



ADVENTIST TODAY

NEGOTIATING CHURCH CONFLICT



SACRED TEXTS: CAST IRON
OR FREE FORM?

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Integrity is a prerequisite to justice. Justice is a prerequisite to confidence. Confidence is a prerequisite to unity. Think about it as you peruse this issue of *Adventist Today*, which is dedicated to these qualities in the life and mission of the church.

Ever since the twelve accepted Jesus' invitation, "Follow me," there have been differences of opinion on a myriad of matters among dedicated followers of the Master of human relationships—for the simple reason that we are, one and all, imperfect human beings.

Our cover article by Barry Casey addresses one important element in the preservation of unity in the church, under the rubric of conflict resolution. We believe our readers will appreciate Barry's recognized expertise in such matters.

Next, with his inside awareness of such matters, David Newman, editor of *Ministry*, laments instances in which the church has suffered because integrity, justice, confidence, and unity in the church have been compromised, and tactfully suggests remedial measures.

Third in this trilogy is a white paper by Doug Hackleman documenting a recent instance in which a lack of integrity and justice in the Southeastern California Conference has subjected confidence and unity to unnecessary stress and strain. The account of events has been rigorously verified by a number of competent, knowledgeable persons. It is presented here, not with the intent to parade so-called "dirty linen," but in the sincere hope that this narrative may encourage all of us—including the participants—to avoid similar lapses of integrity and justice in time to come.

In a heart-warming account of the way in which one congregation related to what could have been a divisive issue, Scott Stevens illustrates gospel principles that bring healing. This community of Christians was stronger and happier as the result of a situation that might otherwise have inflicted wounds that would never have healed.

Gospel principles for resolving differences within the church are clear, eminently fair to all, and effective. According to Matthew 18:7, "occasions for stumbling are bound to come" (NSRV). In verses 15 to 18 Christ outlines what we might call an appellate procedure by which to resolve these differences, with the church itself as the final court of appeal. One of the major needs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today is an adequate adjudicatory system. As reported in our July/August issue, a case currently in process before the Maricopa County Superior Court in Phoenix is the first time one entity of the church has taken another church entity to court—a poignant reminder that present provisions for resolving differences of opinion within the church are woefully inadequate. The fifth article in the conflict resolution series addresses this need.

Two letters to the editor on page 22 of this issue, in response to the anti-Catholic billboard campaign in Orlando and elsewhere, reflect the concern of many with respect to the way in which Ellen White's book *The Great Controversy* is being used. In its scenario of last-day events, which was altogether accurate with respect to events during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, still valid today? On pages 14 to 17 of this issue three highly respected Adventist Bible scholars reply to this question.

On pages 20 and 21 two writers in Colorado report on an aborted attempt on the part of some to welcome the arrival of Pope John Paul II with a series of similar billboards in Denver. The way in which the church in Colorado avoided this unwise confrontation is highly commendable.

Ray Cottrell

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Editor: Raymond Cottrell

Associate Editor: James W. Walters

Assistant Editor: Gayle Saxby

Administrative Assistant: Darla Pape

Copy Editor: Cherie Rouse

Accountant: Arlene Fraser

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Adventist Today
P.O. Box 1220
Loma Linda, CA 92354-1220

Telephone & Fax (909) 824-2780

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The Art of Conflict

by Barry Casey

The man was pacing at the back of the auditorium, violently shaking his head and gesturing with his arms. "I demand to be heard," he shouted and pointed directly at me on the platform. The occasion was a local Adventist Forum meeting and I was presiding over a panel discussion. The participants had taken predictable but different approaches to the issue, and a vigorous discussion was in progress. Now the man at the back was drastically changing the dynamics of the situation. While he continued to shout I turned to the panel members. "Should I let him speak?" I asked. One of them shrugged. "I can't compete with that," he said. The others nodded. Reluctantly, I spoke into the microphone and announced that we would open the meeting up to discussion, beginning with the gentleman at the back. That did it. For the next few minutes we listened, dumbfounded, as he attacked the panel members and myself, the institution, and the general Laodicean condition of the Adventist Church. He raised the spectre of secular humanism, likened us to communist infiltrators, and generally did what he could to tar us as traitors to the cause of the gospel.

I didn't handle it well. I could feel my anger rising throughout his harangue until when he finished up with, "What are you going to do about it?" I retorted, "I'm going to close this meeting right now." I stood up, gathered up my notes, thanked the participants, and stalked off the platform.

With experience, maturity, and a lot more understanding of conflict management, I would have turned that situation around. But there will be other opportunities, I know, because one thing I have come to realize is how much the Adventist community, like other institutions, needs to understand the nature of conflict. I'd like to offer some reasons why Adventists handle conflict badly, propose some different ways to regard conflict, and suggest some alternative principles upon which to base our responses in conflictual situations.

Barry Casey is associate professor of communication, journalism and philosophy at Columbia Union College and manager of a desktop publishing business. He holds a doctorate in philosophy of religion from Claremont Graduate School.



Five Ways We Fail at Conflict

Fear. We are afraid of conflict. We identify conflict with anger and anger with sin. At the first sign of tension we back off, afraid to go any farther for fear that we might offend or break any number of social rules that govern "niceness." What seems to matter most is maintaining the veneer of respectability that overlays so many of our interpersonal relationships, rather than discovering the causes of the conflict.

Denial. We find it difficult to be honest about the presence of conflict. One sure sign that the tension level is rising is when Adventists begin to call each other "brother" and "sister." It's an unconscious attempt to deny that conflict exists and to remind each other of our collective fantasy of being a tightly-knit community. Yet when we call each other by such falsely honorific titles in the midst of genuine conflict, we impose a structure on the situation that can only make things worse. It's the equivalent of baiting someone until they are angry, and then chiding them for having a temper tantrum. By ignoring the real presence of conflict we rob each other of the opportunity to get beyond our first impressions to the values each of us holds deeply enough to *be* in conflict. In doing this we often sabotage the very means through which people rise above their differences to a new level of understanding. More often than not, real community is the product of real conflict. Having fought honestly and well, people find how much they care about the cause at stake. Differences of mere preference and opinion are scrapped and the way is opened for the integration of the deep and powerful issues at conflict.

Power-play. We often attempt to deal with conflict by invoking the power of position to quell the sources of conflict. If power is both a real and symbolic force that is invested in an office, authority is power that is *earned* by people we come to respect. Coercive power based on position alone, power without authority and trust, is power exercised without foundation; it begins to crumble the first time someone asks "Why?"

Misperception. We find it difficult to distinguish essential values from peripheral issues. The essential values are the ones that form our very core of being, that define us as people and as Christians. The peripheral issues are those preferences and momentary interests that mark us as belonging to particular and shifting sub-groups. While such interests might be personally important, they are rarely worth fighting for, and the presence of conflict over such things suggests that we are not coming to grips with the real values in our society. Perhaps they are values we inherited,

for which we have a lot of history but little direct experience. Or perhaps they are values which call our very self-image into question. In any case, we ignite our tempers over the straw that broke the camel's back before we find out for sure that this is our camel.

Identity-confusion. Adventists want to run the church like a business but live in it like a family. We can't have it both ways: either we work toward explicitly stated goals and mission statements like a business or we indulge in the loose, informal, messy and sometimes infuriating web of expectations and assumptions we associate with families. Either we regard each other with respect, even in conflict, or we fall under the wearying rounds of gossip and innuendo.

Many of these conflicts arise because Adventist institutions are often frustratingly unclear about which standards are expected and what the intended mission and goals are. Employees are left to guess at what administrators want, since they don't seem to know what the end result should be nor how to get there. Added to this is a debilitating corporate inferiority complex which manifests itself in the hiring of "outside" consultants and experts at great expense to tell us what common sense would suggest in a healthier environment.

Conflicts also arise when we forget that people are never to be regarded as means to an end. That's the way badly run businesses operate and we should have nothing to do with it. It's an inefficient way to work with people and it runs against spiritual principles of the inherent worth and the redemptive value of every person.

Re-visioning Conflict

If we want to get past these failures and on to better ways of handling conflict, we need to see it differently. Specifically, we need to get rid of two myths about conflict.

Myth #1: Conflict is solely negative. According to Thomas Crum, founder of the Aiki Approach and author of *The Magic of Conflict*, the first useless myth is that conflict is a purely negative experience. It's not, says Crum. It's a natural movement, a dance, a release of energy that is constantly going on in nature. It's not wrong or right; it just is. Conflict is so much a part of the natural world that we often forget the forces that carve a gorge through a mountain, that pull the tides around the world, and that feed the food chain from bottom to top. It is conflict between my muscles that provides the means for me to remain upright instead of sagging like spaghetti; it is conflict that achieves a balance between gravity and centrifugal force to keep me from being slung like a cherry pit into the sky. And conflict is inevitable even if we try to avoid it or resist it.

The key here is the understanding and acceptance of conflict. This does not mean, of course, that we shouldn't try to resolve conflicts or that we must give up in resignation. It's simply a clear-headed recognition that in any given human interaction, conflict will likely occur—and that it is natural.

If conflict is natural, inevitable, and a means of change and growth, why don't we study it, embrace it and learn to see it as a stepping-stone to deeper understanding...?

Myth #2: Conflict demands a winner. We need to get rid of the notion that conflict is a contest we have to win. Conflicts are not inherently about winning and losing; we are the ones who choose to make them games in which there are winners and losers. Regarding conflict as a contest means that someone must win—usually at all costs—which also means that someone has to lose. That much is clear. What complicates the situation, though, is that the problem that sparked the conflict is forgotten in the race to best the other person. Shifting our attitudes, from perceiving conflict as a contest to seeing conflict as an opportunity, can free us up to accept the other as a potential partner rather than an enemy.

Grasping the active role conflict can play in peacemaking is a positive step toward re-visioning conflict. Danaan Parry, a conflict resolutionist and author of *Warriors of the Heart*, says conflict is a catalyst for change and growth. It increases our awareness of situations and it connects us with our conflictual partner by eliciting greater intimacy. We need to see it as "an interdependent challenge requiring cocreating and teamwork," says Parry, and recognize that if we deny conflict and push it away, it goes underground. There it becomes an internal terrorist, causing us to mistrust others and break relationships. Like a plague it can infect us and our community with suspicion and jealousy. On the

other hand, say several experts in the field of conflict resolution, conflict can become the crack in our hard shell that widens to open up a new understanding of ourselves and other people.

I think this new perception of conflict is essential for Adventists. It's important because it recognizes a principle of spiritual life we often forget: every situation can be redemptive. The seeds of transcendence lie in the mundane, everyday battles of life—that is where God most often meets us—not in the careful, tightly-controlled, and insular attitudes we often exhibit. The corollary of this is equally important: there's only one Redeemer. Taken together these ideas provide a working framework for conflict resolution from a spiritual perspective.

