

24 August 2006

The Means and Ends of Adventist Media

By Alexander Carpenter

The Adventist blogosphere has raised some questions about the **Danny** and **Linda Shelton** divorce and Adventist Today's coverage.

Perpetual Student points out, "Now I don't have the time or interest to figure out what really happened, but I thought the letters provided a good example of some of the pitfalls that a ministry can face if it is too tightly controlled by a dominant personanility (sic)."

Ron Corson and the rest writes: "It may be a shame that people search the AToday site for information on the 3ABN situation but that is really not the fault of AToday. To report on the situation is part of AToday's purpose in reporting news of Adventist interest and it certainly does not have lots of material on the subject."

But let's not mix posting emails with news reporting.

I worry that my friends at Adventist Today are letting the wrong kind of interest drive their content. At the root, it seems, they are mixing their means and ends.

Behind some the prurient discomfort over the Sheltons' personal lives lie serious objections to the content and management of 3ABN.

But let's stop for a second. We must pull away from the brink of employing personal relationships as substitute arguments for raising essential questions about the people who represent our faith to the world. It troubles me that some religious folks have been at the forefront of personal attacks on public figures (Bill Clinton/John McCain) - and we cannot allow dehumanizing titillation and argument by innuendo to leak into the public discourse of our faith community.

I've interviewed Linda for Spectrum and investigated the multi-million dollar waste and the bumbling right-wing coddling of 3ABN. And yes, you can buy a wedding dress or a doll by Marie Osmond from 3ABN on Ebay.

But beyond the personal, **Danny's** email retort reveals a troubling morality - essentially saying that he has many converts so shouldn't be criticized by folks with less. That hint of "ends over means" justification should make his accountant and 3ABN board sweat.

Ron gets at that when he writes: "Just claiming that **Danny Shelton** is spreading the gospel is not enough, Christian responsibility calls for accountability as well."

When a person starts defending themselves by saying: "but look at all the good I've done (Duke Cunningham/Pol Pot)," their moral jig is up.

I believe, Mr. **Shelton**, that the Spanish Inquisition got even more converts than you.

As an Adventist I want to see better content and leadership at one of the largest cultural signifiers of

Adventism; but we should make sure that our own means stay high. Concerned Adventists need to drive smart change at 3ABN, but we'll give our whole community a better media experience by staying off "the he said/she said" road.

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Comments

"We must pull away from the brink of employing personal relationships as substitute arguments for raising essential questions about the people who represent our faith to the world."

I agree. But it is easier said than done. Maybe I am being unfair, but I am 99% sure that any questions about the content on 3ABN will be cast as an attempt to weaken the gospel message and Adventist distinctives. (A charge frequently expressed in the letters to the editor about the AToday commentary on the Sabbath School lesson.) It is easier to discredit an opponent than to help, discuss, and come to an understanding.

Posted by: [perpetualstudent](#) | 25 August 2006 at 10:12

The problem isn't so much the reporting, though that's part of it, but the slant on it. I recently chided Irv Taylor, for instance, for making the statement about **Danny Shelton's** "third marriage," neglecting to mention that his first marriage ended when his wife died, as opposed to a divorce. His reporting, however technically correct, left the wrong impression.

Posted by: [Cliff Goldstein](#) | 25 August 2006 at 11:29

The most comprehensive discussion on the saga of 3ABN is at www.blackstda.com

Posted by: [Calvin Eakins](#) | 25 August 2006 at 17:27

The reporting at www.blackstda.com is comprehensive and slanted.

Posted by: [Steffan Philip](#) | 26 August 2006 at 06:17

I reject the idea that 3ABN is a cultural signifier of the Adventist faith. It is not now and has never been officially embraced by the Church. It is an independent ministry that seems to have a different set of doctrines than those presented in the 28 Fundamentals and certainly a different agenda from the Tell the World agenda recently adopted by the General Conference. We should not assign it too much importance, and the current personal troubles of the proprietor certainly indicate why.

Posted by: [Monte Sahlin](#) | 26 August 2006 at 07:06

I agree that 3ABN fails in representing Adventist doctrine and it certainly is not a part of the Church, but as semioticians point out, cultural meaning transcends official avenues.

Speaking of cultural signification means to talk about description, not prescription.

Notice that I used the term "Adventist faith" not "Adventist church." The functional reality is that more people know about and watch 3ABN than Hope/LLBN/SAFE/Blue Mountain, not to mention outside of the US.

Whether you or I want it or not, the cultural impact of 3ABN on para-church ministry and the funding priorities of retired Adventists has been culturally significant in many ways.

