

**PASTOR FIRED OVER TITHE**

NEWS • ANALYSIS • OPINION

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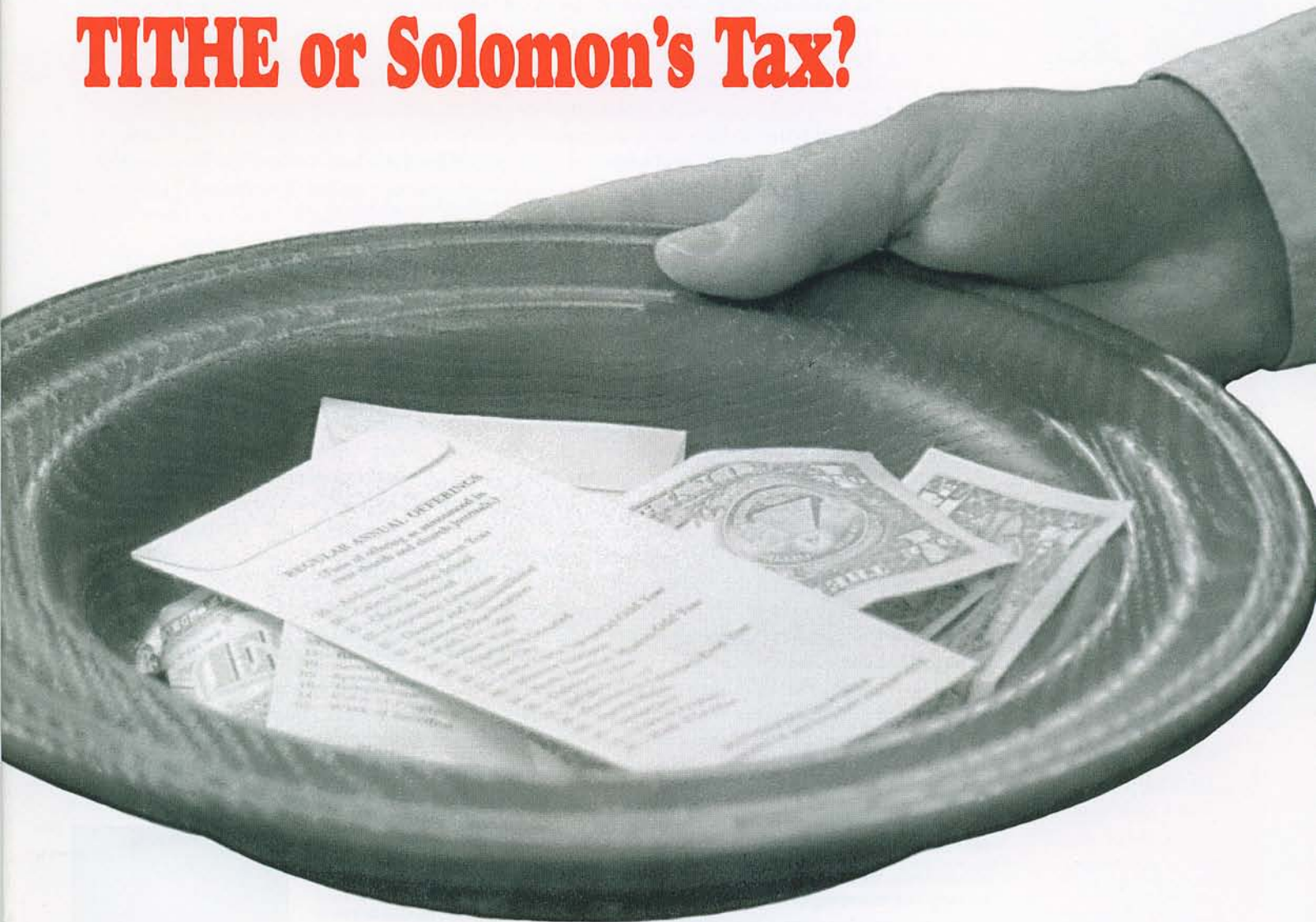
# ADVENTIST TODAY

VOL. 4, NO. 3

MAY • JUNE 1996

**I.R.S. REDEFINES  
ADVENTIST MINISTRY**

**TITHE or Solomon's Tax?**



**CAMPUS HILL CHURCH CHOOSES  
BLACK WOMAN SENIOR PASTOR**



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# The Spiritual Dimensions of Money

**T**he role money plays in the life of a Christian is a good barometer of a person's relationship to God and to the surrounding world of material things. When a Christian begins to make money, God either gains a fortune or loses a man. One important advantage of storing your money in heaven is that only one person's folly can lose it for you. A Christian may be a millionaire as the bank teller counts but bankrupt as the Lord counts (or vice versa). Such is the vertical dimension of money.

