

# ADVENTIST TODAY

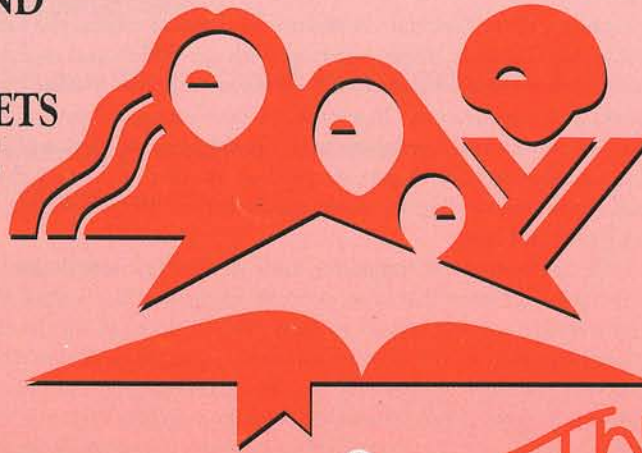
VOL. 3, NO. 5

SEPTEMBER • OCTOBER 1995

TITHE SLUMP ENDANGERS  
RETIREMENT FUND

WHEN THE PEW GETS  
UNCOMFORTABLE

CAMBRIDGE  
CREATION  
CONFERENCE



*Thwarted*

## 1995—Year of the <sup>^</sup>Adventist WOMAN

### Equality Is Present Truth

**T**he world church's decisive No on women's ordination this summer is a wake-up call for the North American Division. The NAD must sing its own tune in its own cultural setting. The alternative is for new converts in the developing world (God bless them!) to mandate theology and practice for mature, 6th-generation Adventism in the locale where it has been growing up for 150 years. This would be profoundly wrong for reasons of conscience, Adventist history and biblical faith.

EDITORIAL CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

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# “The Old Order Changeth...”

*The older changeth, yielding to new,  
And God fulfills himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.*

**S**o wrote the poet laureate of England, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, in the closing epic of his idylls of the King, “The Passing of Arthur,” more than a century ago. It is far too soon to tell the ultimate effect of Utrecht 95 on the Seventh-day Adventist Church. One thing is certain, however: Tennyson’s comment on the passing of King Arthur aptly expresses what took place at Utrecht. Another fact is equally certain: None of us can ever “go home” again to the Seventh-day Adventist Church we have always known. “The old order changeth . . .”

The restructuring of the General Conference Committee reflects the sobering fact that nine tenths of the church membership is outside North America. With our Bibles open to the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 more than a century ago, we audaciously set out to “carry the everlasting gospel to all the world in this generation.” In a sense, we have succeeded beyond the wildest dreams of our spiritual forefathers, and “Global Mission” aspires to complete the task that they so nobly began, by the dawn of the 21st century. But those doughty souls never believed that we would still be here in 1995! Sobering thought. Yet we are still here.

Prior to 1901 a three-member committee made all the important decisions for the church everywhere. But by that time, everyone recognized that a small group of North Americans were not wise enough to make realistic decisions for the church outside of North America. At the 1901 session they responded to that problem by taking several very important actions. The first was to decentralize authority by giving church leaders in other parts of the world the right to decide what was best for them, in their respective parts of the world field. Another important decision was to bring various departments of church activity together under the wing of the General Conference Committee in order to coordinate their operations more efficiently. Still another was to increase the number of the committee to 25, in order to broaden the base of its decisions.

Yes, our dream has come true. With our church membership now approaching nine million, it is appropriate to commend the church leaders of yesteryear for making some very wise decisions. “Nothing succeeds like success.” We trust that the decisions at Utrecht will be equally successful.

But for us in North America, there are troubling overtones to Utrecht. The present hierarchical structure of the church means, very simply but realistically, that top-level decisions will now be made, even as at Utrecht, by people who vocally expressed their opposition to a motion designed to help the church in North America fulfill its mission more effectively. With “glee and vengeance” as one General Conference person and others expressed it, some of them toasted their triumph over North America. And they are now going to control the General Conference Committee, which, according to the “linkage” voted at the Spring meeting of the General Conference, is now to control the church of North America?

But wait a bit longer. It’s a sobering thought for us to ponder—and experience—over the quinquennium. Yes, “the old order changeth,” and we can’t go home again. Susan Sickler aptly expressed our dilemma in North America in *Adventist Today’s* special General Conference issue last month: “There is an incredible amount of anger and resentment towards us in North America. The truth is that NAD doesn’t have enough votes to elect anyone to be a dog catcher.” Then Sickler continued: “It is very hard to spend several days being the focus of anger of people who want your money, but not your presence.”

Let us not soon forget, however, that we are the ones who wanted a world church. Now we have a world church. And certainly it is right and proper that delegates representing the world church should have a voice in proportion to their number. Also we indoctrinated them with the proof text method of Bible study with which they defended their vote. Perhaps our most appropriate response should have been: *Mea culpa! Mea multa culpa!* In this issue several articles address this dilemma. See page 3. We commend them to your thoughtful perusal.

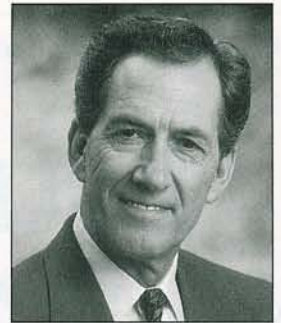
Raymond Cottrell

**N**one of us can ever “go home” again to the Seventh-day Adventist Church we have always known.

Cover: 1995 was designated the “Year of the Adventist Woman” by “Leaders” of the Adventist Church. The logo for this special year came from the Office of Women’s Ministries at the the General Conference, directed by Rose Otis.

FEATURES

- 1 **Equality Is Present Truth** *the editors*
- 5 **Tithe Slump Endangers Retirement Fund** *Albert Dittes*
- 9 **Barely Hanging On** *Spencer Downing*
- 12 **To Spencer Downing: Let Go!** *Dan Matthews*
- 13 **When the Pew Gets Uncomfortable** *Richard Winn*
- 15 **Chance or Dance? A Symposium on Science and Religion** *Edwin Karlow*
- 18 **Give and Take at the Cambridge Creation Conference: A Response to Edwin Karlow** *L. James Gibson*
- 19 **How to Reach a City** *Albert Dittes*



Dan Matthews 12



Richard Winn 13



Edwin Karlow 14



L. James Gibson 17

LETTERS

- 20 **Servant-leaders**
- 20 **Staying in the Church and Leaving It**
- 20 **"New Noel" TV Program**
- 21 **Dennis-GC Lawsuits**
- 21 **Russian Evangelism**

IN THE NEWS

- 24 **Sligo Church Plans Affirmation Service**
- 24 **Dennis Versus General Conference**
- 24 **Where Is the Church on Religious Liberty?** *Jim Walters*

REFLECTIONS

- 23 **A Good Mystery** *Bonnie L. Casey*

**ADVENTIST TODAY**

Vol. 3, No. 5  
September-October 1995

**EDITOR:** Raymond Cottrell  
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*Adventist Today* reports on contemporary issues of importance to Adventist church members. Following basic principles of ethics and canons of journalism, this publication strives for fairness, candor, and good taste.

**Unsolicited submissions** are encouraged. Payment is competitive. Send a self-addressed stamped envelope for writers' guidelines.

**Annual subscriptions:**  
\$18 for individuals  
\$12 for students  
\$29 for institutions  
(Payment by check or credit card. Add \$10 for addresses outside North America.)

Telephone (800) 236-3641  
Fax (909) 884-3391

*Adventist Today* (USPS Pending) is published bimonthly by Adventist Today Foundation, 1845 S. Business Center Dr., Suite 140, San Bernardino, CA 92408. Application to mail at second-class postage rates is pending at San Bernardino, CA. **POSTMASTER:** send address changes to *Adventist Today*, P.O. Box 1220, Loma Linda, CA 92354-1220.

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# Equality is Present Truth

## Conscience

A hallmark of Adventism is its high regard for individual conscience—that gut sense of right and wrong, the foundation for all religion and morality. Conscience is a deep, multiple awareness of one's own being forged from an awareness of authentic possibility and actual inadequacy.

For the North American church to use, for example, financial clout to coerce the African church to ordain women ministers would be wrong. Such forced equality would be alien to millennia-old, deeply-held African convictions that are only now beginning to yield.

It is even more wrong for the majority of Adventists, now found in Africa and Latin America, to prohibit Adventists in the homeland from following conscience in ordaining women pastors. As the telecommunications revolution molds a global village, both world and church are undeniably moving toward recognition of individual equality—including gender equality.

The denomination's current blanket ban on ordaining women ministers throughout Adventism is wrong. Tens of thousands of church members, scores of congregations and a number of conferences in North America, Western Europe, Australia and beyond are convinced that a continuation of discrimination against women as ordained pastors is sinful. It is as wrong as apartheid in South Africa in the early 90's was wrong—or racism in the American south in the early 60's.

Divergent views on certain transitional social practices, conscientiously held, must be tolerated—even if not always respected. And one side of the divide must not coerce the other side. Therefore the denomination's total ban on allowing women into the ranks of its 12,000 fully authorized ministerial leaders must not continue, for it is against mature Adventist conscience.

## Adventist History

Historically Adventist pioneers refused to organize their "movement." The organized churches had kicked them out because the Advent believers followed religious insights beyond their churches' current ideas. So for 20 years these psychologically savvy pioneers resisted organization because they knew human nature: any human organization, even their own, could sacrifice individual conviction at the institutional altar.

Organized religion's oppression made an indelible mark on our church of new ideas. Significantly, James White's first periodical was called "Present Truth," a title suggesting that God reveals new concepts of truth not known previously. Doctrine and practice are not defined in timeless words—even in sacred Scripture, according to Adventist pioneers. As the Spirit leads, new ways of seeing ancient texts are brought to light—and the faithful believer must

**G**ender discrimination is now considered immoral by the great majority of Christians...

be free to follow and not be bound to the letter of old truths by mere human organizations. Because of this historic Adventist insight, the Scriptural literalism (Paul's "I let no woman teach or have authority over men") that held the day at Utrecht 95 is signally anti-Adventist.

Alongside present truth is the notion of "progressive revelation"—God progressively revealing himself. God is not dead. God is alive and working in church and society. God is progressively revealed in Adventism, as Ellen White contended. And more insights will be revealed throughout eternity. The open spirit of Adventism was demonstrated in the way the early Adventists became convinced of new truths such as the Sabbath, and we need that same spirit today.

This is the core of historic Adventism. It was this sort of spirit that early Adventists saw inspiring the prophets—and it was this spirit they saw personified in Ellen White, hence the phrase "the Spirit of Prophecy."

## Biblical Faith

Biblical Christianity is not a return to just the way life was lived in ancient times. If it were we would all burn candles at night and eschew automobiles—as do today's Amish, who cling to the letter of a bygone era. Biblical faith prizes the spirit of the prophets and apostles over the letter of their writings. Such a notion is not new, dating back to at least the apostle Paul, who said that "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Cor 3:6).

