should ask for nothing in return. And if someone wants to give to the Adventist work and receive accolades or influence in return, we have an obligation to politely refuse; to not only save ourselves, but them as well.

James Standish is editor of Adventist Record.