A good principle to follow for the horizontal dimension of money is, keep your yearnings within your earnings, or as President Calvin Coolidge expresses it in his autobiography, "Don't attempt to light higher than you can roost. There is no dignity quite so impressive, and no independence quite so important, as living within your means."

The same is true of the church. The religious role of money—its wise and responsible use—likewise has vertical and horizontal dimensions. On one hand the church is responsible to the people who trust their hard-earned money to it, and on the other to God in relation to the mission he entrusted to it.

In this issue John Testerman looks at tithing as "a crucial spiritual discipline, because it strikes at the root of our addiction to money, which holds us in bondage to the world system. It is virtually impossible for a Christian to be effective in the world without dealing with this addiction," he comments.

Steve Daily finds that in Bible times a significant portion of the tithe was assigned for use by the priests in their home communities, and suggests that as a model for the church today. The Bible provides that the tithe be brought into "the storehouse," and each local congregation has "a storehouse." Daily is "not convinced that giving local congregation greater autonomy" in the use of the tithe would have a negative effect on "our Adventist global community or worldwide networking."

Bert Haloviak, an archival expert, recounts a recent episode in Adventist history when Internal Revenue Service regulations forced the church to revise the job description of licensed ministers, by assigning them responsibilities equivalent to those of ordained ministers. The IRS was on the verge of requiring the church to pay millions of dollars in tax arrears! "The interrelationship between money, theology, the IRS, and church administration had converged to create a moral dilemma within the Seventh-day Adventist Church," says Haloviak.

Sixteen years ago Walter Rea called attention to the fact that Ellen White made extensive use of literary sources in writing a number of her books such as *The Desire of Ages*. Under assignment by the Ellen G. White Estate, Fred Veltman of Pacific Union College documented more than twenty writers from whom she borrowed more or less extensively in writing that book. The church now recognizes the reality of these literary relationships.

Soon to be published is a 500-page book by Phyllis Watson of Angwin, California citing extensive literary similarities between the writings of Ellen White and Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism. *Adventist Today* invited several Adventist historians and one Mormon to evaluate these similarities. Their consensus is that conclusive evidence of literary borrowing is lacking, but that the literary similarities are admittedly impressive. (See page 10.)

The acid test of Ellen White's claim that the Holy Spirit guided her in her writing lies in the inherent quality of the product, not the process by which the writing was done. For instance, a candid reading of *The Desire of Ages* leaves the distinct impression that it is inspired. Who is qualified to second-guess the way in which the Spirit may have led to the best way to express what she wrote? Originality is not necessarily a test of inspiration.

With this issue we introduce a revised layout. Because so many of you first turn to our letters section, we are putting it first. Then, because you say our reporting of news is of key importance, we give that next. Our cover feature will typically begin at the centerfold—page 12. We hope you like the new layout.

*Raymond Cottrell, Editor*

**Raymond Cottrell** has served the church as pastor, foreign missionary, Bible teacher, writer, and editor for 66 years, 47 years as a church employee and the balance as an active retiree. His career spans half of the time since the GC was organized in 1863.





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**ADVENTIST TODAY**

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Telephone: (800) 236-3641  
Fax: (909) 884-3391  
Email: [AToday@aol.com](mailto:AToday@aol.com)

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# FIRST CLASS



## **WANTED: TRUE CONSERVATIVES**

I received the Nov/Dec *AT* today and...feel compelled to respond to the editorial. It proclaimed the morality of women's ordination. I believe most NAD officials agree with that, as do I. But then the editor proceeded to hail the insight of early Adventists who feared church organization, suggested that the organization seeks to stymie conscientious Adventists, and closes with the plea that God help the church in Rome and Silver Spring.

One might conclude that church leaders are immoral or at least amoral wimps, that the church is akin to spiritual Babylon, and that Adventists need to return to their historic roots to regain the moral high ground.

My problem with this approach is not just that some points are questionable (e.g., Knight argues in "The Fat Lady and the Kingdom" that the church's organization was a part of the genius of Adventism and key to its misological success), but that the tone of the argument is vitally indistinguishable from the junk mail I frequently receive from the right-wing "Historic Adventist" fringe. They, too, argue that the church is immoral and corrupt and that we need to reclaim the historic high ground, taking back our church from its corrupt leaders.