There is something more important than how biblical principles were applied in the original years of the church: what those principles are and how Spirit-led believers should apply them today. The issue is not static truth, but the vector of truth. Yes, women were discriminated against in the millennia-old patriarchal era of earlier times—an era that stretches even to the current century. Paul's notion that in Christ there is "neither male nor female" was long in germination, but it was always there pointing the way. Similarly, the notion that there is "neither slave nor free" came to fruition only in the previous century.

Today slavery is anathema to biblical faith throughout the world, and gender discrimination is now considered immoral by the great majority of Christians—certainly by most of those living in Western countries. Slavery explicitly concerned millions of persons and their personal freedom; gender discrimination implicitly involves billions of persons and their theological status.

The Adventist church's ban on ordaining women, a blatant form of gender discrimination, is wrong because it violates conscience, it is contrary to the genius of historic Adventism and it is counter to biblical faith.

The ban cannot stand.

—The editors

# Tithe Slump Endangers Retirement Fund

**D**ata obtained by *Adventist Today* suggest that unless the North American Division of the Adventist Church takes drastic measures, retirement funds supporting conference workers in the US will not be enough to cover all the costs of supporting retirees in the next 15 years. Complete health of the retirement fund requires that it now total about half a billion dollars, four times the amount in hand.

"There is no immediate crisis. Yet, trends are developing that give cause for concern," said D. R. Pierson, administrator of the Seventh-day Adventist Retirement Plans, at the 1994 year-end meeting of the North American Division, in commenting about the overall condition of the retirement fund for workers in all North American conferences except the Canadian Union.

Pierson reported a \$147,729,519 balance for the fund, 83.11 percent of what should be on hand to cover three years of retirement checks for the 11,854 retirees currently receiving benefits at the end of 1993. Managers and consultants agree that the fund should have a full three-year reserve, and its \$30 million deficit is a problem.

The church currently sends out nearly 12,000 monthly benefit checks.

## BOOMERS TO SWELL RANKS OF RETIREES

Pierson's report shows a fairly rapid increase from 1982 to 1987 in persons receiving benefits, but the



Albert Dittes is a print and broadcast journalist from Tennessee.

by Albert Dittes

**C**omplete health of the retirement fund requires that it now total about half a billion dollars, four times the amount in hand.

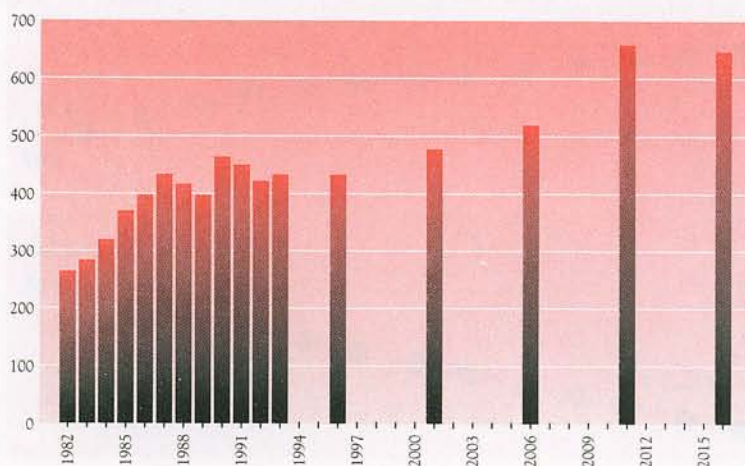
increases through 1993 were not as rapid. However, 855 people joined the retirement plan in 1993, while 386 dropped out. There are many more additions to the plan than deletions. The number of conference workers retiring will gradually increase during the next 12-15 years, but the year 2010 will see a major increase when the baby boomers start to retire (Figure 1). Pierson said, "Unless we prepare for this well in advance, it could swamp our small resources and require drastic measures. We must avoid this potential problem."

In fact, an actuarial study, completed just days before the committee met, revealed the retirement fund to be seriously underfunded, according to the November 7, 1994, newsletter of General Conference President Robert Folkenberg.

## SOURCES OF FUND SHRINK

Three sources have historically maintained the retirement fund. One is tithe. Soon, 10 percent of all tithe given to each local and union conference will go to the retirement fund. Data suggest, however, that

Figure 1: Past annual net persons added to retirement fund plus added persons estimated for the future, in 5-year spans.



more members are giving less tithe per member. Over a recent five-year period, tithe per capita rose only 5.88 percent while disposable personal income rose 18.59 percent, according to F. Donald Yost, General Conference director of Archives and Statistics.

In 1993, tithes increased 1.7 percent over 1992—much below the Consumer Price Index, or cost increase, of 3 percent. While North American Division membership grew by nearly 300,000, nearly

doubling, from 1975 to 1993, tithe did not increase proportionately. Either not all the new members pay tithe or some of the old timers have decreased their giving.

It may be unwise to expect future tithe to maintain or shore up the fund. Surveys conducted in the Columbia Union show that tithing through traditional channels has not caught on among the younger generation. “Newer members are not giving in the same patterns as the older,” says Ohio Conference President Edward Motschiedler. “The baby busters support the tithe fund even less than the baby boomers.”

Motschiedler and others have reported that the “baby busters” seem more interested in giving to special projects, often local ones, than to general support of the national or international church organization. General Conference statistics bear this out, as shown on Figure 2.

Data from the 1991 Valuegenesis study also suggest lessening enthusiasm for giving to the church. More than 15,000 youth in SDA schools were asked, “Do you faithfully pay tithe?” The responses were:

Never	11%
Seldom	16%
Sometimes	20%
Most times	25%
Always	28%

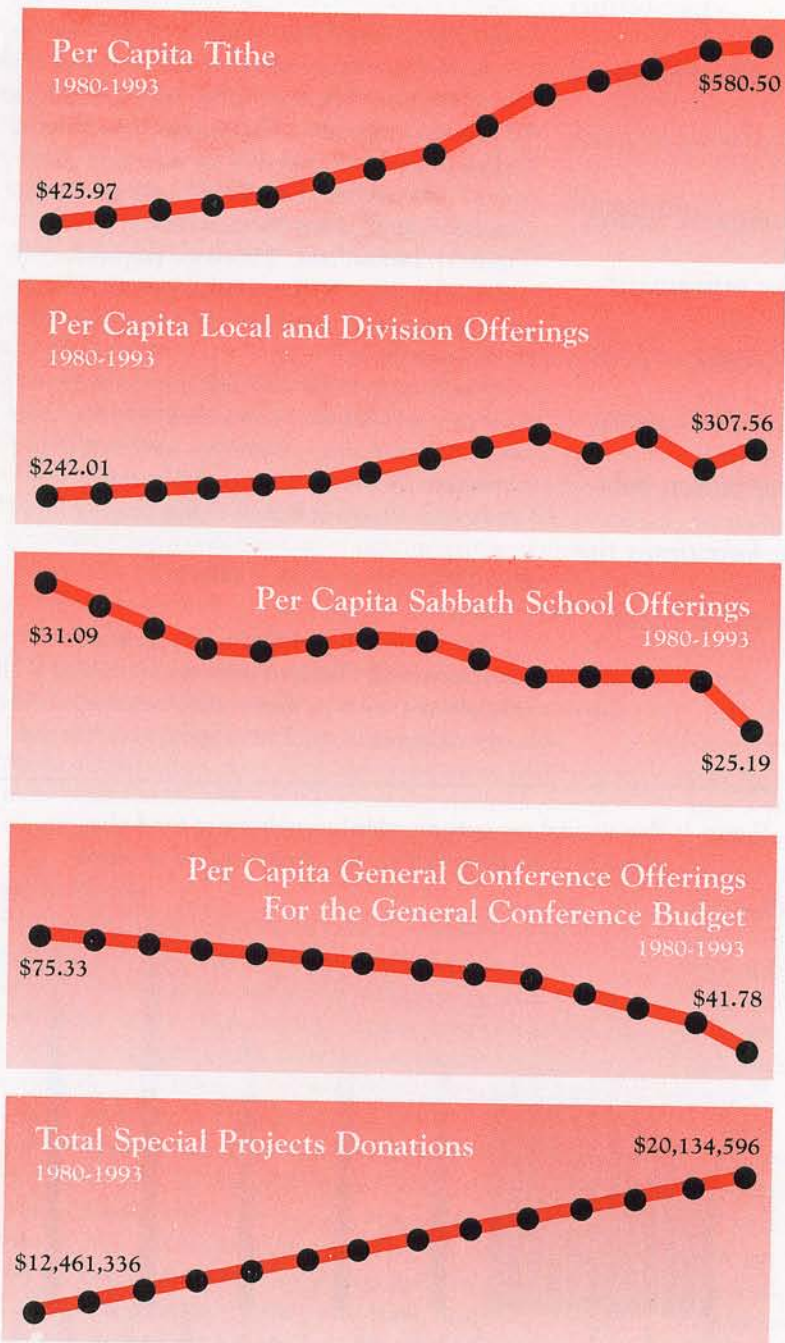
When asked how often they gave other offerings, these youth responded:

Never	15%
Seldom	27%
Sometimes	29%
Most times	18%
Always	11%

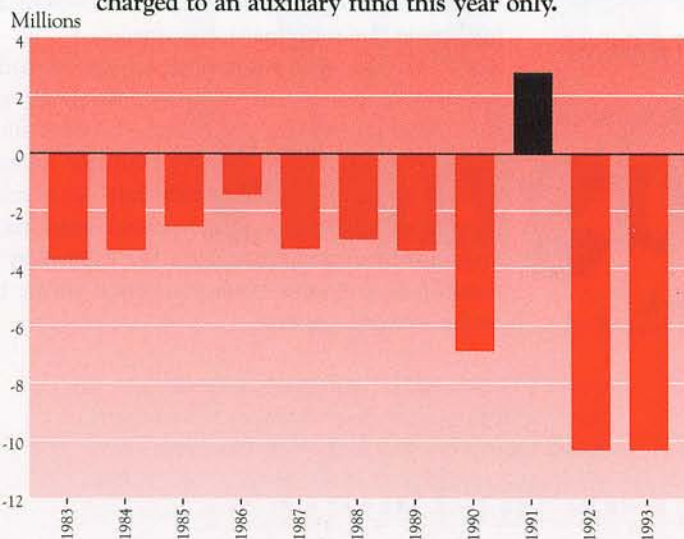
These figures were provided by V. Bailey Gillespie, PhD, executive director of the John Hancock Center for Youth Ministry at La Sierra University. Gillespie comments: “To what extent have we transmitted the value of always putting God first, of taking out the tithe before spending on anything else? Not very well it would seem.”

Another source of money for the retirement fund has been contributions from Adventist institutions. Adventist colleges, academies, publishing houses, etc., donate a certain percentage to the fund for each employee. But downsizing and staff cutbacks have lowered contributions to the retirement fund from this source. The North American Division work force hit a high point in 1976, with 14,256 workers; but in 1993 the force had shrunk to 9,374, lowest since 1988.

Figure 2: Giving patterns of North Americans 1980 - 1993.