Working Through Conflict

Many Adventists have a desperate need, almost an obsession, with defining and finding "the truth." We define it first as something we *own* as an institution, and having so narrowly defined it, we thus exclude any possibility of finding it outside our own belief system. That sets us up in a conflictual situation with other viewpoints before dialogue can even begin. How many times in a Sabbath School class or a discussion group has further conversation been stifled by the words, "We know the truth," or "we know from the writings of Sister White," or even, "Why are we wasting our time with man's [sic] thoughts?"

If conflict is natural, inevitable, and a means of change and growth, why don't we study it, embrace it and learn to

see it as a stepping-stone to deeper understanding between people and cultures, and a window into the suffering and triumph of Jesus Christ? Why don't we open ourselves to the truth that if conflict is natural and inevitable, we need to work with it instead of against it?

First, the principle that every situation can be redemptive helps us work through conflict by recognizing there *is* a problem before plunging ahead to a solution. Conflict managers advise identifying what kind of problem we're up against and then together defining it as clearly as possible. That means being honest in admitting there is a problem and being comfortable enough with it to call it a conflict.

Second, we look for a win/win solution instead of a win/lose, a lose/win, or a lose/lose solution. The goal is to arrive at a solution that both parties can live with. The ideal is that both parties win—that success is not achieved at the expense or exclusion of other people. The win/win attitude sees life as a cooperative, rather than a competitive arena, says Stephen Covey, bestselling author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Third, we seek first to understand and then to be understood. The paradigm shift here is that we work at comprehending the other person's point of view without projecting our own responses onto them first. This involves a return to the classical rhetorical principles of *ethos* (character), *pathos* (feeling), and *logos* (reasoning). The sequence is important: in *ethos* we establish our credibility with others by truly, empathically listening to them; in *pathos* we become aligned with their feelings and needs and finally, in *logos* we present the reasoning behind our view point. Stephen Covey says, "Seek first to understand. Before

the problems come up, before you try to evaluate and prescribe, before you try to present your own ideas—seek to understand. . . . When we really, deeply understand each other, we open the door to creative solutions and third alternatives."

The redemptive quality of conflictual situations is not inherent in the situation, though. Rather, it is an attitude and a perspective that we must work hard at achieving. We bring it to the situation and work from that energy. It takes self-aware, disciplined, and patient work to shift our paradigms and assumptions from competing to cooperating—not unlike the process we go through in accepting Christ into our lives, confessing our needs, and sticking to our commitments.

The second aspect—there is only one redeemer—also supports this new approach to conflictual situations. Many Adventists act like becoming a Messiah were written into their contracts when they accepted Christ as their Savior. They fuss and fidget, make infinite adjustments to their conversations, worry that they haven't witnessed in over a week, and generally make life miserable for those around them by trying to save the world. There's only one redeemer and redeeming is best left to that person.

When applied to conflict situations and to life in general, this principle tells us that we haven't been called to come up with all the answers nor have we been given the responsibility to fix all the problems. In whatever we do, even our best efforts are flawed and finite. In working through conflict to some kind of resolution we need to realize that we will fail a good portion of the time, for no

(continued on page 18)

For Further Reading on Creative Conflict Resolution

Books on conflict resolution are legion and they range from the silly to the superb. The ones below are easily available and offer a variety of viewpoints and approaches to the subject.

Stephen R. Covey. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Simon and Schuster, \$12.

This book is not specifically on conflict resolution, but the chapters on "Think Win/Win" and "Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood" alone are worth the price of admission. This is an eminently practical book on character development from an author whose personal ethic is Christian but who can appeal to people from any background.

Thomas F. Crum. *The Magic of Conflict: Turning a Life of Work Into a Work of Art*. Simon and Schuster, \$12.

The author is an Aikido martial arts expert and as such knows something about defusing volatile situations. He uses the nonviolent approach of Aikido to make parallels with interpersonal relationships. His advocacy of working with conflict and remaining open to its potentially energizing power is helpful.

Roger Fisher and William Ury, with Bruce Patton. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, 2nd edition. Penguin Books, \$10.

Something of a standard in the field of business negotiating, this book usually shows up in the bibliographies of articles on conflict resolution. The authors are business people and have little time for cultivating the interpersonal. Their approach is pragmatic, fair-minded, and tough.

Danaan Parry. *Warriors of the Heart*. Sunstone Publications, RD 4, Box 700AW, Cooperstown, NY 13326, 1991.

Parry works regularly with corporate groups and social services organizations, teaching methods of conflict resolution. His approach uses techniques of body and mind discipline integrated with a clear understanding of interpersonal communications.

Tom Rusk with D. Patrick Miller. *The Power of Ethical Persuasion*. Viking Press, \$20 (hardcover).

In the field of self-help, much that is marketed as a new approach is familiar to anyone who was raised in Sabbath Schools and homes with a modicum of good manners and Christian principles. Rusk's book is a clearly written, earnest, and helpful summary of how to influence people in ethical ways.

Is the Church Afraid of Candor?

by J. David Newman

When a church employee makes a mistake, do we admit it or cover it up? When a committee discovers it has made a wrong decision, does it inform its constituency? If a church member or employee has a grievance against the church, can an impartial hearing be assured? Why are incompetent employees often transferred to another unit of the organization? Who brought the Davenport scandal into the open: church employees or lay people?

Why does the church seem to be afraid of openness?

Just before I became secretary of the Ohio Conference the officers hired a new principal for one of our academies. He came with high recommendations and an impressive resume. However, before the end of the school year he developed an illicit relationship with one of the faculty and was dismissed. He left his wife and departed for Florida. There he was strangled to death by the husband of another woman with whom he was having an affair.

After the principal's dismissal, we discovered that similar problems had plagued him at the two academies where he had previously worked. His references contained no hint of any problems.

Just recently two people resigned at an Adventist institution for moral reasons. One of these individuals applied at a number of our institutions for a position. The letters of recommendation gave this person high marks for leadership, knowledge of Scripture, and spirituality. There was no hint of any moral problems.

Once I sat on a committee that was asked to authorize several hundred thousand dollars to hire a particular firm. We were reluctant to vote this money and were moving toward a negative vote when the presenter told us that the firm had already been hired and was busy at work. The presenter was embarrassed and committee members were angry. How much better it would have been if the presenter had been candid from the beginning. He probably hoped that we would vote the money without knowing that the authority of the committee had been preempted.

Another committee I sat on was asked to vote \$500,000 for a special project. After much discussion, the chairperson of the committee realized that we were moving toward a negative vote. He told us that if we voted no, several church

representatives would have to be immediately recalled from a country overseas where they were already negotiating the use of the money. Action had already been taken on the assumption that the committee would rubber-stamp the decision.

I and perhaps the reader could cite many more examples. Why does the church have a problem with candor? There are several reasons.

- We believe in being positive. It is always much more pleasant to give good news than bad news.

- We are often the best practitioners of what counselors call "denial." If we deny there is a problem, as the alcoholic does, then perhaps the problem will vanish and we will not have to deal with it.

- We do not understand how to manage conflict. Most people practice either aggressive and often hostile behavior, or more commonly, withdraw and assume a passive stance.

- It is embarrassing to admit a mistake might have been made, especially if the group has prayed for divine guidance.

- Since we say we are the remnant church, we are not supposed to make mistakes.

- Since no provision has been made for public dissent, it is easy to become overconfident and even intolerant of other views and perceptions; therefore there is no need for candor.

- Since the church has so many critics already, it must "circle the wagons" and defend itself at all costs.

Because the church is so afraid of candor it is very difficult for church publications to publish much in the way of bad news. Some church publications will not even print letters to the editor because they don't want anything negative appearing. Yet without all the facts—with only partial information—we may hire the wrong person, vote the wrong decision, or refuse to rectify a mistake.

The Associated Church Press in its Standards of Ethics and Professional Practice declares:

Disciplined journalistic curiosity seeks out information and insight in the service of the reader and the common good, out of the knowledge that the individual readers, the ultimate 'consumers' of journalism, need truth to form their opinions and conduct their lives in consonance with God's will, and that society as a whole, and each community within society, specifically the churches, need trustworthy sources of information and interpretation in order to function as community.

As Jesus so succinctly stated: "The truth will set you
(continued on page 18)

J. David Newman is the editor of *Ministry*, the journal of the Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial Association. Newman focused on church organizational behavior in earning a D. Min. degree from McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago.



Conflict Seeking Resolution

by Douglas Hackleman

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(Hackleman served as a delegate to last fall's Southeastern California Conference constituency meeting. He then extensively researched the failure of the first presidential nominee's candidacy and was consulted by the SECC's executive committee on the issue. Hackleman here writes the highlights of a complex case that is more fully documented elsewhere in a 130 page report. Thomas Mostert, president of the Pacific Union Conference, has been invited to respond. As we go to press, his response has not been received. We hope to present it in the November/December issue. —the editors)

On February 25, 1993, the executive committee of the Southeastern California Conference (SECC) voted (20-2) to censure Pacific Union president Thomas J. Mostert for his actions at and surrounding the SECC's 1992 constituency meeting.

The action stated that Mostert "made serious errors in judgment and possibly committed unethical conduct...by releasing a memo [about SECC presidential nominee Craig Newborn that was] clearly misleading." The memo "listed nine references...[but] Follow-up of the references does not support Elder Mostert's statements."

Over a period of three weeks preceding the September 20, 1992, SECC constituency meeting, the nominating committee met together for almost thirty hours and eventually voted unanimously to nominate Elder Craig Newborn as president. Reasons for this choice included: his Christ-centered approach to daily living; the mission-driven focus of his ministry; his distinguished administrative experience under extremely difficult conditions; an extraordinary rapport with young people; and his demonstrated ability to deal effectively with ethnic issues, including those that face the church in SECC.

Newborn, a graduate of Pacific Union College, has a master's degree in history and has completed 70 percent of the course work required for his Ph.D. in religious education.

Ordained in 1975, Newborn has spent most of his denominational service in the Middle East and the East African Union as pastor, evangelist, educator, departmental

director and field president. Since 1990 he has taught religion at Loma Linda Academy where in 1991 he received the Loma Linda Chamber of Commerce Teacher of the Year Award and in 1992 the Zapara Excellence in Teaching Award.

Mostert sat with the nominating committee throughout its three, long Sundays of pre-session work and told its members that he would support their nominee.

Mostert and Newborn meet

"How do you feel about the division you have caused in this conference during the past few weeks?" was the first question Newborn remembers Mostert asking when they met at the conference office on the Thursday evening before the constituency meeting. Newborn had wanted a third party present for this pre-session meeting, but the union president refused. After two or three more questions based on statements that Mostert claimed the nominee had made, Newborn told Mostert he would be happy to answer any straightforward questions on any topic but he would not answer any more questions based on hearsay and innuendo. When Mostert continued this interviewing approach, Newborn left the room.