Regardless of which policy we feel is moral—and obviously proponents of both positions feel theirs is the moral one, we need to keep things in perspective when it comes to dealing with each other or making suggestions about one another's characters. Perhaps it would help to ask, Could I live next to this person in heaven? I think denominational leaders, with their apparent concerns for organizational cohesion, man-

age this perspective better than some of the rest of us.

This is not to downplay the role or correctness of individual moral choices or even congregational choices, but simply to suggest that we should avoid the church leadership-smearing tactics used by "the other side." Perhaps there is a creative tension that can exist between conscientious congregations and denominational leaders, each acting according to the values they esteem highest, but without disparaging the characters of those whose value systems differ. They should treat each other like Knittel treats his motorcycle dealership employees on Sabbaths.

**R.T. Johnston**

*Lake Jackson, Texas*

## **WOMEN'S ORDINATION**

The authors of the main articles in the January-February issue seemed to do a fairly good job of showing that an acceptable interpretation of scripture does not prevent women from preaching, but they did not discuss the appropriateness and the implications of these churches ordaining women as pastors in the context of the General Conference vote against it. The Church is very important to Christ. Perhaps no one would claim that the General Conference rulings are never in error, but surely it is more important...for us to keep in harmony with His Church than with the civil government! It was Jesus Himself that chose the men who had the responsibility shepherding the infant Church. This is not saying that ordaining women can never be pleasing to God, but only that God has given authority to his church and we should give it proper respect even though we disagree!

Women that are not ordained surely have the privilege and duty of nurturing

the flock and preaching inspiring sermons.

**Rocklyn Rouse**

*Pendleton, Oregon*

## **DOWNING IS RIGHT**

I feel [Spencer Downing] is right on target, but just not aware of it. At OSU as a med school faculty member, I was shocked at how minds closed gradually from the med students, the residents, then finally in my colleagues in Columbus in practice. I thought his article was the only one of interest. I think the Holy Spirit is in charge of matters, and most liberals just have not become rooted and grounded in our faith. I like to see the name of Jesus and a reference to EGW now and then to reassure me as to the authenticity of a magazine.

**Bruce Baker**

*(E-mail, aol.)*

## **COLIN COOK AND CHANGE MINISTRY**

Thank you for publishing the article entitled "Former Minister Again Charged with Homosexual Conduct" (January-February, 1996) regarding Colin Cook's alleged sexual abuse of counselees. This is a topic which has not received much publicity in official Adventist publications.

Even though he has had his ministerial license removed because of similar behavior in the past, and has left church employment, many SDAs appear to continue to believe he has "the answer" to homosexuality—a so-called "change ministry." It is important that Adventists everywhere fully understand how Cook conducts himself so that they do not continue to subject other church members to this kind of behavior.



It is unfortunate, indeed, that so many seem to believe this man simply because he tells them what they want to believe and which conveniently fits with church teachings, regardless of the fact of his behavior or of the results of similar efforts. I am sure that your writer did not intentionally mean to be homophobic, but I found the title of the article to be unfortunate. The point, I think, is not the sexual orientation of Mr. Cook or his counselees, but the fact that a counselor is alleged to have engaged in unprofessional conduct. This would be true regardless of the gender orientation of either the counselor or counselee.

**Harvey Brenneise**  
Berrien Springs, Michigan (E-mail)

#### **AT A LINK**

We are a couple of lifelong Adventists who, after moving to Nashville and exploring the local Adventist scene, chose to attend a non-denominational Sunday church. I think we'll always find ourselves deeply divided.

On one hand, there's the sectarian "come out of her, my people" denomination we were raised in and will always have ties to. On the other, there's a whole group of people in our lives who describe themselves only as Christians—and who we have found to be more vital, loving, challenging, and Christlike than we thought possible.

Your magazine is an important link between our past and present, and gives us hope for the future. It is wonderful to find intelligent, articulate people who give voices to our own observations, hopes, and frustrations.

**Larry and Jamie Williams**  
Nashville, Tennessee

#### **LA SIERRA ORDINATION FILLS AN EMPTY PLACE**

What a joy it was to be at the La Sierra Seventh-day Adventist church to witness the ordination of two outstanding women who have given more than a full measure of talent and devotion to their church...I embrace Dan Smith and

those courageous ministers, women and men, who were willing to be counted among those in celebration.

As a fifth-generation Seventh-day Adventist I experienced enormous sadness when I left the church, as though I had betrayed those in my family and my church who gave up everything to follow individual conscience. But down to the marrow of heart and bone I cannot support any organization that discriminates against women, and there has been a hole in my life where the church once was.