**Figure 3: Net gain or loss to retirement fund before investment income. Two unusual events caused a net gain for 1991—A special contribution of over \$6 million was made to fund Loma Linda Foods employees prior to separate corporation, and about \$5 million in health care and funeral costs were charged to an auxiliary fund this year only.**



A third source, dividends from investments of the fund balance, have so far picked up the slack when tithes and institutional contributions have not covered costs. However, investment returns are diminishing, and are expected to diminish further, at the same time the fund is depending more and more on them. Ideally, the contributions from tithes and from employers should cover the benefits, and investment income should help to build the fund to a stronger position. Figure 3 shows the net gains and losses of the plan before investment income during 1983-1993.

*Adventist Today* asked Donald E. Adkins, president of Business Actuaries, Inc. (Nashville, Tennessee) to study Pierson's report. Adkins cautioned that heavy reliance on investment results to replace some part of the funding "leads to disappointment." Adkins predicted some lean years and noted that a large number of plans experienced negative results for the 1994 plan year.

In 1983, total contributions to the retirement fund (from both tithe and institutions) fell \$3,827,853 short of meeting its obligations, with investment income picking up the slack. The shortfall was \$6,891,612 in 1990 and increased to \$10,219,850 in 1992. The 1993 deficit was slightly less—\$10,192,871 (Figure 4).

#### WHAT CAN BE DONE

Keeping the fund from soon draining away, in the face of lower investment returns, will require larger

contributions, reducing expenditures, or both. Adkins suggested the church could consider moving the normal retirement age from the present 62 to the Social Security retirement age—65, 66, 67, for future participants only.

Another move might be to require direct contributions from denominational workers. Conference workers presently pay nothing out of their paychecks into the retirement fund, under the North American Division "defined benefit plan."

Adventist Health System employees do contribute to their retirement accounts through a "defined contribution plan." Their employing organization matches what they pay. They draw their benefits from a separate plan.

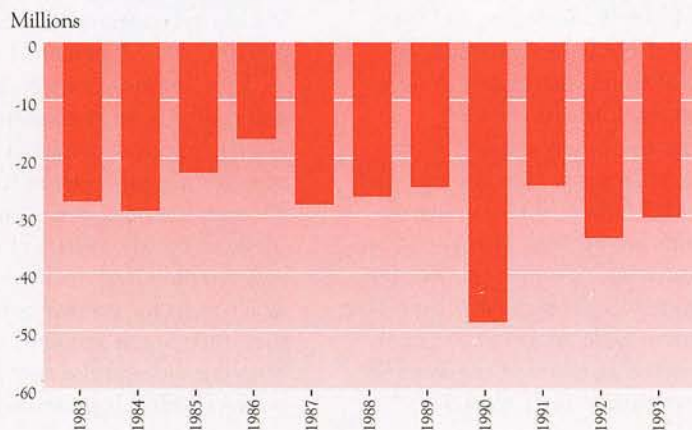
Another obvious way to lessen demands on the retirement fund would be to cut benefits. In fact, Folkenberg, in his newsletter, said the division committee voted to "compute contributions to the retirement fund as a percentage of payroll rather than as a percentage of tithe income, increase the contribution to the fund by all organizations and institutions and to review the benefits."

The real need of the fund, however, is for more tithers. Statistics show tithing has fallen off among North American Adventists during the past 15 years. Perhaps the denomination should do a major study to find out why and what can be done to inspire church members to financially support conference work.

#### CANADIAN FUND ON SCHEDULE

By a Canadian law enacted two years ago, Canadian Union retirees must be paid out of a fund administered by their own union. They cannot be paid out of money coming from the United States.

**Figure 4: Deficits from goal of having three years' reserve in NAD retirement plan.**



So the Canadian Union itself pays 400 retirees monthly, with 1,000 church workers eligible to receive their benefits someday, according to Marilyn Pazitka, director of Canadian Retirement Plans. Like the Adventist Health System, the Canadian Union has a "defined contribution plan" with workers and conferences jointly contributing to the retirement account of each employee.

"We are two years on schedule into a program to actuarially fund our plan over a 15-year period," Pazitka said. The Canadian Union has set a goal of \$49 million to have enough money on hand to cover lifetime costs of all present and future retirees at the end of 15 years.

"The government has not yet approved our plan, but actuaries tell us they usually give 15 years to make it fully funded," says Brian Christenson, under-treasurer of the Canadian Union. "That is the maximum they will allow."

**"Obviously we cannot move rapidly toward full actuarial funding without a major disruption to the ongoing work of the Church."**

## HALF A BILLION DOLLARS

If fully funding the Canadian plan for 1,000 retirees costs \$49 million, doing the same for the current 11,854 North American Division retirees would cost over half a billion dollars—about \$581 million. That figure is four times the current \$147 million in the retirement account.

"Obviously we cannot move rapidly toward full actuarial funding without a major disruption to the ongoing work of the Church," Pierson said. "It is important, however, that we maintain a large enough reserve to avoid a crisis that would require a major cut in benefits which would injure morale among retirees and employees. We must plan ahead now and make some changes if we are to avoid a crisis later on."

## New North American Division Retirement Plan Likely

**T**he North American Division plans to totally revamp its retirement plan for ministers. Officers of the NAD will likely propose to the next year-end meeting of the divisions, in October, 1995, that the "defined benefit" plan be phased out in favor of a "designated contribution" approach.

The current plan, similar to a corporation's setting aside of a large sum to pay retirees, is grossly underfunded. If nothing is done, it will be in trouble in 10 years, according to Don Pierson at NAD headquarters. A financial report distributed to delegates of the Utrecht General Conference session stated that the current retirement plan is underfunded by \$1.3 billion, if U S actuarial standards are applied. However, the denomination never set up the plan according to such standards, given the traditional expectation of the imminent end of history and the need for funds to initiate such an end.

The new retirement plan is similar to what many colleges operate for their professors. The NAD proposes that its conferences contribute 3 to 3.75 percent of an employee's salary to that person's individual retirement plan—a plan controlled by that individual. An employee will contribute a mandatory 3 percent and may contribute up to 3.75 percent of one's salary in pre-tax dollars, with the denominational employer matching the percentage. (Many academic institutions operate on a basis of 7.5 percent plus 7.5 percent.)

This "defined contribution plan" will probably be implemented for all North American Division ministers who are not fully vested (do not have 35 years' service) in the current "defined benefit plan." These workers will be converted to the new plan, which calls for varying percentages of their retirement accounts coming from the old and the new plans.

NAD officials presented details of

the anticipated retirement plan to NAD officers and union presidents in a meeting in Berrien Springs, Michigan, in late July. The presidents asked whether an additional 3.75 percent of ministerial salaries, if put into the current defined benefit plan, could sustain it. Further study will be given to this question, and therefore, the planned adoption of the new defined contribution plan may be delayed, but it is unlikely it will be scuttled.

—the editors

### Correction

*Adventist Today* regrets our editing error in Susan Sickler's reflections on Utrecht 95. Sickler's real point was:

Although the Roman Catholic and Adventist traditions both have world church structures, only the Catholics possess a theology that supports the hierarchical authority necessary to operate such an organization.



# BARELY

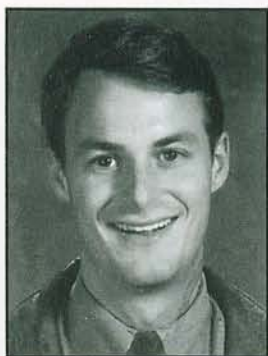
## Hangin' On

by Spencer Downing

*As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel's message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position and join the ranks of the opposition. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they have come to view matters in nearly the same light. . .*

—Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, page 608

**S**he knew it. However it occurred, whether by inspired vision or simple common sense, she saw it coming. Ellen White predicted that a time would come in which the people of God, the remnant, would confront the specter of having their own people led away into the easy life of the world.



**Spencer Downing** is enrolled in a doctoral program in American history at the University of North Carolina. A graduate of Auburn Adventist Academy in western Washington and of the University of Chicago, he has also worked as a science teacher.

### Beyond the Veneer of Works

The Adventist church in North America finds itself mired in an epic crisis. Rushing to the rescue, thoughtful leaders have reworked Adventist theology and doctrine, searching for new avenues of reform. Many preachers, especially younger ones, have attempted to strip down the trappings of Adventism to the essentials of the good news of Christ crucified. Many traditional doctrines—especially the normative practices of the church which have burdened Adventists with feelings of guilt, shame, and self-righteousness—are found to be more tradition than doctrine, with no strong biblical support. In an effort to revitalize the church of the 90's, our best and brightest urge the people to look

beyond the veneer of works to the solid stuff of the gospel and the original teachings of Christ. Still, the pews empty and the revenues shrink.

In Africa, Asia, and Latin America there is great news, but with it come pleas for more help. Moreover, new conversions bring a theology, doctrine, and practice that make many of us squirm just a little. Why so much success in the rest of the world, while on the home front, the birthplace of the Advent message, the people have moved from Laodicean lukewarmness into outright New England chill?

### No Biblical Support

Placing the blame on antiquated administrative bureaucracies, slick conference officials or tottering educational systems might give peace of mind, but it is merely the uneasy peace of the scapegoater. No, it is not so much the structures of the church we should blame, as the theology itself. By this I do not mean the theology studied in the seminary or even the ideas put out in lay journals and pulpits. I refer to the theology in the pews. In the last 15 years or so, Adventists have profoundly changed the way they think about God, and many have moved away from the church.

Much of this has come by way of deeper examination of the Bible. Consider the proposition that as Adventist theology becomes more reasonably biblical, the church suffers. In a sense, it is a problem of thinking too much. Massive problems have come to the church even as its members make rational evaluations of their personal theologies. For a variety of

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**O**ur best and brightest urge the people to look beyond the veneer of works to the solid stuff of the gospel and the original teachings of Christ.

reasons people have begun reading their Bibles and comparing what the Bible says to their own practices. In many cases, they find no biblical support for what they do or don't do. The results are striking.

We are virtually bored with the litany of changes. In a time when vegetarianism grows in the nation as a whole, it is not easy to find an Adventist salad muncher. Jewelry seems almost as common in

our schools and churches as anywhere else. No longer do concerned parents shrink from the prospect of allowing their daughters to learn the mystic secrets of "Christian make-overs." Few of our young people worry about finding themselves unequally yoked. Playing at chess, checkers, billiards, and 10-pin bowling not only fails to stun, but now these amusements have become sanctioned activities enabling the faithful to solidify the ties that bind. Many have examined the evidence and found (to their consterna-

tion, delight, and sometimes destruction) that the prohibition against alcohol has more to do with 19th century America than first-century Palestine.

Few of these examples have much to do with theology (the study of God) in the strictest sense of the word. Perhaps a better word would be doctrine (teaching). Still, these changes in behavior signify an important transformation in the theological stance of many Adventists. In their eyes, we do not worship a petty, vindictive God. There are some things that matter to him, but knocking over pieces of wood with a big ball or putting a ribbon of gold on your finger are not among them. More and more Adventists find solace in a loving, accepting, and forgiving God. They decry the hypocrisy of the past—the written, "If it has a watch on it, it's OK," and the unwritten, "You can wade, but you can't swim, and if I hear of any of you skiing . . ." In response to this hypocrisy they claim, "Perhaps being worldly may not be best, but to be hypocritical is even worse."