A few minutes later, Newborn encountered members of the nominating committee who were at the conference office in hopes of meeting with him. Shortly after Newborn began to convey to them what had just transpired, Mostert joined the group, and more than twenty minutes of highly charged conversation ensued.

Eventually Mostert said he was going back to the library, and if Newborn wanted to cooperate, he could join him there. The others persuaded Newborn to resume the interview with Mostert.

One of the questions the union president asked Newborn during their reconvened meeting was, "How does it feel to know that you are less qualified to be president than any pastor in this conference?" It was a question that Mostert turned into an assertion on the floor of the constituency meeting three days later.

Finally, Mostert told Newborn that he had contacted nine leaders under whom the nominee had worked overseas and not one of them believed he was qualified for the position. (Mostert made this assertion later on the session floor.) Newborn asked Mostert to name any of the nine leaders he was claiming to have contacted, but the union president refused.

Neither Newborn nor the members of the nominating committee (with one exception) knew that Mostert had already named the nine leaders in a two-page memo (in

Douglas Hackleman, a member of the Loma Linda University Church, is a free-lance artist and writer with a master's degree in psychology. He has just completed and is now marketing a limited edition art print of Christ.

box) that he had been distributing to select delegates earlier that day at the SECC executive committee meeting, or that copies of his memo were circulated extensively among black SECC pastors, one of whom read it to his congregation on the Sabbath morning before the constituency meeting.

Mostert's memo purports to describe Newborn's work and character in a ten-point summary that is attributed to the nine church leaders whose names and titles are listed as "persons interviewed" (see box, p. 11).

"All had the same general impression as expressed below," wrote Mostert, and there followed characterizations of Newborn as "stubborn," "arrogant," "contentious," "argumentative," and "unpredictable." He "often scraps with people" and exhibits "poor judgment in critical situations;" he "doesn't accept counsel;" he "has had a record of tearing down and disrupting the work where he has been;" he is "definitely not administrative or presidential material;" and "It would be the biggest mistake the conference could make were he to be elected president." These and most of the memo's other claims have been pointedly contested by several of the leaders to whom Mostert attributed them.

The Constituency Session, September 20, 1992

During the hour the nominating committee met immediately preceding the constituency session, Mostert still did not share any of his memo material with its members, even when the chairperson, Jay DuNesme, asked whether there was anything further of which the committee needed to be made aware.

When secretary Marta Salcedo presented the nominating committee's slate of officers to the 763 registered delegates, Mostert was the first to speak at a floor microphone:

I must stand today to vigorously oppose this nomination, as do the other [Pacific] union officers, leaders in the [North American] division, and the General Conference...

There are thousands who have similar virtues,...

...the heart of the concern—is the fact that we have contacted nine people that he worked with overseas.... None of those nine union and division presidents that he worked under would recommend him today for president of this conference, and they have quite a list of reasons relating to matters of judgment and temperament....

"Why," Mostert asked in conclusion, "would we call someone for president who is less qualified than any ordained minister in this conference?"

The next speaker moved to refer the slate of officers back to the nominating committee, and it was so voted.

After listening to forty-seven delegates, singly and in groups, and stopping for supper, the nominating committee

returned the same slate to the delegates—including Newborn for president.

A failed motion to refer the slate to the nominating committee a second time moved North American Division president Al McClure to speak about the Newborn nomination.

"I do not know the nominee," said McClure. "To my knowledge, I have never seen the gentleman." But he went on to "question that one year in the mission field with three churches demonstrated administrative skills." This was an inaccurate representation of Newborn's fifteen years overseas and his varied administrative experience.

"I personally think," added McClure, "it [Newborn's election] would be a drastic mistake to him and to the conference."

The division president had a final point: "I believe, Brother Chairman, that the person who is elected to the presidency of this conference needs to be loyal to the organization. And some of the publicly stated positions that I have heard by the nominee for president—" Here the

acting chair stopped McClure, not because he was starting to speculate about the candidate's loyalty to the church, but because his three minutes were up.

A few speakers and considerable procedural

wrangling later, the weary constituents, now depleted by some 200 representatives, voted Newborn's nomination down—361 to 202—but not before the nominating committee's leadership was called "alarmingly inept." It was told it had done a disservice in bringing Newborn's name before the body, and a call was made for its replacement—all on the assumption that Mostert had told the truth about the assessments of the nominee supposedly provided by Newborn's highly positioned past superiors.

Post-Session Discoveries

As a constituent delegate and a reporter for the Loma Linda University Church newsletter, *Dialogue*, I succeeded in reaching by phone eight of the nine church leaders that Mostert listed in his memo as the "individuals interviewed" regarding Newborn's qualifications. I contacted the ninth leader, Manoug Nazarian, indirectly through his son-in-law, an SECC pastor.

Each of these nine leaders was asked whether he had been contacted by Pacific Union president Tom Mostert (or anyone on his behalf) for his assessment of Craig Newborn's qualifications to be SECC president. Three said they had been contacted by Mostert. A fourth had been contacted by Gary Patterson, assistant to North American Division president Al McClure. The other five said that they had not been queried about Newborn by anyone.

Of the four actually asked for an assessment, two said they hardly knew the man, had never served as his administrative superior, and had no basis for assessing his qualifications.

Why would we call someone for president who is less qualified than any ordained minister in this conference?

The only two who actually had provided Mostert with any assessment of Newborn whatsoever were Maurice Battle and Neal Wilson. Wilson, who had never worked with Newborn, admitted frankly, "I was speaking for myself about things I'd heard."

The Memo Assessed

Seven of the ten items in Mostert's memo were categorically disputed by those who had actually worked closely with Newborn in East Africa. C.D. Watson, who was Afro-Mideast Division president at the time, told me he didn't remember an incident in Kamagambo, Kenya, the way Mostert had reported it. D.K. Bazarra, then Newborn's union president, wrote:

The ramifications of the charges brought against Elder Craig Newborn ...is downright wrong, as far as East Africa was concerned....

Morally, Craig was all that could be desired in the mission field. He was an asset to us. He was a man of determination but not a stubborn fellow. To brand him as arrogant is to reveal a lack of good judgment....

Had he messed up things as it has been alleged, he would not have been invited back to serve as our Departmental Director and, later on, University Chaplain in East Africa.

More recently (May 28), retired East Africa Division president, Elder Bekele Heye, wrote SECC president Lynn Mallery:

May I reiterate for all of you in writing that I was never contacted by anyone who wanted to know my opinion of Elder Craig Newborn's fitness to serve as any conference president, much less for the presidency of the Southeastern California Conference.

Had anyone asked me about his qualifications, I would have told them that Elder Newborn is absolutely qualified for that position and well able to serve in any position to which the Church might wish to appoint him.

The use of my name in a way that totally misrepresented me and my respect and esteem for the abilities and character of Elder Newborn is hard to understand.

In closing, Heye asked Mallery to share his letter with the members of the executive committee, whom he thanked for "all that you have done, . . . to try to rectify the grievous wrong that was done to Elder Newborn." But as of August 13, the executive committee members remained unaware of the letter.

The Reconvened Constituency Session, October 18, 1992

At the second Sunday of the constituency meeting, nominating committee chairperson DuNesme proffered a motion of apology to Newborn and his family. The delegates voted this unanimously, although most of them were unaware that Mostert's remarks on the floor a month earlier had been misleading, or that he had circulated even more defamatory material about Newborn in his memo.

Pacific Union vice president David Taylor, the committee's second choice, withdrew his name from nomination. The nominating committee then offered a third candidate for president, SECC secretary Lynn Mallery, who was voted into office.

By November 5 my efforts to contact the nine leaders named by Mostert were concluded. In the spirit of Matthew 18, Mostert was invited by DuNesme and me to discuss the evidence. He did not respond.

Had anyone asked me about his qualifications, I would have told them that Elder Newborn is absolutely qualified....

A week later DuNesme and I met with the newly seated SECC executive committee. DuNesme provided an oral overview of the episode, and I distributed copies of my 23-page documentation of the evidence entitled, "Protecting

the Process." The committee voted to ask Mostert to respond.

He did so by bringing copies of a ten-page statement to the January 28, 1993, executive committee meeting but refused to pass them out to members until the meeting was over. This was despite two hours of wrestling with him that included a motion for a vote of no confidence. This motion was eventually tabled in favor of a vote to invite Mostert, DuNesme and me to be available at the next month's meeting.

Mostert's statement described my report as "distorted," "inaccurate," "irresponsible," "twisted," "character assassination and half truths." He expressed "total denial of any action or statements that were either false or inappropriate relating to the events cited.... I have nothing to hide or be ashamed of on this matter...."

"What many do not know," Mostert wrote, "is that the Newborn nomination was promoted by a small group who over a period of years have worked in various ways to take the Conference independent of the World Church." And he cited as proof "Bylaws changes at the last two [constituency] sessions; the attempts to ordain women outside of Church policy, and a presidential candidate who indicated his support in both areas.... Little wonder," he wrote, "some are so intent on destroying the credibility of those whom they see as interfering with their agenda."

Apart from the fact that Southeastern has been doing its best to find ways to accomplish women's ordination within church policy, Mostert himself, when he was SECC president, seemed to favor women's ordination. Speaking

on a Sabbath afternoon in San Diego in 1984, he said:

I think North America is ready to go with it. I don't really think there's that much of a problem in North America, frankly...I sense in North America a greater support for it. And, theologically and biblically, uh, there's no problem; there's nothing to prohibit it. It's simply a policy of the church at this point...

Before the February 25 SECC executive committee meeting, DuNesme and I each provided the committee with formal, written responses to Mostert's ten-page attack on our credibility and that of our conference.

During this meeting, to which Mostert, DuNesme and I were invited, the union president described more candidly—but vigorously defended—the way he had actually acquired his assessment of Newborn. Mostert had gleaned his information from second and third parties. He acknowledged that he did not know from whom some of his sources got their second-hand information, but he insisted on its accuracy.

Mostert did, however, apologize for the pain and anger that resulted because he did not present his information to the nominating committee prior to the constituency session. Nevertheless, he insisted that the action taken by the executive committee was grossly unfair—that it was tantamount to calling him a liar—and he questioned the committee's right to act as his judge and jury.

On March 5 Mostert sent a letter to SECC president Lynn Mallery protesting the way in which the February 25 meeting had been conducted, and on March 14 persuaded

an SECC department director, who is a member of the executive committee, to lobby with the committee for the removal of certain words from its earlier action. As a result the phrase "possibly committed unethical conduct" was replaced by "engaged in disturbing conduct." The allegation was deleted that "follow-up of the references does not support Elder Mostert's statement," and the action was expanded to include more specific and clear language.