Some of that emptiness filled with peace as I celebrated the ordination of Hallie and Madelyn in my own home church, and again I claim God's promise in Isaiah 55:12, "For ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." Blessed Be.

**Patti Cottrell Grant**  
(E-mail, AOL)

#### **FORUM FOR ADVENTISTS**

You are to be commended for this quality publication and for providing a much-needed forum for thinking

Adventists, both current and former. Keep up the good work.

**Richard Gutsche**  
Sunland, California (E-mail, AOL)

*Adventist Today* is a forum for anyone who is dissatisfied with the church. Your bully pulpit has become a haven for everyone who is unhappy... [with] the church. God knows that each one of us is filled with defects. When we first subscribed to this publication, we felt we would see a reflection of how a struggling people, seeking by the grace of God and the Holy Spirit to become what He wants to be, strive to take to our world the message of our soon coming Savior. Instead we find a magazine that poisons every one who reads it as well as fosters a dissatisfied and rebellious attitude.

**Jerry and Sandy Barts**  
Lexington, Kentucky

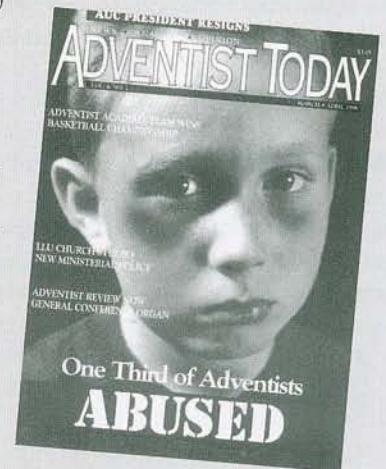
I appreciate your publication for its candor in addressing the problems that face the church today. It is my hope that you will continue to deal realistically with those problems.

**Francis Hecker**  
Lovell, Wyoming

#### **FOR THE RECORD**

In reporting that a third of Adventists are victims of abuse, *Adventist Today* failed to provide documentation. We apologize for the neglect; however we cited the 1/3 figure as a conservative generalization. In a major randomized study of 1600 church members in the Southeastern California Conference, as reported in the *Adventist Review*, the figures are 40% for physical abuse, 43% verbal and 16% incest. (The latter two percentages refer to individuals who were personally abused or witnessed abuse in their families of origin.) See "Adventists and Family Crises," *Adventist Review*, August 18, 1994. Audray Johnson, one of the report authors, told *Adventist Today* that she believes a total of 46% of Adventists have suffered some type of physical, verbal/emotional or sexual abuse.

—the editors





### **CONSCIENCE VS. TRADITION**

I feel my church is much more concerned with doctrine, dogma, tradition than with the Gospel. I know and feel in my church that makes me a so-called "liberal." . . . I feel my heritage/church will finally split along these lines. I had had great hopes for change at the G.C., but it obviously is not going to be under Folkenberg! I feel individual SDAs of conscience vs. tradition are in for some real difficult decisions and times. I really appreciate your efforts to bring the issues to your readers! I pray you and the staff will continue to have the courage and integrity to bring critical issues before us as Christians despite the officialdom pressures to the contrary.

*Donald D. Jeffries  
Bakersfield, California*

### **DIRTY LINEN**

I do not wish . . . for a magazine that spends such a large part of its message on the "dirty linen" of the church. Cases and events may certainly be true, but I do not believe these are the things we need to spread around. . . . Surely, good news and results of honest effort should receive greater coverage than the actions of a very few.

*Morris M. Gutman  
Springfield, Missouri*

### **UTRECHT COVERAGE FAIR**

I appreciate your magazine and read most of the articles carefully.... Keep up the good work. I, too, was at Utrecht and found your coverage fair and nearest to what I saw.

*Bette Miller  
Maitland, Florida*

### **WANT TO KNOW**

I am renewing my subscription because I want to know what the critics and revisionists are griping about, not because I agree with much you have to say.

*Alvin M. Bartlett  
La Junta, Colorado*

### **AMERICAN EPITAPH FOR A THIRD-WORLD CHURCH**

As numerical membership for the Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to explode in third-world countries, membership and financial support are declining in America. General Conference reports show that Caucasian membership is around 10%. Unfortunately, this group sustains the financial operation of the entire worldwide church organization. What is it that Caucasians find so unattractive about our church? Let's look at women's ordination as an example.