Thus, many of us have eliminated the silly, hypocritical, nonbiblical rules from our lives. And for most of us still going to church regularly, we find that some of our friends have eliminated our weekly fellowship from their lives. For some of us, the psychological pressure of feeling lied to was too much to bear. After all, the process of soul-searching did not come without some severe shocks. For others of us, there was no shock as such. Instead, we realized that a loving, nonvindictive God understands that a couple more hours of rest is just what we need. Besides, fellowship with our spouses, family, and the Lord's natural kingdom can also be important in this

hectic world. Whatever the reason, many of us have stopped acting Adventist. In effect, we have stopped being Adventists.

### Creating Meaning Once Again

In response, many of our progressive-minded thinkers grapple with larger theological questions to create meaning in Adventism once again. Some suggest that we look to the celebratory aspects of Christ's passion and the promise of his imminent return. Others delve into the mysterious relationship Christ has with each one of us. Still others hold out the promise of a new, more accepting theology that contains fewer recriminations and guilt feelings. The service becomes democratized, open to wide varieties of praise. There are those who believe that opening the clergy to women will light that revitalizing spark again. All over the country the church seeks to make itself anew.

### What Made Adventism Special

That's nice folks, but it ain't gonna work. At least not the way you hope it will. In the mad scramble for the new panacea, we too often forget those qualities that made Adventism special. It isn't our basic Christian theology. What makes Adventists different is our doctrine.

Those rules that make us feel guilty, ashamed, and self-righteous are what make us feel like the special remnant people. Those rules gave us the obvious difference that set us apart from the rest and pulled us into our tight-knit groups. The rules which kept us off the Little League as children, away from football games as teenagers, and uncomfortable at office cocktail parties as adults also kept us together. At least this scenario used to work.

Our peculiar style of life molded us into our Adventist communities. Those communities brought the benefits of mutual aid and support. They enabled us to raise our children in our image. They provided the patterns for growing up and a sense of belonging as adults. It was not a shared love of Christ (an unsure quantity at best) that cemented us, but a common feeling about smoking and about those who did it.

It used to be that an Adventist could travel across the country and be assured of a good lunch on Sabbath afternoon. At the table, no matter where you were, you could expect to find some com-

**M**any of us have eliminated the silly, hypocritical, nonbiblical rules from our lives.

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mon ground for conversation (that would presumably continue during the walk in the local park). A decade ago, the subject might be the latest institutional shake-up. More recently, it may include a reaffirmation or reminiscence of those cultural tidbits we have in common (like sneaking out of the boys' dorm). It is mandatory to play the Name Game sometime in the day (Do you know....?). Of course these things still exist. But they have meaning to fewer and fewer of us. It is the same with other trappings of Seventh-day Adventist life—church attendance, private school, the Sabbath itself.

### Cultural Shift

The basic problem of Adventism, as I see it, lies in the fundamental shift in Adventism's cultural foundations. The vibrancy that came from the feeling of being a part of a different, special community engendered a vital force to the church. It seems, ironically, that only a return to the strict, fundamentalist structures of former times holds the key to resurrecting that community. I cannot help but think that such a move may be the only way for Adventism to survive. Yet, for some of us, "You cannot go home again."

I am one of those who has "rationalized" his religion and has moved away from the faith of my fathers. I have swum on Saturdays, and I shoot pool with a clear conscience. But I also recognize that attitudes like mine erode the traditional church that shaped much of my personality. Even so, I cannot continue to be a part of that church.

The church faces a huge challenge in keeping younger members like me—and I am not sure that it can. We are unwilling to go back to the past in order to preserve a future in the church. Many of us, like myself (I have not attended church regularly for several months), have almost given up completely.

### Friendly Communities

Yet all might not be irretrievably lost. Perhaps Adventists once tied themselves to "The Church," "true doctrine," or (more likely) a set of rules for living. In any case, the recent past demonstrates that this loyalty no longer holds for many in my generation. Instead the local church community has taken the place of large abstractions for many of my peers. They do not see themselves as part of a broad international fellowship, but members of a local community. They find God's church in the friendly faces and caring personalities of the people they sit with in the pews each week. Talking with these people leads me to hope that the future of Adventism may be found in the strengthening of local church communities. To be frank, I am skeptical as to whether that will happen, but it is the only possibility I now find appealing.

Then again, maybe Ellen White was writing about me.

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**T**he basic problem of Adventism, as I see it, lies in the fundamental shift in Adventism's cultural foundations.



## To Spencer Downing:

# Let Go!



by Dan Matthews

**S**pencer Downing paints a dismal picture of the future of the Adventist church as we know it. And from all appearances he is right.

The church is in a double bind. When we hold onto the old beliefs and traditions we drive the younger generations further from the church. But when we downplay the old ways and jump onto the latest evangelical bandwagon we remove the fundamental reasons for the existence of the denomination. And we destroy the basis for the sectarian passion of its members.

At best, making the Adventist church more a part of the Christian mainstream will make the denomination and its support optional. Those who remain members will have nothing like the extraordinary commitment to the organization that made possible the educational, foreign mission, and hierarchical structures we associate with the church today.

Downing says nothing we can do will "work," and I believe he is right. We cannot go home again. The days of the supremely confident North American Seventh-day Adventist church, moving from victory to victory, surpassing all other denominations in growth and financial support, appear to be gone forever.

But there is an answer, at least for me.



Dan Matthews is host of the weekly television program "Lifestyle Magazine" and executive director of Faith for Today Television, a Seventh-day Adventist ministry headquartered in Newbury Park, California.

I have stopped trying to save the church. I have committed myself instead to being the church. And I feel a lot better now. Saving the church was always too big a job for me. I have decided to leave that to God.

But being the church is just my size. I can do it today. Jesus said it is no more difficult than giving a cup of water, a piece of bread, or a little of my time. It is as easy, and as challenging, as loving people and being loved by them.

*I have stopped trying to save the church. I have committed myself instead to being the church.*

I am repeatedly challenged by Ellen White's assertion that, "If we would ... be kind and courteous and tender-hearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one" (*Testimonies* Vol. 9, p. 189).

I understand this "Truth" to be Jesus himself. He plainly declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Conversions only really happen when a person is involved with Christ and not just with statements of belief or values.

And I am not the only person who has shed the burden. I believe much of what Downing sees as futile effort to save the church is in fact sincere effort to be the church of Jesus. "We are doing this to save the church," is an excuse we sometimes give to people suspicious of change.

Being the church often looks the same as saving the church. It can involve visiting people, preaching sermons, studying the Bible with people, telling others of God's goodness, worshipping, helping with soup kitchens and clothing centers, operating church schools and pathfinder clubs, and hundreds of other things.

But being the church feels different from saving the church. It is liberating. It frees me to really listen to people. It frees me to learn from people on spiritual journeys different from my own. It enables me to happily minister to, fellowship with, and be fed by people who will never be Seventh-day Adventists. Finding common ground for friendship is much more productive and rewarding than advancing or defending dogmatic positions.

Leaving the saving of the church to God enables me to sleep at night and praise God in the morning. It enables me to be honest about myself and the church. It enables me to mourn and even to despair about the things that are not the way they should be. In short, it enables me to be me, and to celebrate that others are different.

And there are places in the world where I can revel in the companionship of others whose burden is not to save an organization but to serve Christ. Many of those people are at Seventh-day Adventist churches. Many are not.

Do I sound like I am hoping such an approach will save the church? Okay, I'm guilty. I didn't say shedding the load was easy. Occasionally I have to slide the old burden off my shoulders again and just live today for God the way he asks me to. But it still feels good every time. And more than feeling good, it is right.

# When the Pew Gets UNCOMFORTABLE

**Y**our 5th-grade teacher is talking with a bit more enthusiasm than usual. In a few moments, she announces, you will have a choice either to attend the baptismal class presented by the guitar-playing youth pastor or stay in the study hall and do arithmetic under the watchful supervision of Ms. Stonewall. You glance around the room, weighing the status consequences of either option. But the memory of your mother's quiet supplications casts the final vote and you begin a week-long process that culminates, dripping wet in the presence of teary-eyed relatives, in a ritual of joining.

In a single act, you have symbolized that you love Jesus and that you accept the complex doctrines and standards (both expressed and implied) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The significance and meaning of these new loyalties are just as muddled and commingled as one would expect for any fifth-grader.

In the years that follow, the consequences of this joining decision are often joyful—but occasionally troubling. You're not always convinced that others who have joined are therefore more balanced, joyful and whole people. On key positions of the church, you sense conflict among adult members and (more troubling) between what you have been told is so and your own experience of life-in-this-world.

Especially during your college and early adult years, the meaning-making system of your childhood is stretched and challenged as never before. The simplistic formulas are inadequate to the complexity of the issues you face. You long for a broader, more encompassing and tolerant perspective, for the freedom to test a fresh position. You feel the dissolution of earlier faith constructs, but you feel no safety in admitting this angst of your soul. Your old, childhood pew has become very uncomfortable.

Churches, we discover, are not known for encouraging change. The vocabulary of the

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by Richard Winn

*Especially during your college and early adult years, the meaning-making system of your childhood is stretched and challenged as never before.*



Richard Winn is a marketing consultant, currently working with Faith for Today. He also presents seminars on values development for children and on adult spirituality. He holds MA and MDiv degrees from Andrews University.

deputies of God is laced with cautionary images like "falling away," "bright lights going out," or "being seduced by the reasoning of the world." Most importantly, you are told in both overt and subtle ways that you are not capable of redefining your position toward the faith structures of childhood. Having been warned not to trust "human reasoning," you feel guilty about distrusting the reasoning of your childhood teachers or of the ancient authorities of the faith community—all of them humans.

However, a bedrock of adult spirituality is that you both can and must take charge of what you are in fact responsible for: your individual spiritual pathway. To be more explicit, I propose that there are six (and with minor variations, only six) alternative courses to follow when the old pew becomes uncomfortable. Those who are not yet self-defined nor self-accountable will choose one of the first three options. These options are for victims, for passive or angry pawns. By definition, then, these choices do not qualify as spiritual positions. Those who have embraced adult spirituality will choose the fourth, fifth, or sixth option. Which course best describes your experience at this point in time?

**1 Go unconscious.** Sit in the pew and go numb. Don't ask the questions that keep pressing into your consciousness. Let a huge gap develop between your intellectual growth and your religious conversations. Settle for sweet music and nice people. Don't disappoint Mom and Dad. It's the safe thing to do for the kids. When in doubt, stay conservative, cautious, inactive and unaware.

**2 Slink out the side door.** Feel like an overwhelmed failure. Admit that you never could live up to all the standards, all the pastor's expectations. You couldn't figure

out all those doctrines; can't afford to pay tithe and send the kids to church school (even though it's probably the right thing to do). Someone's going to find out about your "secret life" sooner or later anyway. So shoulder your load of guilt, shield your downcast eyes behind your stooped shoulders and quietly slip away. Escape from your dark thoughts of guilt and failure in work, drink, or another church.