Not wanting to come across like junior officers advising senior officers, the SECC executive committee voted that its action regarding Mostert be conveyed to the Pacific Union executive committee, without asking the union committee to take any particular action.

Before the union committee met on May 5, DuNesme and I sent each of its 48 members a 130-page book that contained everything on which the SECC Committee had based its action—my original report, Mostert's response, my rejoinder and DuNesme's reply, the SECC's actions, and an epilogue.

When SECC president Mallery concluded reading his executive committee's action to the Pacific Union committee, the repeated efforts of an SECC representative to have the action discussed were emphatically ruled to be out of order, and a motion to receive without discussion was voted, 31 to 11.

Two weeks later, Southeastern's executive committee pressed Mostert about the written apologies it had requested of him at its February 25 meeting—to Newborn, the SECC nominating committee and the SECC constituent delegates. *(continued on page 18)*

Mostert's Memo

Craig Newborn

Only administrative experience: Interim president of Iran field for one year; 3 churches, 124 members, one pastor—No United States pastoral experience.

A composite evaluation of all the leaders who have worked with Craig Newborn in Africa and the Middle East over a period of 15 years. These were the people in charge of the fields where he worked. All had the same general impression as expressed below:

1. Had some ability—friendly way about him
2. Did well as chaplain in East Africa working on non-Adventist campuses
3. Did poorly in Kamagambo, Kenya—made blunders in judgment—Resulted in a major upset because of his careless, insensitive ways—Had to be moved in the middle of the school year
4. Didn't shine in the Middle East—often scraps with people
5. Poor judgment in critical situations
6. Doesn't accept counsel—Is stubborn, arrogant
7. Always been contentious, argumentative, unpredictable
8. Has had a record of tearing down and disrupting the work where he has been
9. Definitely not administrative or presidential material—There were several places open that he could have been put into that role. He was not chosen.

10. Administrative qualities are lacking. "It would be the biggest mistake the conference could make were he to be elected president." None of the group saw him in this position.

Note: This information was gleaned by phone from September 3-16, 1992, by Tom Mostert, Pacific Union Conference president.

Persons interviewed:

1. D.K. Bazarra President, East Africa Union
2. C.D. Watson President, Afro-Mideast Division
3. Manoug Nazirian President, Middle East Union
4. Bekele Heye President, Afro-Mideast Division President, Eastern Africa Division
5. Jerry Karst President, Middle East Union
6. Dunbar Henri President, East Africa Union
7. Maurice Battle Secretary, Eastern Africa Division
8. Neal Wilson General Conference President—Middle East Union—directly attached to the General Conference in recent years
9. James A. Finn President, Middle East Union

Congregation Dares to Love Radically

by Scott Stevens

12

It was a small church in a small town with a very big problem.

In fact, it was facing what in the last few years has become a nightmare for churches in America—a pastor who has committed a sexual impropriety.

But as big as this problem was, this particular congregation had a faith large enough to beat it, and its solution is as remarkable and unique as it is biblical and loving.

For six years this church had had the fastest-growing youth program in the city. Leading it was an energetic, dynamic youth director who could attract high school students from even the neighboring towns. These began to attract their parents, and church attendance swelled nearly as quickly as at the Wednesday night youth meetings. Many people were being converted and it looked as if the future could only grow brighter.

Then, in a counseling session with the senior pastor, a troubled teenage girl haltingly admitted that she had slept with the youth pastor. It had started from a bond they had formed when she had asked for help with personal problems. She knew that the same thing had happened with several of her friends. It had been going on for two years.

Most churches that have faced such a crisis have adopted a strategy of “damage control,” a public relations term used by business to recover sales in the event of injury to customers. In this vein, pastors have been quietly whisked away with vague reasons for resignation, the silence of victims has been purchased with out-of-court settlements, and the skeletons have been kept “safely” in the closet.

The pastor and board of elders of this particular church believed in different principles. Less concerned about public image than the truth, they decided the only way to deal with the crisis was to employ the biblical principles of justice, forgiveness, community and especially love.

Thus they confronted the youth pastor. With his permission, his wife joined them and they agreed to a plan: The youth pastor would, along with his wife and the senior pastor, visit each of the families that day to admit what had happened. He would then turn himself in to the police. As soon as possible, he would announce his resignation to the

congregation, including the reason for it, and would immediately seek professional help. What was most remarkable, however, was that he was asked to remain a member and regular attender of the church.

American Christianity faces two major criticisms from non-Christian society: irrelevance and hypocrisy. The valid substance of those criticisms can be clearly revealed in such a crisis as this. Sequestered in the stained glass, hiding their deepest pains behind a plastic Sabbath-day smile, churchgoers pretend to be free from the problems that plague the “secular” world outside. Church has become the last place where one would admit to a problem with drugs or alcohol or, heaven forbid, sex. The church is seen from the outside as irrelevant because it refuses to deal with the problems of real life. It is seen as hypocritical because it hides those very problems while claiming moral superiority.

This small congregation exemplified what a Christian church could and should be—a loving, forgiving, open group of people who, starting from the security of God’s love, dared to love one another radically, freely, dangerously—a group of people so committed to the truth and so willing to be vulnerable to life’s pain and injustice that they risked public ridicule to show love to everyone.

Jesus was criticized for spending his time with publicans, Pharisees, prostitutes and tax collectors. Most churches would never condone their clean, well-dressed ranks’ becoming soiled with the modern equivalent of such folk. How many of our pews seat the homeless? How many of our doctors find themselves next to struggling drug addicts on Sabbath morning? We have it all backward. In desperately trying to maintain a squeaky-clean image we only push away those on the outside who desperately need the love God is waiting to show them—a love he wants to show *through* us. Christians are regularly accused of hypocrisy but it is very rare to hear such an accusation leveled against Jesus himself. The world “out there” recognizes things about our own Savior that we overlook.

The little church in the small town took the risk to love dangerously, to break all the rules of good public relations, to do the godly thing. It was not at all easy, but today, five years later, that former youth pastor (now working with computers) and his wife are still married. They attend the same church. While some members did move to different churches during the crisis, the families of all the girls involved are there every week. In fact, two of the families involved did not attend the church when the crisis occurred, but were so moved by the way the situation was handled that they began attending. The girls involved have

(continued on page 19)

Scott Stevens graduated from Westmont College, Santa Barbara, and is now a junior medical student at Loma Linda University. He has a Presbyterian background and currently is a member of a non-denominational congregation.



A Credible Adjudicatory System

by Raymond Cottrell

13

Our July-August issue presented statements by the Arizona Conference (AC) as plaintiff and Adventist Health System/West (AHS/W) as defendant in a case before the Maricopa County Superior Court in Phoenix. Each claims jurisdiction over proceeds of the sale of Tempe Community Hospital (TCH) to St Luke's Hospital of nearby Phoenix.

In essence, the crux of the issue is whether the arrangement by which the hospital became a member of what is now AHS/W, in 1973, involved a transfer of ownership (as AHS/W maintains), or an agreement by which AHS/W was to operate the TCH for the conference (as it maintains).

Both litigants agree that proceeds from the sale were dedicated to the medical/health outreach of the church in Arizona. Subsequently AHS/W invested the proceeds in an Arizona project that failed financially. AHS/W maintains that the failed project fulfilled its responsibility with respect to investing the proceeds in Arizona; the AC maintains that in accepting management of the hospital, AHS/W is still obliged to establish and operate a medical or health-oriented facility in Arizona as originally agreed, or return proceeds of the sale to the AC for that purpose.

There are several as yet unresolved questions, and a judicial decision in the case has yet to be made. In the meantime it is appropriate to ask why the conference considered it necessary to take AHS/W to court—why the issue could not have been resolved amicably between the litigants themselves, or by arbitration—within the church. This is probably the first time one entity of the church has entered into formal litigation with another church entity.

Inasmuch as AC and AHS/W are both entities of the Pacific Union Conference (PUC), why was the PUC not able to resolve this issue in a way acceptable to both? One reason is that the president of the PUC is also the chairman of the AHS/W board, a fact that inevitably gives rise to a conflict of interest that would tend automatically to result in a decision against AC. The effect of this conflict of interest became painfully evident at the AC constituency meeting early this year.

Why, then, did the litigants not appeal to the next higher echelon of church organization—the North American Division—to mediate or adjudicate the dispute? The answer is simply that there is no adequate mediation or adjudicatory mechanism in church polity by which the division, or even the General Conference, could do so.

The United States constitution provides for a separation of powers—legislative, administrative, and judicial—with a system of checks and balances that prevents any one of the three from exercising arbitrary authority. Each of the three is independent of the other two, yet subject to them.

Questions that have not been or cannot be resolved on the legislative or administrative levels, or by a lower court, are referred to the nine justices of the Supreme Court. For all practical purposes the Supreme Court is independent of Congress and the executive branch of government, and this relative immunity to political pressure invests its decisions with a level of credibility we accept as a practical working arrangement even when we dislike its decisions.

In striking contrast, the Seventh-day Adventist hierarchical system of church polity gives its administrators almost complete legislative and judicial, as well as administrative, authority. There is no effective separation of powers. Those who make policy administer it, and when questions arise as to whether they have done so properly, they are the ones who sit in judgment. There is no independent, and thus credible, adjudicatory apparatus.

Why has the church not developed a credible adjudicatory system? As a member of the Southeastern California Conference Constitution Committee from 1986 to 1992, I was asked to draft the constitution under which the conference has operated since 1989. My original draft included an article that provided for an independent judiciary composed of dedicated, competent, respected persons, to be elected at the same time and in the same manner as other conference officers, and like them, responsible to the constituency. That article was eventually eliminated from the document because administration feared it would lose control.

In summary, the Tempe case underscores the urgent need for an independent judiciary at each level of church government, to resolve otherwise unresolvable issues without bias or favoritism, in a way that is not only fair and just but that is perceived as fair and just. Such a system would enhance rather than diminish the role of administration in the life and mission of the church. It would prevent conflict of interest situations. It would spare administration the unhappy necessity of making decisions that tend to undermine respect and confidence in church leadership. It would enhance confidence in the integrity of administrators and thus tend to unify the church.

An independent judiciary has been a major factor in the success of the American system of government; a similar body at each level of church organization would do the same for the church. As history has demonstrated, the twin autocratic principles, "the divine right of kings" and "the king can do no wrong," are incompatible with democratic principles and a democratic society. As the Tempe lawsuit unfortunately demonstrates, they are equally inappropriate and counterproductive in the governance of the church. ☛

Sacred Texts: Cast Iron or Free Form?

How should we use *The Great Controversy*?