For instance, last March, 3ABN drove some of the programming choices of Hope, which, according to NAD sources, changed its weekend format to devote hundreds of thousands of dollars and several dozen hours of programming to coverage of the right-wing, non-event Ten Commandments Day.

This happened because **Danny** was going to do it at 3ABN.

If the official church channel has tried to copy 3ABN programming - I'd call that cultural significant, which is different than arguing "ought."

Posted by: [Alexander Carpenter](#) | [26 August 2006 at 09:50](#)

My understanding is that 3ABN recently got kicked off some satellite network, SkyAngel or something, and now it has a much smaller viewing audience than before. I don't know what the portends, if anything, but whenever anything is built around a single personality, the potential for trouble is immense, especially in ministry. I'm not a fan of 3ABN in general, or **Danny** in particular, but apparently thousands of people have been drawn to our message--which is by far the best thing going out there (have you seen, for instance, the "Left Behind" series?)--so I wish we could just live and let live. If the church started pushing hard against 3ABN, that would probably in some people's minds only increase their reasons to support the station. Though **Danny**, as anyone, should be held accountable for his actions, we all ought to be careful how we respond to him and what he's doing.

Posted by: [Cliff Goldstein](#) | [26 August 2006 at 15:28](#)

The "live and let live" principle is vital, especially within religious communities. The specter of persecution tends to validate a person in his or her own mind.

But on the "best thing going" trope. I'd prefer a "good thing going" as we all know that there is plenty of room for improvement.

Remember that worse doesn't make anyone better.

Posted by: [Alexander](#) | [26 August 2006 at 19:33](#)

Well, Alexander, I happen to believe that the three angels' message of Revelation 14 is THE persent truth message for the world, so then what else is there? One of the things that has made it so much easier for me over the years to stay an Advenist is when I look at all, and I mean "all" the alternatives out there . . . I mean, look at all we have to chose from: the secret rapture, eternally burning hell-fire, Jesus-changed-the-Sabbath-to-Sunday, or there's the liberal versions, with the resurrection of Christ being really our own personal renaissance of spiritual awakening, or the second coming being when our communities reach a level of divine cooperation For me, the three angels' message is, really, the ONLY thing going (are we allowed to say that on a Spectrum blog?)

Posted by: [Cliff Goldstein](#) | [27 August 2006 at 06:45](#)

Here here Alex. I won't champion a cause or a movement just because it's the "best thing going." That's too close to easy complacence.

We come close to aping the baptism-tallying circuit riders when we trumpet the clear value of simply drawing people to our message. G-d's work should do more than identify and hail one protestant faith that is utterly self-assured. And the loudest voice for the faith would do well to leave baptisms and roll-calls aside when measuring its impact.

Yes. Absolutely. "Live and let live." So let's see the church do some living. Though I believe the 3ABN message has limited the representation of our faith by its extreme conservatism and the resultant exclusivity, the medium and method has tethered the faith to an image of inaction - to the valuation of power through mere consensus and popularity.

The church must start to kick and flail - neither in an attempt to scratch or dismantle 3ABN nor to distance itself from it - but to clear the path through action: to put vigilant kindness and charity back into society. When the *church* organises such an effort the *faith* will be represented more widely more loudly and more gracefully.

And honestly - if we focused on such a mission would we then care if the people we helped start throwing one tenth our way?

The list of SDA-friendly organizations is precisely the type of public voice I would like to hear more. Whenever a sevvie face appears on the screen I'd like to hear it say "this is what I'm doing" rather than "this is what you should believe."

And if by such action the purely polemic pundits are muffled and muted...let's hope they come to and decide to do some living as well. Live and let live indeed.

Posted by: [Michael Covarrubias](#) | [27 August 2006 at 13:04](#)

The amount of detritis smeared throughout the web about 3ABN is astounding. Yes, **Danny** is probably not the brightest bulb, but why must a site such as [www.blackstda.com](#) rely on demonstrating that not only did he mess up the divorce, but also allows comments about all kinds of other things, including employees being wife abusers, etc. This does nothing but detract from the seriousness of the discussion.

Frankly, 3ABN should think about suing them for slander. Unbelievable what is going on!

Posted by: [Kevin](#) | [24 October 2006 at 10:50](#)

I watch 3ABN, until **Danny** hits the stage. It's just a shame that he has used his position & his program to trash his former wife & son-in-law.

Posted by: [Dave Firnkoes](#) | [12 November 2006 at 03:00](#)

exzactly what is spiritual adultry...? Is thaT BIBLICAL?

Posted by: [DONNA BURKETT](#) | [28 November 2006 at 15:28](#)

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