**3** **Get wounded and quit!** Some major offense will bruise your tender spirit. Some judgmental oaf will say the wrong thing to you, confirming your disdain for this narrow bunch of hypocrites, giving you just the pretext you needed to storm out the side door with hardly a self-righteous glance backward. For years to come, if anyone asks you why you are no longer church-active, you can rehearse the whole bloody scene—and feel so right!

**4** **Go purposefully out the front door.** Without anger or bitterness, and with the grace of someone who is simply taking charge of one's life, make a formal and purposeful exit. Make it clear what you are going to rather than *from*, and follow through. Be certain about the boundaries and expectations; own your response. Be grateful for what the church has contributed to your formation and your values, to your friendships and memories. Don't spend a moment kicking yourself for being who you were at earlier

times in your life. Don't become an ex-Adventist or an anti-Adventist, but maybe a post-Adventist. Become skilled at setting your own spiritual goals and connecting with others on a similar journey. Build a fundamental self-definition around who you are now rather than around a denomination to which you once belonged. Then seize life.

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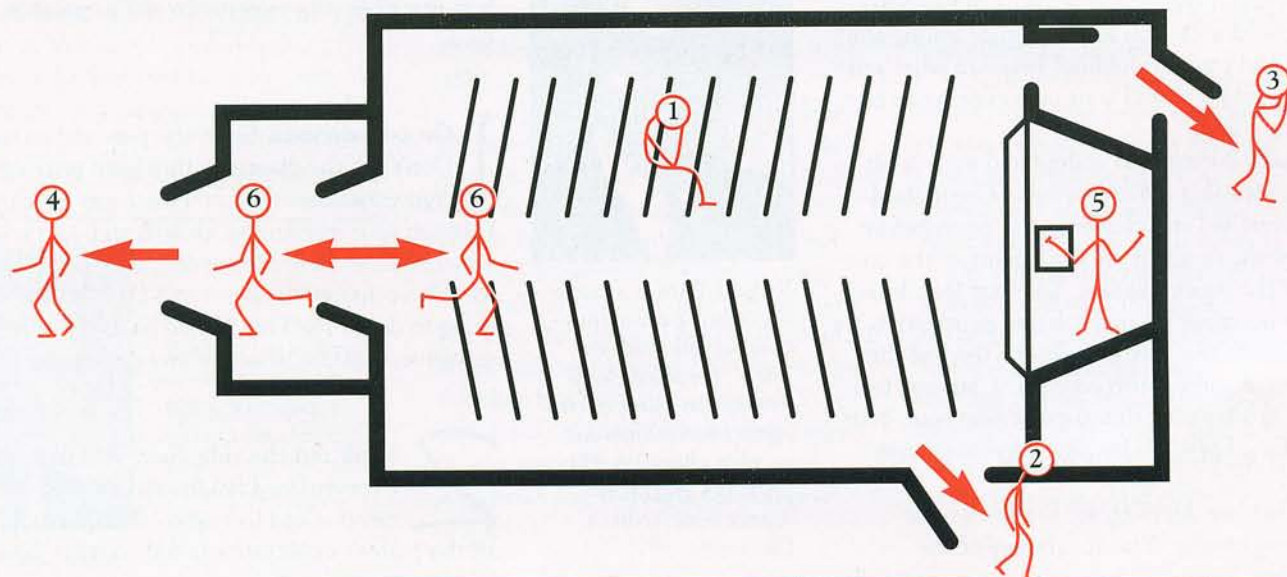
*...You both can  
and must take  
charge of what you  
are in fact respon-  
sible for: your  
individual spiritual  
pathway.*

**5** **Demand/expect more.** Don't just sit there and absorb irrelevant stuff. Take a leadership posture, shake up some committees, name what you want and insist on relevance, honesty, and spirituality. Become a veritable "pain in the narthex" to the leaders until the church meets your needs; take the initiative to get them met. Draw from your heritage where it helps; leave the rest alone.

**6** **Become an *a la carte* member.** Review what the church has contributed to your life, both positive and negative. In view of what you know you need for optimum spiritual growth, decide what your church can and cannot contribute toward that goal. Keep the good; discard the damaging. And shop elsewhere to meet unfulfilled needs.

Once the old, childhood pew no longer fits, only you can decide which of these courses will best serve your needs and your personal goals. Adult spirituality requires that you accept this responsibility.

### Six Things to Do When the Old Pew No Longer Fits



# A Symposium on Science and Religion

## CHANCE or DANCE

Last year, it was my good fortune to attend "Cambridge 94," officially "an international symposium exploring contemporary Christian and secular understandings of science and religion with particular emphasis upon origins—of the universe, of life, and of human creativity." It had been organized by the C. S. Lewis Foundation of Redlands, California.

The institute, held in Cambridge, England, drew an international faculty of scholars from the physical and social sciences, theology, literature, fine arts and performing arts. Over 300 participants came from around the world, most from the United States. All Christians, we represented a diverse range of professional and educational backgrounds as well as varied religious customs and commitments. It was this diversity that had attracted me to the institute.

Each day of plenary sessions formally began with a 30-minute sermonette prepared by clerics of various denominations. Major themes were developed by two plenary speakers, each having an hour and a quarter for presentation and questions from the floor. Afternoons were devoted to topical seminars and workshops under the direction of one of the institute faculty. I attended the seminar on "Detecting Design in Nature."

We kept up this schedule for two weeks. It was an intense, rich, often abstract and heady environment. It was not a debate or confrontation, nor a harangue for or against evolutionism or creationism. There was no implicit "message" or hidden agenda (such as promoting theistic evolution) buried in the program.

The organizers had declared, "Few subjects have proven to be more controversial or divisive than that of the relationship between science and Christian faith. It is our hope to join the principal

by Edwin A. Karlow

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**I**t was an intense, rich, often abstract and heady environment.

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Edwin Karlow is professor of physics and coordinator of the honors program at La Sierra University. He conducts research on acoustics.

issues openly and assertively but with an equally earnest desire to do so in a manner compatible with the spirit of and nature of Christ. If, with your help, we succeed in doing so, we shall all be immeasurably enriched." I think our dialogue did succeed in this. I shall never forget the spiritual high I got from it.

### Issues and Dichotomies

The central question threading through the entire conference was "How shall we talk about the creation, the cosmos?" What metaphors, symbols, and descriptions are appropriate or useful? What balance shall we strike between the pictures suggested by descriptors such as chance and dance, chaos and order, meaninglessness and purpose, despair and hope? The dichotomies these words imply also ran throughout the conference, and could be heard in participants' questions as well as informal conversations over lunch.

I recall some memorable lines from our plenary speakers. Galileo had to battle a kind of "Aristotelian political correctness" that was the vogue of his day, according to Owen Gingerich, senior astronomer at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory. He asserted that Galileo changed the rules of science from "proof positive" to "coherence with an intricate argument."

Nancey Murphy, professor of Christian philosophy at Fuller Theological Seminary, described how the "objective" and "subjective" distinctions we are accustomed to are no longer tenable. "We recognize," she said, "the interactive character of perceptual knowledge. Knowledge is socially and historically located."

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## Making Sense Together

John Polkinghorne's opening address was the model of clarity, simplicity, and grace by which all other presentations were judged. One line from his talk has become my motto: "Answers from science and theology must make sense together." He is not satisfied with consonance, as if science and theology must speak in the same way on issues that confront them both; nor is he happy with the less strenuous position of complementarity, as if these two realms had nothing to say to each other, but were only necessary for a complete picture of reality. Science and theology are both human enterprises and they both are corrigible. Since they both may be practiced by the same person, one should expect to find compatibility among the theories and doctrines asserted by science and theology.

Our 20th century view of things has seen the death of the purely mechanical, clockwork image of the universe. Thus the clouds in the sky formed by atmospheric chaos, for instance, are much more interesting and beautiful than the rigid regularity of a clock. Acknowledging that quantum uncertainty at the atomic level renders the future in principle unpredictable, he said, "what you can know is a reliable guide to what is the case."

## The Argument From Design

The seminar "Detecting Design in Nature" was particularly important to me, because the design motif has been a very appealing way of describing God's involvement with the cosmos. For many believers, seeing design in nature has been equivalent to seeing God in nature, and for them the picture of God as Designer or Architect makes good sense, especially in the context of Romans 1:20: "Ever since God created the world, his invisible qualities, both his eternal power and his divine nature, have been clearly seen; they are perceived in the things that God has made" (TEV).

A casual reading of this familiar text makes it seem as if God's fingerprint is clearly evident everywhere in the natural world. What better attribute than "designer" could be ascribed to God? Thus the complexity and wonder of the world could have come only from a mind as cosmic as God's. So goes a typical homiletic approach.

We must remember, however, that the apostle is trying to establish that the things God has made testify to "his eternal power and his divine nature," not his architectural prowess.

## Can We Detect Design?

Design ought to be detectable even in the absence of any known purpose which wrought the design. With this preamble in mind, I will summarize a proposal for detecting design in nature, as presented by Stephen Meyer, assistant professor of philosophy at Whitworth College in Spokane.

In everyday life we recognize and act on the presence of design, function, order, and complexity in the world. For instance, when an election clerk is asked to randomly order the candidates for an office according to party affiliations, one expects to see from year to year a change in the party of the candidate appearing first on the ballot. It might happen that the Democratic candidates will appear first a couple of times in a row, but if Democratic candidates appear first for 10 years straight it stretches credulity to believe the clerk wasn't trying to bias the elections! Oh, it could happen, even if the clerk were blindfolded and picked names from a bowl, but it's very unlikely.

When confronted with the Rosetta Stone we don't wave it off as random nonsense. Its very complexity and structure lead us to expect it to contain an intelligible message. It's not in the regularity of a pattern that information is conveyed; we discern meaning in a message that departs from rigid repetition.

We recognize the presence of design (a) when an event occurs whose probability of occurring by random chance alone is very small, and (b) when an event is specified in advance of its occurrence.

Another example comes from the game of darts, where the probability of hitting any given part of the dart board is proportional to the area of that portion compared to the total area of the board. It's not difficult to imagine that if you're a skilled dart thrower, you could declare in advance which portion you would hit. But if you could hit a small dot which I draw with a pencil on the board, whose area is vanishingly small compared to the whole board, I would declare you a dart-throwing phenomenon!

Such skill just isn't common. But if you could also hit any dot placed by anyone, for as many times as we ask you to throw, without missing, I'd be very suspicious you had rigged the game.

## Improbability and Irreducible Complexity

We detect design when our sense of fair play, or equal opportunity, or randomness is violated. Walter Bradley, Professor and Chair of the Department of Mechanical Engineering at Texas A&M and co-author of *The Mystery of Life's Origin*, enlarged on this by stating, "Living systems and automobiles do not defy the laws of chemistry and physics, but neither can they be derived from them." In other words, the information necessary for the existence of a living system, or for the design of an automobile, is not to be found in the laws of nature alone. Thus we conclude that if we find any sign of complexity that would have to be described by a very tiny probability of occurring by random chance alone, we see evidence for design.

This line of thinking is not new; the improbability of events has been a staple of designer arguments for centuries. But what is new, I think, is the attempt by Steve Meyer and friends to quantify the approach. His colleague Bill Dembski wants to find an upper bound to the least probability that would qualify for the trademark of design.