14

The last issue of *Adventist Today* reported that church leadership feels embarrassed by evangelism such as the recent Orlando campaign featuring anti-Catholic billboards. Many church members in Orlando feel socially uneasy, but they are silently gratified that although the method is unusually direct, at least someone is standing up and calling a spade a spade, or here, naming a Catholic a Catholic!

The question raised by the billboards may merely be one of means. But for some Adventists, the undergirding issue is one of ends—theological ends.

Does a book such as *The Great Controversy* contain specific unconditionally true information about the Catholic Church's future sinister activities? If so, then on to discussion of the most savvy method of conveying the information. But there is disagreement in the church over how to interpret *The Great Controversy*. Therefore, *Adventist Today* presents below three different ways a contemporary Adventist may relate to sacred texts, of which *The Great Controversy* is but a timely example.

For the position of the White Estate on the question of interpreting *The Great Controversy*, see Paul A. Gordon's, "How Shall We Warn the World?," *Adventist Review*, July 1, 1993.

—The editors

The Great Controversy Is Dated But True

by Alden Thompson

Ellen White's role in Adventism is center stage again. This time it's eschatology, an agenda forced by Waco and a billboard campaign against the pope. The fact that the billboards advertise Ellen White's book, *The Great Controversy*, throws the problem into bold relief.

The wide variety of reactions to *The Great Controversy* forces us to ask the question: Can Adventism be one flock under one shepherd (John 10:16)? Here I address that question on the basis of a typology illustrating the variety in Adventism.

Any typology easily runs roughshod over multiple variations and overlap between types. Cheerfully ignoring that danger, however, I have constructed a conservative-to-liberal sequence based on two criteria: (1) attitudes toward culture (separation vs. accommodation) and (2) attitudes toward inspired text (divine vs. human). Three basic types emerge: sectarian (double conservative), mainstream, and rationalist/secularist (double liberal).

1. THE SECTARIAN IMPULSE (DOUBLE CONSERVATIVE) TYPE—Confront the world. This view is hostile toward modern culture and gripped by God's voice in inspired texts, thriving on the confrontational element in

The Great Controversy. That's why evangelism tends to be cross-town, after dark, or by media. It's too intense for the neighbor next door.

Accommodation to culture alarms these true believers. Even cooperation with other Christians is compromise. Understandably, then, given the tendency of mainstream Adventism, their wrath against the church can be as intense as it is against the world.

But some of the same tensions that afflict Adventism as a whole are also at work here. The pure sectarians are the wilderness ascetics, humble colporteurs venturing cautiously into the wicked city with cheap newsprint editions of *The Great Controversy*. Living in the austere world of Ezekiel 9, the ascetics sigh and cry for the sins of Israel.

But money, media, and technology tempt even sectarians with the glossy and the expensive. It's almost a form of intoxication: high-visibility billboards advertising a plush \$19.95 illustrated *The Great Controversy*; livid and vivid radio talk shows, and high-tech video productions splashing out the sins of the church.

Interestingly enough, though sectarians typically hold tenaciously to the *The Great Controversy* end-time scenario, the same sectarian impulse can also give rise to a futurism that jettisons *The Great Controversy* for something more contemporary and compelling. The most extreme example, of course, is David Koresh.

2. THE MAINSTREAM IMPULSE—Love the world. In its attitude towards culture, mainstream Adventism has turned cautiously liberal, a change already foreshadowed in the later writings of Ellen White. Loving the world in the best sense of the word, mainstream Adventists now seek to

Alden Thompson, professor of Old Testament at Walla Walla College, recently published a book, *Inspiration*. Thompson uses Ellen White's writings extensively in his teaching, speaking and writing.



win more than warn.

The blood and beasts of Revelation still figure in public advertising reminding us of our sectarian roots, but the tensions are there, for mainstream Adventists have learned to revel in the goodness of God. When Ellen White says that we should come near to ministers of other denominations, praying for and with them, we say amen. Maybe we even agree too easily when she says, "The Lord wants His people to follow other methods than that of condemning wrong." *Desire of Ages* is now the Ellen White book of choice, at least for initial entry. *The Great Controversy* comes on the scene last, cautiously, often with fear and trembling.

But mainstream Adventism is also diverse. Learning to love the world means learning how the world thinks. Venturing forth from the wilderness and lingering in the city opens the eyes to changes in the world. Can a changed perspective on *The Great Controversy* be far behind? Here I see three basic positions, all preserving a sense of "sacred" text, but relating the writings of Ellen White to Scripture in different ways. The labels are over simplified and probably misleading but still may be helpful for purposes of discussion.

A. The sectarian mainstream: Ellen White is the final interpreter of Scripture. *The Great Controversy* is the end-time scenario

for our day. Though affirming the priority of Scripture, many Adventists accept Ellen White's interpretation of last-day events as final and absolute. Rather than applying a common measure to all "inspired" end-time scenarios, they grant Ellen White interpretative authority over Scripture in the same way that many evangelicals impose the New Testament interpretations on the Old. Vestiges of a fundamentalist view of inspiration make such a position difficult to avoid.

At a more sophisticated level, the dissonance of unfulfilled biblical scenarios (Ezekiel 40-48; Isaiah 65-66; Zechariah 14) is resolved by postulating a conditionalist interpretation for so-called "classical" prophecy, but a deterministic view for the apocalyptic prophecies in Daniel and Revelation.

As for those aspects of our world that seem to differ from those projected in *The Great Controversy*, one simply has to note that the struggle over authority (Revelation 13) is still very evident in our day. And any dissonance between the contemporary scene and that of *The Great Controversy* can be accounted for on the basis of Ellen White's statement that "the final movements will be rapid ones." Clifford Goldstein's popular monograph, *Day of the Dragon, The Great Controversy Vindicated* reflects this perspective.

B. The academic mainstream: Both Scripture and the writings of Ellen White are equally "inspired," but Scripture retains a "functional" priority. *The Great Controversy* presents Adventism's way of vindicating God in the presence of evil—its theodicy—but it is not a fixed end-time scenario. To draw an analogy, Ellen White is to

Scripture as a local city ordinance is to the US constitution. Thus the phenomena of "revelation" and "inspiration" are qualitatively the same in Scripture and in the writings of Ellen White, but Scripture is the ultimate norm.

The "inspired" (but unfulfilled) end-time scenarios in Scripture suggest that *details* cannot be absolute, though all end-time scenarios illustrate the *principles* of the conflict between good and evil. Thus *The Great Controversy* continues to be viable as the classic statement of Adventist theodicy, even if changing times date some of the details. This is my preferred position, one that I will address briefly in the conclusion. The perspective is not well known in "popular" church circles in spite of Ray Cottrell's 1955 essay, "The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy," in *The Seventh-Day Adventist Commentary* (Vol. 4) that spells out the eschatological implications of unfulfilled passages.

C. The evangelical mainstream: Only Scripture is revelational; Ellen White is devotional. *The Great Controversy* is simply a product of nineteenth century culture.

For largely experiential reasons some Adventists

are only loosely tied to the historicist eschatology of *The Great Controversy*. Having found peace with God on a personal level, they are less concerned about 1844 or Sunday laws. While appreciating some aspects of Ellen White's ministry, they stress "the Bible

only." For them, Ellen White is distinctly a lesser light. Her end-time scenario is time-bound; presumably those in Scripture are not. Such an approach is suggested in Frank Knittel's article, "The Great Billboard Controversy," (*Spectrum*, May, 1993).

3. THE RATIONALIST/SECULARIST IMPULSE (DOUBLE LIBERAL) TYPE—Join the world. This perspective slips toward an undifferentiated pluralism. At risk is the distinction between church and culture and the sacred nature of "inspired" texts. The advent is no longer "the blessed hope."

Though the essentially religious nature of Adventism has kept this tendency at bay, our secular culture does tempt the church with its views of history, prophecy, and Scripture. When the rationalist impulse moves God off stage, is the divine anywhere at all? That is the frightening specter raised by such articles as Donald Casebolt's "Is Ellen White's Interpretation of Biblical Prophecy Final?" (*Spectrum*, June, 1982) and Jonathan Butler's "The World of E. G. White and the End of the World," (*Spectrum*, August, 1979). Devout Adventists are unsettled by Butler's suggestion that Ellen White only "envisioned the end of her world," that she "provided an eschatological perspective for her own time," now it is "up to us to provide one for our time."

Butler didn't say "only." But the specter is there. Those longing for a restored world are not ready to think that all things might "continue as they were from the beginning" (2 Peter 3:4).

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When our eschatology is properly informed by Scripture we will see more clearly the difference between the enduring principles and their temporal applications.

Text and Community in Dynamic Relationship

by Fred Veltman

16

The United States has its constitution, Moslems have the Koran, and Christians have the Bible. Each community has its sacred text—a necessity for extending its identity beyond the lives of the founders.

The Adventist church has two sacred texts, the Bible and secondarily the writings of Ellen White. The anti-Roman Catholic billboard campaign, based on a literalist reading of selected portions of Ellen White's writing, in this case *The Great Controversy*, is a blatant and embarrassing example of a significant issue facing contemporary Adventism. A literalist application of Ellen White's writings in a changed cultural setting may appeal to our conservative nature, but we should be clear on one thing: such application is not biblical. Let me illustrate.

When the children of Jacob came out of Egypt as the people of Israel, God gave them a special covenant, His law engraved in stone (Ex. 24:12; 32:15, 17; 34:1, 27,28). Moses recalls that Sinai experience some forty years later when he is about to die. But in quoting the law of God engraved on the two tables of stone at this time, Moses changes the fourth commandment. He gives a new rationale for keeping the seventh day holy: freedom from slavery. The sacred text continues to structure the community but it is modified to meet the new situation. The children of Israel have made the successful transition from slaves in Egypt to members of the independent community soon to enter the promised land. The Sabbath becomes a sign of freedom, a symbol of the creation of the new community out of the old.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy...you shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out...therefore the Lord commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

Moses dares to modify the original text, the text written in stone, in order to make the same basic instruction from God relevant in a new social context.

Ellen White strongly objected to a literalist reading of her own writings that makes no allowance for new situations. In a response to a church school board in 1904 that used her earlier counsel against enrolling children at an early age to prohibit her own grandchildren from attending school, she argued: "God...wants us to reason from common sense. Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances

change the relation of things" (See *Review and Herald*, April, 1975, p. 7).

The Bible presents many examples of how later interpreters followed a non-literal reading of the older texts. When Jesus presented his messages to the Jewish people of his day, the Palestinian community had changed and the sacred text had been enlarged by prophets and poets. To make the ancient text dynamic and meaningful again Jesus often bypassed the literal reading for the principle behind the text. "You have heard that it was said...but I say to you..." (See Matthew 5). Many of his contemporaries concluded that he was destroying God's word (Mark 7:5). Some thirty years later Paul used typology and analogy in applying these same ancient Jewish writings, which he understood to have been "inspired by God," to the problems being faced by the new Gentile believers.