One element I have discovered (and there are many) that contributes to the present controversy over women's ordination is the emerging difference of cultural values. In my experience with members of third-world countries, a glaring ideological dissimilarity has become obvious. Members of third-world countries usually hold "traditional family values." For lack of better terminology, Americans might relate to a 1940s or 1950s mentality. The husband is the head of the household; the wife raises children at home. Women know their place and accept it, readily. Some American Adventists also still subscribe to these beliefs, but not many. The majority lie outside American borders.

Lacking the experience of evolving American values (viewed by third-world countries and American "traditionalists" as Biblical heresy), countries outside our nation cannot fathom (with accuracy) what North America is trying to say about Ecclesiastical Equal Rights for women. To them, it's absurd! In a church where the majority rules, North America is being forced to follow the rules, readily. So, what can make this bitter pill more palatable?

Maybe we could view this problem like the dreaded wedding band issue of previous decades. For years (over a century), non-American Adventists were not condemned for wearing a wedding band. After all, they were not Americans! American Adventists, on

the other hand, were viewed as "less than desirable," if they chose to lower themselves to the realm of jewelry mongers. This dichotomy lasted for years. I believe it took our church 25 years of steady appeals to the GC before policies in America were changed. It may take another 15 years for women to achieve equality in pastoral policies. The majority rules and the education process is slow. (Imagine what would happen if students took this long to learn in school.)

The issue of the wedding band (and many like it) reveals a haunting preoccupation with the status quo. A church focused on preserving 1950s values cannot meet the needs or appeal to 21st century American individuals. Lifestyle religion, the absorbing concern for appearance, is not the heart of the Gospel. The core of Jesus' teaching focused on meeting the physical, material, emotional, and spiritual (in that order) needs of people. Surprising to many Adventists, most Americans already know this universally accepted truth.

I believe the NAD must continue to stretch its capacity to reach Americans at their current stage of development (much to the consternation of many who view this as theologically dissolving the "truth" to a social Gospel—as if there were any other kind!), while maintaining patience with developing nations who are in the majority. After all, ordination of women will not solve our problem of preoccupation with appearances. If this issue is not addressed, there is the possibility of seeing "American Adventists RIP" on some of our future publications.

*Alan Williams  
Graduate student, MSW  
Alabama A & M University*

### **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

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



# Global Mission Accountability Investigated

by Lawrence Downing

**R**ecently numerous reports have questioned whether or not Global Mission funds are properly audited and distributed. *Adventist Today*, therefore, contacted several present and former Global Mission personnel to get their opinions and impressions. Directors of Global Mission said that its funds are audited by the same independent external auditor that performs audits on all General Conference operations. The audits ensure that all funds go to the projects the donors specify.

Harold Butler, Global Mission Development and Planning Director, acknowledges the agency's need to be accountable. "Davenport gave the church a black eye," he says. "We at Global Mission are committed to accountability for all the contributions we receive, and we want to maintain this integrity at any cost. Global Mission is one of the most heavily funded General Conference pro-

jects, and it is vital that we keep the confidence of lay people," Butler concludes.

Michael L. Ryan, Global Mission Executive Secretary, also assured us that one hundred percent of donations to Global Mission goes to mission projects. Even the project's overhead expenses do not come out of donation money. The money from the sale of Loma Linda Foods is in a trust fund, and the interest from this fund pays for Global Mission's expenses.

Global Mission's records of donations and disbursements are open. Any individual donor may request verification showing what happened to his or her donation. As an additional assurance of accountability, the constituency may authorize people besides the auditors to examine the financial records.

**D**onald Folkenberg, brother of General Conference president Robert Folkenberg, has also had his share of criticism. Donald's relationship to Global Mission began obliquely. A private individual who donates large sums of

money to specific church mission projects asked Donald to supervise his/her personally funded projects. In cooperation with the division treasurer, Folkenberg monitored these various projects to assure that the money went where the donor intended. Global Mission staff, impressed with Donald's performance, asked him to provide the same guidance to Global Mission projects. Even former G.C. Treasurer Donald F. Gilbert recommended Donald for the Global Mission position when he saw how well he handled the private donor's projects.

**E**astern Europe became Donald's first specialty area. Many Global Mission projects funded building and evangelism in countries where links to Western banking were nonexistent. Donald worked out a payment plan in cooperation with division officers that would avoid the red tape involved in getting U. S. dollars into these Eastern European countries. He also worked out with the division representatives a method of recording each transaction so it could be tracked.