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**A**nswers from  
science and theology  
must make  
sense together."

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A related concept is that of “irreducible complexity,” presented by Michael Behe, associate professor of chemistry at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania. A biochemist, Mike argues that design in nature can be inferred from biomolecular structures whose complexity cannot be further reduced without sacrificing function. He asks, “What minimum assemblage of molecules is necessary to carry out the function intended?” And then he seeks to find a pathway for bringing these molecules together without violating their respective properties. His conclusion is that there are many functional biochemical structures that cannot be built by accreting the structure piecemeal or mutating it from another form. The function intended in the structure cannot be realized until all its necessary parts are present together.

Mike’s homey example of irreducible complexity was the common mouse trap. He noted that every item that comprises the trap is necessary to its function. Leave out any one item, and the trap won’t work. You have no motivation to construct the mouse trap incrementally if it must perform some useful function during its intermediate stages, because it can’t do anything at all until all the parts are in place. And a mutant approach using an already functioning system really begs the question. You couldn’t mutate a nonfunctioning system.

### Is It Chance and Dance?

This begins to sound a lot like a “God of the gaps” theory. Whatever we don’t understand, we may explain by saying, “God did it.” The Great Designer provides the missing information, or performs a creative act, or intervenes to save the day. Such talk is unsatisfying to all: the scientist is forever pushing God out of the story as the frontiers of science are pushed outward, and the theologian must find a way to excuse God for calling the creation “good.” But Mike and the others continue to press their point: we infer design, they say, from what we know, not from what we do not know. Because we find so much evidence of irreducible complexity and events that happen in spite of low probability, we ought to feel the need to support the theory of design.

Steve Meyer and friends were not the only ones spouting design talk in Cambridge. Arthur Peacocke maintained that design as a metaphor could mean “the design of a watch” or “the unfolding of potentiality built in.” For many people the notion of design is equated with a blueprint, something rigid and existing eternally unchanging in the mind of God. For them such a metaphor describes a fixed, engineered, and uninteresting existence. Howard Van Till, chair of the department of physics at Calvin College in Michigan, urged us to focus on purposiveness, and outlined what he called a “design perspective,” somewhat like Peacocke’s “unfolding of potentiality.”

But the metaphor of chance alone is also problematic. If the world at bottom is really governed by random chance, the freedom we think we experience as human beings is at best illusory, and at worst such “freedom” is a farce. It is not a long step from a totally naturalistic world view to nihilism, where meaninglessness is the creed and despair the motto. Again Arthur Peacocke reminded us that under the metaphor of chance alone nothing could live long enough to evolve into the complex organisms we have in the world.

Ian Barbour, professor of religion and physics emeritus at Carleton College in Minnesota, asserted that “chance and dance are in God’s design.” Randomness and regularity are complementary; both are part of the design.

This is essentially John Polkinghorne’s position. The universe is endowed by the Creator, John says, with fruitfulness, and is allowed to be fruitful. When new conditions arise, new phenomena are elicited from the same old laws. Thus chance is God’s way of introducing novelty in the world, and law is his way of guiding the outcomes. We do not live in a puppet theater, nor a pointless cosmic soup; but rather in a universe in which there will be ragged edges as well as beautiful patterns. These two—chance and dance—are God’s gifts of love.

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*When new conditions arise, new phenomena are elicited from the same old laws. Thus chance is God’s way of introducing novelty in the world, and law is his way of guiding the outcomes.*

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### Epilogue

What can an Adventist learn from a meeting such as Cambridge 94? First and foremost, how to have a two-week conversation with people who hold a plurality of viewpoints and still be friends with them all. Our zeal to be right, to have the truth, and to preach that truth has often blinded us to the wider struggle for truth that goes on in the mind and heart of every Christian believer.

The diversity of belief among scholars within our own fellowship regarding the creation and subsequent development of the earth and life on it is sufficiently varied that no single opinion predominates. Perhaps this diversity is a sign of intellectual and spiritual health, but publicly we are embarrassed by it, and privately we dog those whose views differ from our own. Not only have we kept to ourselves in the creation conversation, we are loath to let any conversation among ourselves occur at all.

Ellen White’s comment about openness written a century ago is worth pondering today: “Those who sincerely desire truth will not be reluctant to lay open their positions for investigation and criticism, and will not be annoyed if their opinions and ideas are crossed... We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed” (*Review and Herald*, July 26, 1892).

*A Response to Ed Karlow:*

## Give and Take at the Cambridge Creation Conference

by L. James Gibson



**Jim Gibson** is director of the Geoscience Research Institute, located on the campus of Loma Linda University. His principal study interests are distribution and biological changes in vertebrate animals.

**T**he "Cambridge Conference" as it is often referred to, was an important event in attempts of evangelical Christians to come to grips with some of the issues of earth history. I have enjoyed reading the reflections on that event by Ed Karlow, as well as those of several others who have reported their experiences on the Internet.

Truly, there is much interest in the question of origins. Some believe the influence of naturalistic philosophy has pervaded society to the extent that many have lost any sense of purpose or meaning to their lives. The philosophy of naturalism has also permeated the sciences, leaving no room in many minds for the supernatural.

What does the Cambridge Conference have to offer Adventists? We can learn from the way in which others have developed the theme of design in nature. We will be interested in the efforts of Steve Meyer, Paul Nelson, William Dembski and Mike Behe to develop a more systematic approach to questions of design. I am

eager to obtain a copy of their upcoming book on design. The secular mind will not be prepared to consider Christianity seriously unless it is first convinced that God exists. The argument from design may be useful in showing the reasonableness of faith in God's existence.

On the other hand, do Adventists have anything to offer to fellow Christians like those who attended the Cambridge Conference? I believe the answer is yes to this question also. Seventh-day Adventists have a great interest in the relationship of God and the creation. Because biblical creationism is foundational to our understanding of God, we have given a great deal of thought to this topic. We have been given the gift of additional revelation to strengthen our faith concerning creation. These factors should enable us to contribute to the discussion in a meaningful way.

Many Christians are unaware of the deep spiritual significance of the sev-

enth-day Sabbath, symbolizing God's sovereignty in the six days of creation, our accountability to him, and his provision for our restoration. This beautiful theme links the creation in Genesis to the re-creation in Revelation. The scriptural view of God's transcendence is presented in the records of creation, the flood of Noah and the numerous miracles of Old and New Testaments. These examples from scripture demonstrate that God does intervene, thereby strengthening our confidence in the promised Second Advent.

**I**t should be clear that Seventh-day Adventists can gain much from, and contribute much to, discussions such as the Cambridge Conference. When the next such opportunity comes, I hope many more of us can be present. Surely the goal of sharing the good news of hope in Christ deserves the best efforts of every Seventh-day Adventist Christian.



**Gayle Lucille Saxby, 1964 - 1995**

**T**his issue of *Adventist Today* is dedicated to the memory of a creative, fun-loving committed Christian theologian who tragically died in a motorbike accident while vacationing in Greece early this summer. Gayle ably served as an assistant editor of *Adventist Today* until she went to Virginia for doctoral work as a member of the Faculty of Religion, Loma Linda University.

# How to Reach

by Albert Dittes

**A** small group of self-supporting Seventh-day Adventists is impacting Nashville, Tennessee with the gospel, and doing it so effectively they make it look easy.

Just take over a house in a bustling part of town halfway between Vanderbilt University and Music Row, transform it into a restaurant, stock a buffet with vegetarian foods, charge a reasonable price, make religious literature available, follow through with evangelism, be open during the noon hour, and the people come.

Their formula works. People from all walks of life throng into Country Life Vegetarian Buffet between 11:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. So many eat inside that the overflow must go out to front porch and yard picnic tables. Manager Andre Wilson, an Atlantic Union College graduate, estimates his staff serves 250 meals a day.

## Media Attention

And their service has attracted media attention.

"Country Life, located on Division Street, presents diners with a no-frills atmosphere," wrote Susan Chappell in the *Nashville Banner* March, 1988, "but with a hearty and healthy alternative to today's omnipresent salad bars and super bars. . . The atmosphere is homey, with windows brightening up the small converted house."

The restaurant has no waitresses or tablecloths. Meal selection is self-serve on paper plates and bowls with plastic knives, forks and spoons.

"Since 1980, Country Life Vegetarian Buffet has been serving up the nutritious in a nonthreatening, unintimidating and decidedly unsmug manner to all who pass through their doors," writes food critic Kay West in *Nashville Scene*, pointing out that Seventh-day Adventists operate it. "Let me just say that I would imagine the staff at Country Life has managed with absolutely no proselytizing to convert more than a few customers simply on the appeal of their warm, gentle and cheerful countenances. There are religious tracts on every table, as well as small booklets combining nutrition with religion. You are free to take them, read them or move them out of sight."

They maintain this simplicity in a competitive environment, with nearby Italian and Japanese restaurants with valet parking. Yet the crush of customers still comes, sometimes with a crowd showing up close to the 2:30 p.m. closing time. Patrons have included Music Row celebrities: Amy Grant, Alabama, Take Six, Larnell Harris and Pam Tillis.

Country Life offers literature as well as food, about a third of it health and two-thirds religious offered free at each table and on a rack. Of the books, Wilson says *Christ's Object Lessons* is one of the most popular. *Steps to Christ* and excerpts from *Ministry of Healing* go well also. They replenish the literature rack once a week.

## Outpost Centers, Inc.

Country Life Vegetarian Buffet is part of Outpost Centers, Inc., a Dunlap, Tennessee, based organization of Adventist lay-workers affiliated with vegetarian restaurants in other cities such as Boston, Los Angeles, Osaka and Paris.

Harold Lance, president of Outpost Centers, Inc., says these 15-20 restaurants are all free-standing members, not franchises. Each has its own board of directors, and the restaurants are not financially interdependent.

"They are financially and spiritually successful," Lance says. "Some of them emphasize their health food stores and operate small restaurants."

He says the health food stores are significant in England and France, where they seem to be more cost effective. And their most evangelistic restaurant is in Marseilles, France, where the local pastor comes in and mixes with the customers, then follows through with Bible studies.

"We are open to that," Lance says, "but it depends on the personality of the local pastor. We encourage our people to explore evangelism through the restaurant. But the pastor must come and get acquainted with the customers. He cannot just announce meetings."

A vegetarian restaurant in New York City failed. "In Nashville, they serve 250 meals a day with a less than \$2,000 a month rent," Lance says. "In New York, they had a big recession, then the rent and taxes went up."

Lance also says people do this as individuals, but to be part of OCI they must meet four criteria: (1) become part of the corpo-

# a City

rate arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, (2) be a nondairy vegetarian restaurant, (3) have a modest and appropriate atmosphere, and (4) be a not-for-profit corporation.

The idea for Country Life originated in 1980, with the Wilsons and some of their coworkers opening it as a restaurant and health food store. After a few years, they decided to put in a preventive medicine clinic next door with midwifery service. Mrs. Wilson delivers four to six babies a month. "The health food store didn't take off," Wilson says. "We couldn't compete with the supermarkets and their high inventories."