The sacred texts for the Adventist church are dated. They were produced in other times, in other places, and addressed to other cultures. Does this mean they have no value for us today? Of course not. But they must be read with historical considerations clearly in mind. We must not expect that our texts will specifically speak to all of our problems. We look in vain for unambiguous answers to our questions on abortion, the ordination of clergy (male and female), last day events, the role of Christians in times of war, the proper role of Christians in politics, the way God would have us manage society justly in the presence of evil and how best to treat the very old and terminally ill.

On the other hand there is sexual and racial discrimination in our texts. Slavery and the subjection of women are not as clearly condemned in the Bible as our Christian understandings today demand. Does this mean the texts are wrong? My answer is No. The texts were not then nor are they now to be understood as clearly reflecting final truth. Rather, they are perceptions of truth written in terms of what was possible in a previous time and place.

We must take the texts seriously but look for the principles being expressed in the specific application to the earlier culture. The prophecies must be allowed to broadly guide our expectations so that believers are not taken by surprise. They were not written as pre-recorded history but as signals that help us to recognize the future when it happens. The Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah and the day of the Lord clearly demonstrate that faith in God demands an openness to his sovereign will unfettered by a rigid and literal reading of the prophetic text.

Sacred texts and their believing communities live in a symbiotic relationship. The continued life of each is tied to the life of the other. Neither element in the relationship may be frozen in time if the other is to continue its life. Communities which isolate themselves from the larger world and maintain their original forms and lifestyles while the world around them changes soon become irrelevant as God's
(continued on page 19)

Fred Veltman, professor emeritus of religion and liberal studies, Pacific Union College, directed the General Conference's *Desire of Ages* Project, a study of Ellen White's use of literary sources.



Prophecy: A Blessing and a Danger

by Steven Vitrano

Seventh-day Adventists are a people of prophecy. Our understanding of the symbolic, apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation have made us distinctive in the Christian world. But the delay of the Advent has caused some to take another look to see if perhaps we have missed something, or if something needs to be re-interpreted. This is to be expected, and a re-study of the prophecies is commendable, but it is also dangerous.

The symbolic, apocalyptic prophecies have always been a playground for egomaniacs, charlatans, and the sincerely misguided who play upon human fascination for a knowledge of the future, for soothsaying and fortune-telling. Prophetic exploiters motivate through fear and apprehension. Some thirst for power over minds and the lives of others using whatever it takes to control and manipulate all who would come under their spell. Some take advantage of people who have a strong faith in the authority of the Bible as God's word by convincing them that they have a special gift for solving the mysteries of apocalyptic prophecy.

Adventists have been vulnerable to this kind of deception because of our tendency to want the Lord to come quickly. People who claim to have a new interpretation of the symbols will usually attract a crowd. In spite of the many warnings against "time setting," there are always those who would have us believe that Christ will return on such and such a day or year because of an anticipated sequence of events, perhaps based on some mathematical formulation.

How can we avoid such traps and still maintain a legitimate and critical interest in what God is trying to tell us through figures and symbols? Consider three points:

1. We live in a society that is swayed more by charisma than by truth. Avoid being hypnotized by a charismatic preacher. Television conditions us to live by our feelings rather than by our judgment.

2. There is safety in consensus within our church, especially in the interpretation of symbolic prophecy. We should still stand alone, though the heavens fall, in obedience and faithfulness to God. But the church is the body of Christ and God reveals himself in the church. Note that the church should not consist of a hierarchical leadership but rather includes the whole body of believers. It is

true that some within the body are qualified in special ways to teach and preach, but the Holy Spirit works with all believers to confirm what is taught. There are good reasons for being afraid of "offshoots."

3. Fault-finding comes easily to frustrated Adventists. Interpreting symbolic prophecy in such a way as to identify Seventh-day Adventists as Babylon is attractive to the embittered. Those who do so may be sincere, but there is every reason to believe that they are sincerely wrong. "Enfeebled and defective, needing constantly to be warned and counseled, the church is nevertheless the object of Christ's supreme regard," (Ellen White, *Testimonies*, Vol. 7, pg. 16). It is all too easy for someone on an ego trip to gather a following by being critical of the "brethren." On the other hand, there is such a thing as loyal opposition that brings not only needed change but healing. When a new interpretation appears that is critical and divisive we should be very cautious. Under such circumstances, we may expect the Holy Spirit to bring conviction to many rather than to just a few.

It will also be helpful to keep in mind why the apocalyptic prophecies were given:

- To help us understand God's hand in history as the prophecies are fulfilled. By the same token, they confirm our confidence in the Word of God, the Bible.

- To keep us mindful that time is "short." The time of Christ's return is unknown. Jesus makes that clear: "...for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect," (Matthew 24:44, RSV).

- To inform us of the ongoing great controversy between Christ and Satan. Every technology developed which can be a blessing to mankind, Satan turns into a curse. As Billy Graham has said, "If Christ doesn't come soon, God will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah."

- To remind us that Christ will triumph over evil. His children will one day stand with Him upon the sea of glass to celebrate a victory that is final and complete. The prophecies should kindle within us not fear, but the glorious hope of the coming Christ so that we can be ready when he returns.

Paul brings the focus of prophecy to the present:

You know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light...but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires (Romans 13:11-14, RSV). ☪

Steven P. Vitrano is professor emeritus of preaching, worship and evangelism at the Andrews University Theological Seminary.



solution answers every problem or situation. People change, our priorities slide, our goals become unfocused, and laziness creeps in.

Again, we are not called to be perfect, but we *are* called to be faithful, to paraphrase Mother Theresa. Preparation and diligence help us to act responsibly, but we cannot prepare for every contingency. We are responsible to work mightily to change what can be changed within our situation, and then to rest. Three passages in the *Tao Te Ching*, the book of wisdom from ancient China, offer us excellent counsel as we think about conflict in a new way:

• *Think of the small as large and the few as many. Confront the difficult while it is still easy; accomplish the great task by a series of small acts.*

• *When you are content to be simply yourself and don't compare or compete, everybody will respect you.*

• *Do your work, then step back. The only path to serenity.*

Behold, conflict is in our very midst. Let us work with it and through it to bring about cooperation and creativity.



~~Is the Church Afraid of Candor?, continued from page 7~~

free" (John 8:32 NIV). The Bible reveals a history of candor. It did not gloss over the sins and problems of its heroes. Paul says, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body" (Ephesians 4:25 NIV). When we refuse to be open, when we cover things up, we create a credibility problem. People wonder what we are hiding; are we covering up for someone in authority? Whom are we protecting? It may not always be the good name of the church.

There is no effective platform within the church from which to voice contrary views and opinions. Government has what is called the loyal opposition which acts as a check on the party in power. This group is not assumed to be disloyal because it opposes some of the decisions taken. Here are some suggestions on how we could have a better system of checks and balances in the Adventist church.

1. A special grievance officer. This independent individual is assigned to talk to persons about grievances that can be revealed best outside normal channels. An example is the inspector-general in the Army.

2. A feedback representative. This person must be a member of the group from which feedback is desired. His or her role is not secret, and the person must have the confidence of the group. The group should select its representative.

3. An ombudsman. This person is a third party, one who is not part of the establishment, one to whom complaints may be addressed. He or she has no authority in the organization other than the right to investigate and to

publicly reveal his or her findings.

4. An open door policy. This requires specific, regular times when administrative personnel are available to listen to their subordinates.

5. Town hall meetings. Administrators meet in various sections of the field—listening, reporting, and answering questions.

6. A "devil's advocate." One member of the organization is appointed to critique the results of the decision-making so that all sides can be aired. This would help prevent group-think.

7. An ad hoc task force. This short-term committee is set up to study a particular problem or situation. It dissolves once its task is done.

8. Independent church paper. Begin a new publication that can investigate and report on events in the church with complete editorial freedom.

Administrators may not like publications like *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today* because they report on things they would rather keep hidden from public view. But members who pay the bills have the right to know how their money is being spent and why particular decisions are made. If the church does not provide this kind of outlet, publications will arise independent of the church that may report the news fairly or from a distorted perspective.

Paul likens the immature church to one taken in by "the cunning and craftiness of men," but says the mature church should be able to "speak the truth in love...and grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ." (Ephesians 4:14,15, NIV)

~~Unresolved Conflict, continued from page 11~~

Toward the end of May, Elder Mostert provided the following note for the SECC office to photocopy and mail to its constituents:

Over the weeks since the Constituency meeting, I have become aware of some delegates who were upset and offended by my actions relating to the original presidential candidate, the nominating committee, and how information was shared.

Please accept my sincere apology if in any way my words or conduct seemed to you unchristian or inappropriate. As I reflect back there are several things I would do differently another time.

May the Lord continue to bless your life and witness for Him.

The SECC office did not include with the note any document to explain its appearance or the events preceding it, and the matter appeared closed.

Note: For a comprehensive, audiocassette recounting of this episode, including the actual voices of several principals in the case, send a check for \$10 to: Meaningful Media, 22797 Barton Road, Suite 205, Grand Terrace, CA 92324.

~~Dated But True, continued from page 15~~

A Solution? I believe Adventism must admit the uneasy truths represented by the two extremes. The sectarians remind us of the danger of compromise. True Christianity will be counterculture until the Lord comes. To be in the world but not of the world is a delicate challenge. Loving the world in the sense of John 3:16 is right. But the love of the world in the sense of 2 Timothy 4:10 lurks not far behind.

The rationalists remind us that we must use our heads. Indeed. But must we lose our souls in the process? Can we not think and believe at the same time?

That's our challenge. And I will argue with passion that we must be consistent—spiritually and intellectually. That means a return to Scripture, not in fear, but with earnest purpose. We cannot be fundamentalist and avoid asking the hard questions, whether of Scripture or of Ellen White. It is inconsistent to treat Scripture as untouchable but Ellen White as flawed. But perhaps most importantly, we cannot be coldly analytical, not sensing the spiritual import of our work.

As for prophecy, popular views have not been shaped by Scripture itself. Ironically, fundamentalists and their critics often share the same assumptions about what prophecy *should* be: infallible, unerring, and certain to be fulfilled.

That's not biblical. In Scripture, prophecy focuses on people—people who have the power to nullify divinely predicted threats or promises. Adventists see that in Jonah, but resist applying it to end-time scenarios.

When our eschatology is properly informed by *all* the end-time passages in Scripture (such as Isaiah 65-66 and Zechariah 14), we will see more clearly the difference between the enduring principles and their temporal applications. That will provide a basis for dealing with Ellen White's eschatology in the light of changing times. Then we can wholeheartedly affirm the "blessed hope" without fearing the "failure" of our eschatology or being embarrassed by *The Great Controversy*.