The disbursement methods he devised often necessitated his carrying large amounts of cash to these countries with which he personally oversaw the purchase

## Campus Hill Church Chooses Black Woman as Senior Pastor

**A** congregation of 1400 in Loma Linda known for its conservative theology voted 20-4 in a board meeting on May 21, 1996, to invite Hyveth Williams, current pastor of the Boston Temple Adventist congregation, to be its senior pastor. The Hill Church church board, chaired by the head elder and functioning as the search committee, interviewed 5 candidates before recommending Williams to the Southeastern California



Hyveth Williams

Conference, which extended the formal invitation. Larry Cristoffel, one of three associate pastors at the church, explains that the predominantly conservative theological orientation of this church has shifted over the last decade under the leadership of senior pastor David VanDenburgh and associates who used a gospel-centered approach in preaching and in operation of the church.

Theologically moderate laypersons

are now a clear majority of board members. Williams was chosen, says Cristoffel, because "we were excited about her answers to the 16 questions that were asked of each candidate, and believe that she would make a quantum impact on the church, the university, and the community." She impressed the committee as articulate, politically aware, socially sensitive and as a powerful, practical preacher, said Cristoffel.

Williams, who holds a M.Div. from Andrews University, plans to complete a D. Min. from Boston University this summer. She served as an administrator in major governmental roles before entering the Adventist ministry in 1982.

Williams' autobiography *Will I Ever Learn?* was just published by the Review and Herald Publishing Association.



of property and the funding of other Global Mission assignments. By visiting and tracking these projects, Donald became the eyes and ears of Global Mission staff. Having him present at a site saved thousands of church dollars, Global Mission reports. *Adventist Today* did not find any present or former staff who can recall an instance of doubt about Donald's integrity. The consensus of those who worked with him, including the auditors, is that he served Global Mission and the church well.

**B**ecause of concerns of nepotism, hiring the GC president's brother for this position may not have been the most prudent public relations decision. Global Mission staff reports, however, that President Folkenberg was sensitive to these concerns and absented himself from any meetings where Donald's employment was considered.

Global Mission staff did state that they understand private donors continue to give funds directly to Robert and Donald Folkenberg for disbursement to other missions or special projects. They further stat-

ed that it appears that any money which either Robert or Donald Folkenberg handle is accounted for and audited by the standard church financial system. On occasion, they report, President Folkenberg contacts the Global Mission staff to say funds have been offered for a Global Mission project and asks for recommendations about where these gifts are needed. Once the donor gives the funds for that project, the money is treated like any other donation. No individual has direct control over Global Mission funds.

An independent, external auditing firm based in Lansing, Michigan audits the General Conference financial records. Following GC policy, the Audit Review Committee receives and reviews the annual audit report every year at the Spring Meeting. (The Audit Review Committee includes all the non-denominationally employed members of the GC committee.)

At the General Conference Session in Utrecht last July, several division auditors gave impassioned speeches arguing that they should be elected rather than appointed. As a result of these speeches, the GC delegates voted to recommend to

the next GC session that the General Conference Auditing Service Board be made of 15 members, 10 of whom are not denominationally employed. Some General conference officers, *Adventist Today* learned, strongly oppose this recommendation on the following bases:

- 1) it reduces the number of non-denominational employees on the Board,
- 2) in 1990 misinformation about the role of the GCAS Board caused some to assume it had a role in correcting fiscal management, and
- 3) it eliminates an officer from each division, thus lessening the available auditors.

**C**urrently, because of inadequate staffing, a significant number of organizations are not audited for years at a time, perhaps only once every 5 or 10 years or less. Global Mission staff says that to correct this problem, new auditors must be hired. Division administrators would have to agree to such a hiring, however, and the proposed configuration of the GCAS Board will make the hiring of new auditors less likely.

## Creative Congregational Funding Used by Orangevale Church

**T**he Orangevale (California) Seventh-day Adventist Church uses creative funding to hire personnel that are beyond its conference's guidelines. The Northern California Conference supplies a single pastor for this 500 member church, but the congregation feels deeply its need to have more paid leadership. Consequently, the church members are supporting a half-time associate pastor and a half-time kindergarten teacher, and they are seeking a full-time associate pastor.

These additional staff members receive their payment from the conference, and the money which the congregation raises for their salaries goes to reimburse the conference. This arrangement meets both the conference's restriction of formally supplying only one

pastor for such a church and also the congregation's strong sense that it and the surrounding community need the services of additional staff.

The Orangevale Church operates an active Community Services Center and an elementary school (K-8). The congregation has long needed and requested additional paid personnel. The conference, however, has responded that the church had to meet a certain membership level in order to warrant an additional pastor.