## Seek First His Kingdom

They phased back the food store, concentrated on the restaurant and started emphasizing evangelism. "When we decided to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

### SERVANT-LEADERS

I want to tell you how much I appreciated your recent article "Wanted: Servant-Leaders" (May-June 1995 *Adventist Today*). I was especially impressed by this in view of the current anti-women's ordination controversy. If we truly embraced the servant-leadership and priesthood of believers concepts, we would have no quarrel over whether a woman should be ordained or have authority over a man....

Didn't Jesus, through his example of washing the disciples' feet and asking us to do likewise, leave us a perfect example of servant ministry—an example for men as well as women? Then why are we so concerned that a woman might have authority over a man? Doesn't perfect love cast out fear? Will we continue to allow blind prejudice to keep us from recognizing and welcoming the spiritual gifts of a woman?

The whole problem with the hard stand that some have taken is that there is no allowance for variations in needs and talents. Why should a large university church here in the United States be forced to follow the same administrative policy as a small country church in an undeveloped country? I believe that this confrontation springs from a desire by some leaders, spurred by some members, to control the actions of others.

Also, I wonder if we are correctly interpreting the meaning of "ordination" and "overseer." I hardly think that having one or two women on a board of 12 elders (or one woman pastor on a staff of six) makes the women overseers. It seems incredibly paranoid for anyone to believe that to ordain individual women on the basis of qualification and acceptance is going to open the door for hordes of women to become administrators.

It's interesting to note how many of us faithfully search the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy to find support for our own opinions while failing to see the overall direction of God's will, which is like not seeing the forest for the leaves. Abraham Lincoln once said regarding slavery that the North and South both read the same Bible, yet came up with opposite conclusions. I

recently saw a letter in *Adventist Today* claiming that we as a church went against God's will when we abolished slavery, referring to Leviticus 25:44-46.

The "hard-liners" use 1 Timothy 3:2 to exclude women from ministry, period. But many of us feel that the principle of "full biblical authority" is being carried too far, not taking into account the times in which we live. What, then, do we do with other biblical commands not appropriate to our time?

Do we, for example (as stated in a recent letter to *Adventist Today*), exclude new mothers from worship (doubling the time for those who had girls), following the counsel of Leviticus 12? Do we stone Sabbath breakers to death (Num 15:35), or disobedient sons, as Deuteronomy 21:18-21 demands? Do we prohibit women from praying with uncovered heads on the basis of 1 Corinthians 11:5,13? Or forbid women to ask questions or lead out in Sabbath School rather than violate 1 Corinthians 14:34,35? Or cast out a woman who braids her hair, according to 1 Timothy 2:9? Or forbid members to heat their homes or food on the Sabbath (Ex 35:3)?

Since Ellen White herself stated that "women...should be set apart by prayer and the laying on of hands," it's quite easy to see that the conflict over this issue has more to do with fear of loss of male supremacy than with the rite itself. If these "hard-line" thought leaders are so fearful of female authority, why do they tout Ellen White when it suits their purpose, but of course not on this issue?

It is rather amusing to me that *Adventists Affirm* and *Our Firm Foundation* magazines are calling for the church to turn back the clock, as far as women in ministry is concerned, when the church had far more women in administrative positions in the early part of this century than there are now. My own mother was one of these. I pray that God will remove the shackles and blinders so that we may move forward on biblical principle rather than biblical custom, and that justice will prevail.

Carol Mayes  
Chatsworth, California

### STAYING IN THE CHURCH AND LEAVING IT

One of the many reasons I subscribe to *Adventist Today* (the only Adventist publication to which I subscribe) is its attempt to provide honest opinions to issues facing our church. Too many publications today report misinformation as fact. Spin doctors create neat, pigeon-holed caricatures based on ill-informed prejudices, straw men easily destroyed, rather than allowing honest opposition. You encourage the honest exchange of dialog. I like that.

I relished the irony in John Martin's recent article on missing members. Although my experience in the Adventist pastoral ministry is half that of Martin's, I have found that in general, people who leave our church have left because of encountering the very attitudes expressed in Martin's article. In fact, Martin seems to be voicing the sentiments of the typical, Adventist board meeting philosophy.

Narrowly defining lifestyle habits as a true measure of sainthood or as actual connectedness to God, Martin (and those like-minded) view lifestyle "deviants" as individuals uncommitted to Christ. Lack of training and poor nurturing might be closer to the truth.

Typical, local Adventist church board philosophy sees helping an individual with a task or throwing money at a project as "incredible outpourings of love" or "enabling people to stand in Jesus' strength." True, the good Samaritan did provide these necessities for his victimized, fellow-traveller, but the recipient was unconscious. Most of the people we meet don't have this problem. They need friends, people who will enter into a personal relationship with them, who will take the time to get to know and share life with them. Where true friendship evolves, lives are changed.

Instead, many of these people are confronted with a "strictly business" attitude. Conservative ideas like: "Get all you can for as little as possible;" "Straighten up and fly right;" "Be somebody;" and "What's your problem?" are hardly conducive to fostering a climate where people can feel comfortable and grow. Maybe our "caseloads" are being carried by individuals overburdened with the cares of their own lives, untrained to really

meet the needs of other human beings, who desperately need to learn how to handle and heal human relationships. Maybe the philosophical attitudes of today's local Adventist church boards have more in common with Congress than Christ.

*Alan Williams, pastor  
Lake Charles, Louisiana*

### "NEW NOEL" TV PROGRAM

Virginia-Gene Shankel Rittenhouse was born a very gifted musician. I can well understand that to her trained ears, she found in the "New Noel" television program many imperfections. But please let me tell the other side of the story.

I am a member of the Pioneer Memorial Church, and from the first announcement that we had been chosen to present the Christmas program we realized a tremendous challenge to fulfill that request in the short time given. This was a church program, not an Andrews University production. We were blessed to have the university to help, but our own pastor Skip MacCarty was coordinator....The inspiring part was that every member made this his special project.

Many times we saw small miracles take place in answer to our prayers....To the gifted eye this may have appeared to be "botched badly," but to the members of the Pioneer Memorial Church this was a wonderful time of working together, praying together, and rejoicing in the Lord. We were blessed!

*Ina Mae White  
Berrien Springs, Michigan*

### DENNIS-GC LAWSUITS

*Adventist Today* suppressed highly significant facts in its coverage of David Dennis's lawsuit, facts which were in its possession long before he filed it. Your readers may thus be unable to accurately gauge Elder Dennis's credibility, and reasonably assume that you are unduly protective of it.

On January 9, 1995 (six weeks before the Dennis suit), my attorneys filed suit in Federal Court, Washington, DC, against Eld. Dennis, the General Conference, et al. The suit alleges that GC personnel, including

Eld. Dennis, had secretly provided false and defamatory testimony to the Federal Government for several years which immeasurably harmed my family and myself (the *Los Angeles Times* reported some of these injuries on May 10, 1995...) Thus, it's quite ironic that Rev. Dennis now claims he's defamed.

Nonetheless, his charges of tax evasion and financial corruption by the GC are highly credible—particularly since he swore under penalty of perjury that his allegations are true. In contrast, my suit points out that he refused to swear to the truthfulness of his allegations against me that he made to the Federal Government.

It's difficult to understand why *Adventist Today* has exerted such efforts to avoid reporting the whole story. When the first report of the Dennis suit appeared in the March-April, 1995 issue, I contacted the editors, expressing concern about the facts they'd knowingly suppressed. After some buck passing the editors promised to rectify the "oversight" in the next issue (May-June, 1995), when more in-depth coverage of the Dennis-GC imbroglio was planned.

The editors did feature a two-page description of the Dennis-GC lawsuit. But they again refused to even footnote the fact that Dennis himself...is being sued for defamation, as well as for other tortious conduct....

Regrettably, *Adventist Today* has failed its early promise of accurate, complete and objective...coverage. Perhaps in the future it will feel secure enough to fully cover the whole story, including my lawsuit.

*Richard A. Green  
Loma Linda, California*

### RUSSIAN EVANGELISM

I read with great interest a letter...by Douglas Schultz. I would like to respond to his thoughts.

My life has been impacted in a powerful way by pastor/teacher/evangelist John Carter. During my ministry of producing daily radio and weekly television for the Carter Report and serving as the associate pastor of the Community Adventist Fellowship I know almost everything there is

to know about him. Thank God for Adventist leaders who call sin...SIN. Whose understanding and preaching of the everlasting gospel message has resulted in one of our strongest and best attended Seventh-day Adventist churches in the Conference. For leadership that takes the message to Russia even when the conference doesn't have money for foreign evangelism....

Having been to Russia two times recently on behalf of Elder John Carter, I have personally observed the faithfulness of those Russian believers who know what persecution and sacrifice really mean. What Dr. Schultz calls preaching fear, guilt and social pressure is totally inaccurate. Pastor Carter preaches the truth of the Word of God and compassionately, fervently and powerfully asks people to be "born again." Would to God more of our pastors were personally winning souls to Christ and teaching others to do the same! The comments of Dr. Schultz not only harm the work of evangelism in North America but also degrade the authenticity of the revival that God is bringing by his Spirit in the former Soviet Union!

There are many in the Seventh-day Adventist Church who disapprove of evangelistic preaching. They prefer Satan's synthetic substitute.. religion! I view Dr. Schultz's letter as totally uninformed, incorrect and ignorantly judgmental. All of us are known by our enemies and our friends. I believe Dr. Schultz's letter showed malice aforethought, rather than absence of malice since he has never met or personally spoken to Elder John Carter or me! I far prefer the way John Carter does evangelism than the way others don't do it and then have nothing but criticism for those who are successful....

Well, that's my opinion. I dare you to print it!

*Stephen W. Boalt  
Western Regional Director  
International Bible Society  
Chatsworth, California*

### Letters to the Editor

*Adventist Today*, P.O. Box 1220  
Loma Linda, CA 92354-1220  
Internet: AToday@aol.com

## Where is the Church on Religious Liberty?

CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

Union College—that is deemed to be “pervasively sectarian” and thus prohibited from receiving several hundred thousand dollars it would otherwise get. Several hundred dollars per student are given to other Maryland private colleges on the supposition that the state would have to provide higher education at a higher public expense if the private colleges didn’t exist. The Columbia Union College administration believes it is the victim of religious discrimination.

The University of Virginia case involves a student, Ronald Rosenberger, who in 1990 sought \$6,000 in university funds to publish *Wide Awake*, a publication whose mission was to “challenge Christians to... consider what a personal relationship to Jesus Christ means.” The university was funding numerous school papers, including Jewish and Muslim ones, but denied money for *Wide Awake*, citing university guidelines barring funding of religious groups. Rosenberger sued the university, claiming that his free speech rights had been violated, but he lost in the federal district court and the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Rosenberger’s attorney, a University of Chicago professor who happens to be Roman Catholic, argued his client’s case in terms of the First Amendment: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or pro-

hibiting the free exercise thereof...”

The attorney sees a basic conflict between the establishment clause and free exercise clause. He believes that religious freedom is the Founding Fathers’ central idea; the establishment clause has become an end in itself in current governmental thinking, and the result is not neutrality but rather actual hostility toward religion. Mitchell Tyner, an attorney with the church’s Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department, agrees with this interpretation.