And I will argue that Ellen White can be a real asset to us, not as a final interpreter of Scripture, but as a case study of "inspiration" at work. In my book *Inspiration*,* I appeal to her as a positive, liberating force, not just a dogmatic, restrictive one. At least one evangelical observer of Adventism has seen her value in that respect. In a forthcoming review of *Inspiration*, Clark Pinnock notes that the miracle of Scripture is that God's Word is heard "despite all human fragility and all limitations of human authors." Then he adds, "As an Adventist, Thompson is able to appeal effectively to Ellen White on this point. I almost envy him the prophet...."

If Ellen White can help us avoid the fundamentalist and rationalist extremes in Adventism, we can await the Advent without panic and without forcing "predicted" events into a predetermined pattern. And we can pray that by God's grace the sectarians will see that the Maker of the universe is gentle and good. Maybe even the rationalists will suspect that God is at work in the world after all. That

would be good. Very good.

*For an extensive and critical response to this book, see the *Adventist Theological Society's* Issues in Revelation and Inspiration. —the editors

~~Text and Community, continued from page 16~~

witness. They become curiosities and nostalgic symbols of a past no longer understood. Enduring principles and lasting values are those which have been translated into contemporary culture through current forms and symbols.

Texts which are not allowed to be interpreted anew, which remain locked in a rigid mode, are soon set aside by the community as having no power to invoke awe and respect because they no longer serve to motivate proper behavior and inform contemporary faith.

At the same time, communities which allow the text to be manipulated so as to support either a frantic hold on the old ways which have inevitably and irrevocably passed into history, or to defend an unreasoned acceptance of anything that is modern in order to be "relevant," will soon destroy their own reason for being and turn the readers of their sacred texts into cynics.

~~Congregation Dares, continued from page 12~~

each expressed a sense of closure and healing about the experience and have remarked that they wouldn't be doing so well if the issue had all been kept a big secret.

Jesus gave us the commandment to "love one another as I have loved you." Such love can only be fully expressed in the face of sin and error, for it is in these times that courage and vulnerability are most needed. Such love is always relevant and it is never hypocritical.

—Coming In the Next Issue—

Where is Adventism's Next Generation?

Essays representing:

- Teens
- Twenty-somethings
- Boomers
- The GI generation
- Seniors

—and—

Is Adventism in Crisis?

•Jack Provonsha's new book: Responses by Ervin Taylor and Herbert Douglass

Denver & the Pope: Adventists on Alert

by Ed Gallagher & Colleen Anderson

20

World Youth Day and the visit of Pope John Paul II to Denver on August 12-15 attracted half a million Catholic faithful, hordes of media, countless vendors selling papal paraphernalia, pro-gays and anti-gays, pro-abortionists and anti-abortionists—and a notable sprinkling of ultra-conservative Seventh-day Adventist dissenters.

Here's what we observed by way of dissenting Adventist activity before, during, and immediately after World Youth Day:

- Three months before, significant direct mail distribution of the booklet *Coming Soon*—an 80-page collection of *The Great Controversy* excerpts and various statements about Catholicism in history and prophecy. *Coming Soon* attracts attention by its color picture of the pope on the front cover and Jesus on the back; its publisher information makes no mention of the SDA Church. Another edition, also mailed in Denver, uses the title *What's Behind the New World Order?* and lacks the pictures of the pope and Jesus.

- Several weeks before World Youth Day, an attempt to place 21 billboards in the Denver area.

- Leading up to and during World Youth Day, isolated efforts to get the anti-Catholic message across: an interview on a small Christian radio station, personal literature distribution, a hand-held banner saying Seventh-day Adventists believe the “man of sin” will be exposed, and an airplane towing a banner referring to the pope as antichrist.

- Immediately after World Youth Day, significant direct mail distribution of a 16-page tabloid entitled *The Protestant: Voice of the Advent Movement*. This publication is reproduced complete with British spellings from its Australian counterpart. It covers everything from the demise of true Protestantism to claims of papal involvement in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. While disclaiming official Adventist connection, it comes “courtesy of your friends, the Adventists,” and includes excerpts from the *SDA Bible*

Commentary and a 1991 *Sabbath School Quarterly*. In addition, some of its headlines use the name Seventh-day Adventist.

Dissenting Players

Early in the year, it appeared several “independent ministries” might descend on Denver: David Mould’s Laymen for Religious Liberty; John Osborne’s Prophecy Countdown; John Grosboll and colleagues’ Steps to Life Ministries; Danny Vierra’s Modern Manna Ministries; Jan Marcussen’s Amazing Truth Ministries; and the disfellowshipped Troy, Montana, church, with Les Balsiger as spokesperson. In the end, it was the Montana group that appeared as the primary source of activities in Denver. The SDA Reform Movement in Aurora (a city on Denver’s eastern edge) also emerged as a player.

About 20 miles south of Denver is an independent fellowship of Adventists called The Renaissance Church. This group provides a platform for the “independent ministries,” although according to its leader, J. C. Schultz, participants generally see themselves as less radical than some of the speakers they invite. The Renaissance Church lent some support to the Montana group’s activities in Denver, but expressed to Les Balsiger reservations about the timing and manner of the intended billboard campaign.

A Task Force Responds

Late in 1992, a group of lay members and pastors known as the Denver Area Evangelism Committee appointed a Media Task Force to look into outreach through TV, radio, and newsprint. Task force members took as their premise that only through local church and individual member witnessing could we “press the message home,” nevertheless, corporate advertising strategies could support personal outreach and help make it more effective.

By the spring of 1993, the Media Task Force became aware of impending dissident Adventist activity associated with World Youth Day. Its purpose then became twofold: an evangelistic *offense* through media, and a *defense* against potential damage to the church from dissident groups.

The Media Task Force consisted of four core members: an Adventist lay person with an advertising background and knowledge of the dissenting groups, a local pastor, a healthcare communication professional with previous experience in Adventist pastoral and teaching work, and a crisis communication consultant (a non-Adventist). This group met weekly from March through World Youth Day in August, and collaborated with various levels of church administration.

The diverse experience of the task force members, the support and counsel of its advisors, and the group’s early assessment and preparation to be of value. This was the task force’s mandate:

Colleen Anderson is a graduate student in public affairs at the University of Colorado.

Ed Gallagher, Rocky Mountain Adventist Healthcare’s public information manager, is a former pastor and academy religion teacher.

Both served this year on an Adventist Church Media Task Force in Denver.



- Push forward with a positive outreach campaign ahead of World Youth Day and possible dissident activity.
- Prepare for foreseeable dissident activity, and meet it proactively if possible.
- Affirm the right of the dissenting groups to express themselves.
- Make clear that the church's chief concern is not with the dissenting groups' message, but with their counter-productive, antichristian style and methods, which in turn make the church's outreach more difficult.

The Media Task Force wrote an assessment and action plan for both the outreach and the defensive strategy. The plan provided for proactive and continuing communication with key groups including Adventist pastors and church members, Adventist hospital physicians and employees, media representatives, religious leaders, and the public.

TV Campaign Is Christ-Centered

The first round of media attention arose in June, prompted by distribution of the booklet *Coming Soon*, and by an unrelated Denver pentecostal church that dared to call the pope antichrist. Based on our prior news releases and media contacts, most reporters called us for clarification of the Adventist church's separation from the booklet distribution; a few did not. The *Rocky Mountain News* neglected to contact us before running its story, but in a follow-up article the same reporter prominently stated, "Officials for the Seventh-day Adventist Church said they do not condone handing out the booklets."

By far the most effective activities on our part were a paid TV campaign and a news briefing. The TV campaign consisted of a total of 125 30-second spots placed for a four-week period on the local ABC, CBS, and NBC affiliates. Following demographic and viewership data, we used the early evening newscasts and the Oprah Winfrey program to reach our preferred audience—the 25-64 age group, with emphasis on households with young children. This TV campaign alone cost \$50,000.

Our purpose was to create an image campaign that did not address the issue of the Pope as the antichrist, but focused instead on the positive aspects of the gospel. At the end of each spot, we let the viewer know that this message came from Seventh-day Adventists, and we offered a free copy of *Steps to Christ*. We received many favorable reactions from people throughout the Denver area. Nearly 600 people called a toll-free line to request *Steps to Christ*.

News Briefing Brings Results

A few days before the end of the July TV outreach, we learned of plans by the Montana group to place 21 anti-Catholic billboards in the Denver area. We went to the media and let them know, ahead of time, about the billboards and our disagreement with this advertising effort. We took advantage of a prior invitation by the World Youth Day staff to use their weekly news briefing to reach the right media representatives.

Our presentation provoked more interest by reporters than any other item at the briefing. With cameras rolling,

Gary Patterson, spokesperson, found himself faced with many questions including, "Does the Adventist church think the pope is antichrist?" and "What is the Adventist church's position on the book *Great Controversy*?"

The next morning's headlines told the story. "Renegade Adventist Group Plans Anti-pope Billboards," read the *Denver Post*; "21 Billboards Will Assail Pontiff," proclaimed the *Rocky Mountain News*. All major TV channels and most radio stations picked up the item and clearly dissociated the mainstream SDA Church from the billboard effort.

Six days later, the *Rocky Mountain News* reported, "Billboard Supplier Won't Run Attacks On Pope." Gannett Outdoor had cancelled the contract and planned to return payment to the Montana group. When this group then turned to hand-held banners and distribution of a 16-page tabloid, the media paid little attention.

Because of the offensive nature of this 16-page tabloid, Rocky Mountain Adventist Healthcare responded with a paid ad in the *Denver Catholic Register*, distancing the church from *The Protestant* and assuring readers of openness to people of all religious faiths in the hospitals' practice of the healing ministry of Jesus Christ.

Assessing Damage to the Church

Our assessment of the Denver situation is that, ultimately, little damage was done to the church or its institutions. The conference office, local churches, and hospitals received very few calls from people upset at the Adventist church for perceived anti-Catholicism. At the same time, we received numerous affirmations of respect and appreciation for our Christian approach to differences with Roman Catholics. Some local Adventist members housed and fed a number of World Youth Day participants, and two of the Adventist hospitals provided a field clinic and base support during the medical pandemonium of the weekend World Youth Day program.

All task force members, and many who assisted through the process, expressed their belief that the chief issue was the honor of Christ—not merely the honor of the church.

For further information on the Denver response, call Ed Gallagher at (303) 778-2503. 📞

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Letters to the Editor

22

General Response to the First Two Issues

I enjoy Ray Cottrell's writing, but write it in the good old *Review*! I receive and enjoy the *Adventist Review* (the official publication of the church) weekly. I don't believe these extra unofficial publications help the church in any way to be unified.

Unsigned

Let me add my voice to those approving your new publication. You have set a high standard of even-handedness and readability in the first two issues. If you can maintain that standard you will achieve a high line of credibility.