The congregation reports that when they met the requisite membership level, the conference raised the threshold again, thus denying Orangevale church its additional pastor.

In consultation with the conference, the congregation took charge of its own

needs by establishing its Ministry Expansion Fund. The resulting document says in part:

Let a fund be established that will be used to support the employment of Bible Workers, Associate Pastors and others who can work with the ministerial staff. A church the size of Orangevale and that serves communities the size of Orangevale, Fair Oaks and Folsom should have a ministerial staff of at least four or five full-time persons.... We are convinced that the Northern California Conference is not going to provide the means to do this. For that reason the local church should do it.

"We believe that we have been successful," stated D. Ordell Calkins, the congregation's business manager. "The morale of the membership has benefited, and both members and the community are better served."



## Senior Pastor Fired Over Tithing

**O**n January 1, 1996, Mike Pionkowski, senior pastor of the 1500 member Tacoma Park SDA Church, was fired by the Potomac Conference for failing to pay tithe according to denominational policy.

Pionkowski said that he had paid approximately \$20,000.00 in tithe to his local church over the last five years but felt morally convicted not to pay his tithe to the conference. "The Bible does not teach or mandate the conference tithing system," he said, "but the institution does have the right to enforce its own policies, even if I disagree with them."

Though disappointed with how he was treated, Pionkowski said this experience has not made him bitter against the

church, and "certainly hasn't destroyed my relationship with Christ." Indeed, that relationship seems healthy and balanced.

Cyril Miller and other church administrators involved with the case have argued that the Bible speaks of giving tithes to the storehouse, and that the conference is the storehouse. Another administrator said, "This case has nothing to do with the Bible. It has only to do with church policy; we have the right of institutional protection."

Still another was quoted as saying, "If you don't believe everything we believe, then just get out!"

"It has been a very difficult time," says Pionkowski.

Most of his congregation had no idea

what was coming until it was over. Many of his members, in fact, were hurt and disappointed and said, "Why didn't you come to us?"

His response was that he did not want to draw his membership into the controversy. In spite of his care not to involve his parishioners, some conference leaders have still tried to accuse him of rallying support. After 17 years of service, Pionkowski received six months of severance pay and does not know where he will go from here.

"I feel like I am in 'spiritual limbo,'" he said; "I don't believe that I have sinned against God, but I guess you could say that I have sinned against the organization."

## New Hope for Atlantic Union College Calls for Stringent Budget

by John Ramirez

**A**tlantic Union College is working hard to fulfill its motto "Fiat Lux". The light is shining for AUCites as they strengthen their future plans with solid planning. AUC has received help from the North American Division which is sponsoring Mr. Ronald Knott, communication specialist, to help with public relations and recruitment this summer.

The college's Board of Trustees and the Alumni Association, faculty, staff and friends of the school have raised \$250,000, the first installment of their promised \$5,000,000 which they plan to raise in five years at a rate of one million per year.

The faculty has agreed to a very stringent budget that, depending on the number of students that come for the 1996-1997 school year, will significantly cut their salaries. Dr. Clifford N. Sorensen, former president of Columbia Union College, has accepted the interim presidency of the institution. Mrs. Ileana Douglas has accepted the position of interim Academic Dean. The board has set up a presidential

search committee chaired by Dr. Norman Wendth, Professor of English. The committee expects to have completed its task by the end of the summer.

The resolution to keep the college as a unique entity and to lay aside the merger option has created a new optimism. "I believe the campus is on a high note, and we are positive that this great Union will have a college for a long time," was the

comment of Dr. D. Robert Kennedy, one of the two faculty representatives to the Board of Trustees.

The whole college community (faculty, administration, alumni, and constituents) is working together to face the challenges they have ahead. AUC is receiving help from sister institutions. LLU Vice-President for Academic Affairs Dr. Ian Fraser declared, "We are exploring options for assisting AUC, including the use of distant learning technology to provide some special lectures and perhaps even courses that could attract students to AUC."

### COMING IN FUTURE ISSUES OF *Adventist Today*

- Mission or money—what drives the Adventist Church?
- Is the Seventh-day Adventist denomination a business?
- Different views concerning the Sabbath
- What about the Gospel called "Q"?
- What is the "Jesus Seminar"?