On the other hand, Congressional lobbyist Gary M. Ross, a colleague of Tyner’s at the General Conference through July when he was not reappointed, believes that a victory for the publication *Wide Awake* could encourage the conservative agenda and be an “entering wedge” for acceptance of school prayer and Bible reading. What began as a discussion of “student religious expression” at the University of Virginia has been translated into “religious expression in all public places”—or so the conservatives now frame the religious issue. If the Supreme Court loosens the ban on strict separation between church and state in this case, it could signal the allowance of greater intermingling in years to come. Most immediately, it could boost Newt Gingrich’s promise to America to get passage of a school prayer amendment to the Constitution this year.

For over 100 years Adventists have fought any intermingling of church and state in the United States because of prophetic expectations

of persecution by church-state action and from fear that government control would follow government funds. This apprehension appears to be weakening due to several factors, including the ability of the federal government to control matters such as education regardless of whether funds are accepted.

The Adventist church appears to be inching closer to its fellow conservative Christians on the strict separation issue. Those groups that opposed strict separation in the Virginia case include Pat Robertson’s American Center for Law and Justice, the Christian Legal Society, the Mormon church and the National Association of Evangelicals.

For years the Adventist church has sided with more liberal groups, such as those who agreed with strict separation in the Virginia case: the National Council of Churches, the American Jewish Congress, the Women’s Zionist Organization and the National Coalition for Public Education and Religious Liberty. Some groups lobbying for strict separation are becoming quite extremist and thus leave the Adventist church in a centrist position, according to attorney Mitchell Tyner.

Adventism’s anti-Catholicism is subsiding and its need for educational funds—from anywhere—is increasing. We will see whether the denomination’s advocacy of strict separation proves to have been mere prudence or basic principle. But the church’s failure to declare itself on the University of Virginia case may be indicative.

## How to Reach a City

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

‘owe no man anything’ and to ‘seek first his kingdom and righteousness,’ we noticed a sudden increase in business and contracts,” Wilson says. “Now, half of our clients come from Music Row and the other half are middle class professional people.”

And their customers come back for more, stretching the staff of five people working 12-hour days to prepare and serve lunch. They conduct a hands-on cooking school twice a year, selecting the first 25 paying applicants out of an average of 80 requests. A Daniel-and-Revelation seminar then follows the cooking school.

“When people ask us why we don’t serve supper, I tell them that we reserve the evening hours for our classes,” Wilson says.

“This allows us in turn to explain our various classes and Bible studies while feeling for a particular interest. We start at 6:30 a.m. and go till 7 p.m. and need more volunteer help from people with a conviction to do restaurant evangelism to help with Bible studies and cooking schools. We’ll just wait for the Lord to send them.”

A nearby Adventist church will conduct a cooking school. Country Life has given them some names of interested people. Wilson estimates many people have gone to church through their work there, with several baptisms. One person who helps out is preparing for baptism.

### Tofu Salad

In the meantime, Country Life is attracting customers with cottage-cheese-like Tofu Salad, its most popular salad-bar item. Frutage, a nondairy yogurt-like dessert, is 99

percent fruit and also very popular. They serve no animal products such as milk, eggs, cheese or butter. “So we are totally cholesterol free,” Wilson says. Egg plant casseroles, pecan loaf and sunburgers are among the favorite entrees. A vegetable and fruit salad bar also bustles. Patrons eat a good meal for \$6 or less.

“The Lord has a message for our cities, and this message we are to proclaim in our camp meetings, by other public efforts and also through our publications. In addition to this, hygienic restaurants are to be established in the cities, and by them the message of temperance is to be proclaimed.” writes Ellen White in *Counsels on Health*, page 481. She adds, “Arrangements should be made to hold meetings in connection with our restaurants.”

The Country Life staff seems to be doing exactly that.

# A Good Mystery

If Fred Sleeves, reporter for the tabloid *Sun*, is to be believed, life just lost one of its most enduring mysteries. But before I get to that, perhaps I should explain the greater mystery of why I've been reading the sleaziest ragsheet ever to grace a supermarket checkout line. That part is simple—I blame my eight-year-old son.

The headline on the *Sun* for July 11 announced the "Top Secret Shocker" that the Loch Ness monster had been captured. You know about Nessie, the camera-shy creature said to inhabit the inky depths of one of Scotland's loveliest lochs. Well, there she was, on the cover of the *Sun*, being hoisted out of the loch in a sort of sling attached to a vessel roughly the size of a battleship. And this is where my son comes in. Because in this "unretouched photo," Nessie is obviously a plesiosaur, and what Conor doesn't know about plesiosaurs wouldn't fill a footnote in a dinosaur dictionary.

Conor's affection for the Loch Ness monster springs from two facts about her. First, she is a species of the aforementioned family of plesiosaurs known as elasmosaurus. If you have ever known a child obsessed with prehistoric creatures, I need say no more. Second, and more to the point, he loves her precisely because (Fred Sleeves, take note) she has never been found. At some unconscious level, my son knows the spiritual value of a good mystery.

Science and technology have stripped life of mysteries that awed our ancestors for millennia—mysteries of the cosmos, the seas, the human body. These days, any educated person has at least a basic vocabulary for the workings of the physical world, knowledge so mysterious to ancient savants, it was considered the purview of the gods alone.

On Saturday nights, at home in my living room, I can watch a cable program called "The Operation." It gives viewers of rugged constitution a surgeon's-eye view of an actual operation performed on a living patient. I have observed retinal surgery, a cesarean delivery, a facelift, a vasectomy (my husband left the room for that one). I'm spellbound by this show, but I find my thoughts drifting to Galen, the 2nd-century Greek physician who wrote a text on human physiology (which was definitive for 1,500 years) having never per-

formed a single autopsy, it being taboo. Now, the mysteries Galen pursued all his life have been reduced to Saturday night entertainment, complete with a smiling host.

formed a single autopsy, it being taboo. Now, the mysteries Galen pursued all his life have been reduced to Saturday night entertainment, complete with a smiling host.

Please don't misunderstand. I'm not some neo-Luddite, opposed to all advances in science and technology, although I might argue that car alarms and liposuction are not advances as such. I'm merely saying that any gain involves a concomitant loss. Sometimes that loss is good riddance, sometimes it's not, but knowing the difference is essential to spirituality.

To our ancient ancestors the world was quite literally spirit-filled. Every tree in the forest was home to a dryad. Every lake, river and spring was animated by a naiad. A walk outside was truly a spiritual communion, a meeting of sentient entities. I'm not advocating a return to primitive animism. I'm just asking that we consider whether there isn't a difference between a person who looks at a forest and sees a habitation of spirits, and one who sees merely board feet of timber. Whether we aren't becoming people who could, as C.S. Lewis says, look at Niagara Falls and think only of how many cups of tea it would make.

Job was a person who desperately needed answers. The great conundrum of human life—why is there evil and why is it happening to me?—was more than an intellectual exercise to poor old Job. It had a scabrous immediacy that cried out for facts. But when it came God's turn to speak, he answered Job's riddle with an enigma: "Where were you when I was making the world?" In other words, "Back off, Job. The worst mischief is always done by people who have all the answers."

Getting back to the *Sun*, Fred Sleeves says Nessie's capture is a "shocking government coverup." I'm inclined to agree with him there. A government with the subtlety to cover up the presence of a battleship in Loch Ness would be truly shocking. He also reports that there is a whole family of monsters under the loch, that they are not at all happy about the capture of one of their own, and that they are plotting their revenge. Now let's see. Whom would I root for in that showdown?

The worst mischief is always done by people who have all the answers.



Bonnie L. Casey is a freelance writer and an editor at one of Washington, D.C.'s largest law firms. She is a member of Sligo Church, where she co-teaches a Sabbath School class called "Believers and Doubters."

## Sligo Plans Affirmation Service

In business session August 1, 1995, the Sligo Adventist Church in Takoma Park, Maryland, by a vote of 138 to 21, approved the following resolution:

"That out of passion for the Gospel, obedience to conscience, faithfulness to mission and commitment to the sisterhood of Seventh-day Adventist churches and to the building up of its spiritual and financial resources, the Sligo congregation

"1. Plan, for September 23, 1995, a festival service in which eligible women working in pastoral ministry at Sligo and related institutions undergo the laying on

of hands as a public affirmation of their call to pastoral ministry; and

"2. Ask the Potomac Conference and the Columbia Union Conference committees to offer their blessing and participation—including the granting of credentials for ordained ministry—in connection with this joyful and historical occasion."

In his explanatory remarks to the church family Sabbath morning, August 5, Pastor Rudy Torres said, "After the Utrecht decision, scores of concerned members contacted me. Many were discouraged. Some informed me of their

decisions to leave the church, others of their decisions to quit returning tithe. Many thought that Sligo should make some response to the Utrecht decision as a way of bringing hope to the disheartened."

Subsequently, on August 27, the executive committee of the Potomac Conference met and voted 11 to 7 not to ordain women in the conference at this time. Earlier, the two women pastors at Sligo had said that they would not participate in a ceremony where they are not granted regular ordained ministers' credentials from the conference and union. Both women have already been ordained by their congregation as local elders.

## Dennis Versus General Conference: An Update

On February 22 of this year, David D. Dennis, director of the General Conference Auditing Service for 19 years, filed a complaint with the Circuit Court for Montgomery County, Maryland, alleging unlawful discharge, breach of contract, and defamation. On April 14 the General Conference filed a Motion to Dismiss on the ground that "the church's action in disciplining an ordained minister and elected church leader is protected under the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America."

The court took the matter under advisement, and on July 25 issued a "Memorandum and Order" to dismiss the unlawful discharge "with prejudice as to all defendants," on the basis that under the laws of Maryland, "a complete review of all the facts alleged in the Complaint do not establish a cause of

action for wrongful discharge," and that the General Conference, "the only defendant that could possibly be charged with wrongful discharge," is "permitted to conduct their hiring/firing as they see fit."

The court found the defamation charge lacking in specificity and granted leave to the plaintiff "to file an Amended Complaint within 30 days giving a more

definitive statement of facts."

In a telephone conversation, Dennis told *Adventist Today* that he recognized the fairness of the court's decision, that in consultation with his attorney he would file the required statement of facts, and that he was confident the court would honor his defamation complaint.

## Where Is the Church on Religious Liberty?

by Jim Walters

Both the U.S. Supreme Court and the Religious Liberty department of the General Conference were sharply divided over a case concerning direct government funding of religion. In June the court decided, ruling 5 to 4, that the University of Virginia was constitutionally required to subsidize a conservative Christian publication on the same basis as it funded other student publications. The Adventist church

refused to take sides on this case.

Historically, the Adventist church has stood for a strict separation between church and state—in the United States. Outside the U.S. the wall between church and state is much lower. In fact, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency takes U.S. government funds and uses them in ways outside the country that it wouldn't within the United States, and that usage even stretches the federal rules on separation, says one highly placed source.

Certain religious liberty leaders and administrators in Adventism believe that the current high wall of separation between church and state has made the U.S. government actually hostile to religion. For example, in the State of Maryland there is only one college—Columbia

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22