Robert M. Johnston
Berrien Springs, MI

The first issue of your magazine, *Adventist Today*, was read with intense interest. It will be filling a vacuum that exists in our church's publications. Congratulations.

Paul Jackson
Chester, PA

Several weeks ago I received a copy of *Adventist Today*... I examined it quickly upon the day of arrival, but laid it aside for "a more convenient season," and I was pleased—and surprised.

The surprise? For the first time I was finally able to learn the identity of the author of that splendid article ("The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy") published in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 4, pages 25-38, after years of wondering who it might be. During the 11 years of my teaching of prophetic guidance at Pacific Union College ...and subsequently in my teaching of the graduate course at the Seminary, I have often had occasion to refer my students to this article which I found so helpful in understanding the role of the conditional element in prophecy.

Roger Coon
Berkeley Springs, WV

I am pleased to see yet another journal in the Adventist field offering free and candid speech... I am therefore pleased to enclose my subscription check. Thank you for passing it on for me.

Frank Lemon
Beaumont, CA

On returning home to the U.S... I found waiting for me at my oldest daughter's house a complimentary copy of volume 1, number 1 of *Adventist Today*. I have read it from cover to cover... and I must say you are off to a good start.

I was also grateful for the articles on the abortion guidelines. I had heard about them but did not know their

content. The discussion was reasonable for such a difficult and emotion-laden subject. But, to me, the highlight of the issue was James Walters' editorial, "Let Freedom Ring." I look forward to many more such fine editorials and articles.

Rodney Hill
Dighton, KS

Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, and Anti-Catholicism

To suggest, as Clifford Goldstein did in your July/August 1993 issue, that the anti-Catholic statements contained in *The Great Controversy* have been "vindicated" does a grave injustice to the manner in which Ellen G. White (EGW) assembled her writings. There is evidence to suggest that EGW's editorial assistants, with her concurrence, selected the most moderate anti-Catholic statements circulating in the popular and religious press of her day, for EGW to utilize in her final treatment of the "great controversy" theme.

EGW had been dealing with this topic almost from the beginning of her visions. How she treated it evolved as she matured. The facts are that the Roman Catholic Church, after Vatican II, has changed—Mr. Goldstein even notes some of these changes. If EGW was writing now...[she] would use a symbol of the anti-christ that has contemporary meaning—perhaps institutionalized racism or one of the social or economic institutions of the modern state that corrupt the human spirit. This today would represent the spirit of the anti-christ. EGW matured during her long career. The church she helped found would do well to do the same thing.

James Hilton
Loma Linda, CA

In regard to Clifford Goldstein, Frank Knittel, Paul Landa, and James Walters' comments on *The Great Controversy* issue in your July/August issue, I believe Goldstein handled the issue best. Knittel, Landa, and Walters apparently have not read Malachi Martin's *The Keys of This Blood*. I believe that Martin very accurately reported the ambitions and goals of Modern Rome. True, the Papacy undertook a big change at Vatican II...[however] Martin spells out the Papacy's end-time goal in detail, and it corresponds accurately to what Ellen White wrote in *The Great Controversy*... Our mission is not to be confrontational in nature. I believe that approach is counterproductive. I agree with Knittel that our first emphasis should be to proclaim and reflect God's love. That should be the center of our message.

Ray Kablanow
Coulterville, CA

Letters to the Editor

Adventist Today
PO Box 1220
Loma Linda, CA
92354-1220

The God Who Sees

by Sheryll Prinz-McMillan

23

The desert was hot, the work was hard, and a life of slavery was not one to be envied. Not only was she considered unimportant in society, but she had probably traveled with Abram and Sarai much farther than she had ever hoped to go. It may have seemed like good luck to her at first: being “acquired” by a rich couple as they came through Egypt (Gen 12:10), and becoming a personal maid to this beautiful woman. It was not only a chance at something new, but they claimed to be following the “true” god, and to be “chosen” for some special purpose. In fact, she had probably helped pitch the tent in various places from the Negeb to Bethel (13:2), watching as the altars were erected and hoping that this god was worth more than these fancy structures.

But she remained simply “the slave-girl” (16:2), as invisible as a child, as meaningless as extra baggage. She had no voice in the community, no rights in the family, no recognition for the gifts she brought with her. Her youth, her race, her gender, and her position were all against her. It was only to the few like herself that she had a name: Hagar.

One day, all that began to change. Hagar received the opportunity of a lifetime—her status would be elevated, she was finally to be valued, she would become the “second” wife, a concubine. Codes written by the Hurrians show that this was normal procedure to protect the family name. If the first wife could not produce, she was allowed to pick a “surrogate” who would then be treated as part of the family. The child would be “adopted” by the “primary” wife, and would be seen as a rightful heir. Sarai, aware of her duties as wife, legally chose a way to fulfill her duty. And that way was Hagar.

Even with this new prestige, Hagar was unrecognized and unnamed. To Sarai she was a means to an end; to Abram, she was a vessel to allow a promise to be fulfilled. Neither spoke her name.

“And Abram went in to Hagar, and she conceived” (16:4). Hagar finally tasted recognition, a place where she was wanted, and it felt good. It felt good to be seen as more

than just an extra person in the community, it felt good to be important, it felt good to have her body work for her instead of against her, but the joy was to be short-lived. Soon, legal rights were again invoked. Hagar was allowed to do only certain things, and stepping out of place gave Sarai the right to be offended.

So Sarai “abused” Hagar (16:6). The patriarch stood by as the matriarch handed out painful abuse. Abram and Sarai, the family, the leaders of the community that stood for the “true” god, became the major source of Hagar’s pain. And that became more than Hagar could bear. Pregnant, and sure she would die out in the desert alone,

Hagar ran. She ran, hoping to get away from the pain, the dashed hopes, the visions of a redemptive religion. And she ran until a voice stopped her.

“Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” (16:8) It was amazing—someone knew her name—her worth, her pain, her history. And the temporal bonds which she had lived with were recognized as well. And then God gave Hagar a promise—the same one God had given to Abram! The blessing of progeny, a special son, a future, and a place in history. The lowest ranking, the least recognized, received the same promise and recognition as the wealthy, powerful man.

More radical things were yet to occur. At a well, Hagar was met with a theophany—an appearing of God—and reclaimed her own power. Hagar *named* God. She did not call on one of God’s names. She did not describe God. She used the naming formula which acknowledges the power and authority of the one naming, and with those words, took her experience in the wilderness, the dryness of her life, the chance to listen and speak with God, and named her own experience. To Yahweh, God of Abram and Sarai, she claimed: “You are El-roi!” El-Roi—the God of seeing. Hagar had been seen, and she had seen God.

She recognized that her experience with God was important, and that the powerless and unrecognized had something powerful to say to the community—that being underutilized, overlooked or coming out of a family of abuse and pain, can all be turned around with the naming of one’s own experience with God. God indeed “sees.” With eyes opened, Hagar saw the abuse of the law beginning to fade. The importance of community, structure, and truth were matched by experience. Hagar was able to return to Sarai, and bore Abram a son, bringing life, continuity, and a living experience with God. 🙏

The lowest ranking, least recognized, received the same promise and recognition as the wealthy, powerful man.

Sheryll Prinz-McMillan is the senior pastor of the Corona, California, Church.

As We Go To Press

Licensing Women Pastors

Adventist Today recently learned of the following exchange between a Maryland church member and Lynn Mallery, president of the Southeastern California Conference.

John D. Butler is chair of the Gender Justice Commission of the Sligo Church in Takoma Park, Maryland. Apparently he was concerned that under the new leadership of Lynn Mallery, Southeastern might be flagging in its pursuit of gender equality. He wrote to Mallery on December 20, 1992, "Please explain the delay in the reissuance of the regular ministerial license to [Southeastern's] women pastors who have had this license for three years." Note that women pastors are normally granted "commissioned minister" credentials, but Southeastern had for at least three years been giving its female pastors the same credential that it gives to unordained male pastors.

Mallery replied on January 13, 1993, "The North American Division has refused to print these as ministerial licenses in the *Yearbook*, however that is what is voted [by the Southeastern executive committee] and those are the licenses given to our women pastors....To the best of my knowledge I do not know of any delay here in Southeastern California Conference."

Laymen in Trouble—Too Many Liberties

A shake-up appears to threaten the survival of Laymen for Religious Liberty, the group which sponsored the controversial media campaign in Florida and sought to sell to the public an illustrated version of *The Great Controversy*. This summer, Laymen for Religious Liberty director David Mould wrote to donors, confessing to an unspecified "moral fall" and advising them that his organization would be restructured as a result.

Pilgrim's Rest, an independent publication based in Tennessee, reported in August that all but two of Laymen for Religious Liberty's staff had resigned. The 16-page exposé included, as evidence, photocopies of letters and canceled checks, allegedly provided by those who had resigned.

According to *Pilgrim's Rest*, former employees say they resigned because of Mould's alleged sexual improprieties and fiscal irresponsibility. The report further claims that Laymen for Religious Liberty is nearly \$1 million in debt, with no hope of recovery unless Mould is willing to go through a major belt-tightening and put on indefinite

hold all plans for a nation wide campaign.

One of Mould's employees, before resigning, found that the public had ordered only 77 copies of the illustrated version of *The Great Controversy* as a result of the campaign, according to *Pilgrim's Rest*. This information was provided to the employee by West Telemarketing, the answering service used for the Orlando media campaign. The 800 number earlier given for ordering the book is no longer in service.

David Mould could not be reached for comment.

California Activists Plan for Black Conference

African-American clergy and lay people from nine churches in Southeastern California Conference met in July and voted (183-26) to pursue organizing a black or "regional" conference in the Pacific Union Conference territory. The session was attended by the churches' pastoral staffs, church board members and congregational delegates at large. Church business meeting discussions are planned for this fall in preparation for a formal request to the Pacific Union Conference executive committee for formation of a new conference.

The move toward a black conference is not seen by its supporters as a step backward in terms of race relations. "We are already separated as evidenced by the fact that our churches are teaming up in ethnic groups," stated Cleveland Hobdy, pastor of the Mt. Rubidoux, California, congregation. "We are merely making the separation beneficial for the evangelizing of African-Americans and other minorities." Hobdy cited differences over priorities in Southeastern:

Our conference has established 'Baby Boomer' retention, gender inclusion, and pastoral evaluations as the three top priorities, while African-Americans in the conference desire to address evangelism, strategic planning and youth ministry. Our burning desire is to finish the work.

Although the envisioned conference would initially be based in Southeastern California Conference, it would encompass the Pacific Union Conference and be open to any African-American or other ethnic Adventist congregations that desire to join.

"The regional conference concept was authorized by the General Conference in 1944 as a viable vehicle for evangelizing African-Americans in North America," states Hobdy.

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