# Parallels in Ellen White's and Joseph Smith's Writings: Both Part of New England "Visionary Culture"?

by James Walters

**P**arallels between the writings of Adventism's Ellen White (1827-1915) and Joseph Smith (1805-1844), founder of Mormonism, have been discovered by Phyllis Watson of Angwin, California. Although Watson believes her parallels demonstrate literary dependency, several American church historians and the White Estate, who were given a 32-page sample of Watson's 300 page manuscript, disagree. They see the most likely explanation to be what one historian called "common milieu"—a similar religious background and place. Indeed, Richard Lyman Bushman, a devout Mormon and leading scholar in Mormon studies at Columbia University, now believes that Ellen White should be added to the dozen or so New England visionaries he has studied who published accounts of their experiences in the first half of the 19th century.

Bushman speaks of a "visionary culture" that prophetic figures such as Smith and White inhabited. "When people spoke of visionary experiences, there was a style they adopted, just as political scientists or fashion columnists or dance critics have a common vocabulary today," says Bushman. "That does not mean the experiences were the same or of equal validity."

## A Prod to American Church Historians

Watson, a layperson, hopes that the parallels she has documented will prod professional church historians and theologians to action. Her hopes will likely be realized.

Bushman states, "Since I have become interested in the visionary experience of the nineteenth-century, I can see I will have to look further into the writings of Mrs. White." Ronald Numbers, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and author of *Prophetess of Health* and other writings on Ellen White, believes that Watson's extensive parallels need to be set in their proper context and that they need expert interpretation. Hence, he would like to see Watson collaborate with an American church historian who could complement her

present work. The parallels "don't settle anything," says Numbers, but they are "worth starting a discussion."

Mario De Pillis, Professor Emeritus of social and religious history at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and president of the Mormon History Association, also sees the need for interpretation, but he believes that if Watson merely published her parallels, scholars would be compelled to react.

## No Direct Literary Borrowing

Numbers calls Watson's work "fascinating." "There is clearly something striking going on here." However, Numbers and the other four historians contacted by *Adventist Today* do not think that White plagiarized Smith. Numbers says that when White is clearly working from another's writings, the parallels incorporate more than a few words and phrases. Ron Graybill, an Ellen White scholar who formerly worked at the White Estate, agrees.

Graybill cites the need for clusters of unique phrases to show literary dependence. In his own research on White he found considerable borrowing, but one paragraph in White's writings was distinctive. In it White has 9 separate, unique elements on "secret vice" that are in a book by health reformer Dr. James C. Jackson—a book advertised in a periodical that prompted husband James White to order health reform materials.

Bushman has "found accounts of many other visions in Joseph Smith's times, and some of them bear remarkable similarities in word usage. Pulling out a phrase here and a phrase there ends up proving no more than that people shared a common culture, not that one drew explicitly from the other."

Mario De Pillis says that direct literary dependency is possible but not probable. He suggests that computer analysis of the parallel passages may be productive. Fred Veltman, a professor of religion at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California, who documented White's literary dependency in her *The Desire of Ages*, sees "some ideological similarities, but the agreements in ideas were not so striking as to clearly show dependency. The similarities have to do with White's response

to getting the vision, emotional or other reactions." Veltman warns against getting caught up in "parallelomania."

The White Estate, located at the Adventist church's headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, says that: "Although the Ellen G. White Estate is aware that Mrs. White sometimes used material from other authors, we have seen no convincing evidence that she ever copied, or even that she had read, anything written by Joseph Smith."

Two further problems with literary dependency, according to Graybill, are that Joseph Smith was "anathema" to early Adventists and scholars do not know that any Smith books were in White's library.

## Common Sources and Religious Experiences

The extensive parallels may be explained in one of two ways, says Numbers: either White was fascinated with Smith's writings and had them in mind in writing her own, or both writers were dependent on a common way of perceiving their religious experiences. De Pillis independently suggested the likelihood that White was influenced by newspaper accounts of Joseph Smith's religious experiences, given that he was the leading visionary of the era and widely covered by journalists. It seems tenable that young Ellen White, with three years of education, could have been influenced by accounts of an older Methodist-connected churchman who told of visionary experiences with God similar to those she was having.

However, the scholars focused more on the common sources that indelibly influenced both prophetic figures. Graybill says both were "steeped in the King James Version of the Bible." De Pillis indicates that both repeat verbatim phrases from the Bible—e.g., the notion of being struck dumb, from Daniel 10.

Further, both heard similar Protestant preachers and gained a common religious experience and style, indicates Graybill.

"There are startling parallels, to be sure," says De Pillis. However, he believes those he has seen to date are best accounted for by use of common sources. He has researched 10 religious writers in nineteenth century New



England who used some variation of the expression, "retiring to the woods to pray." This expression, so common in early American Christianity, goes back at least to the Puritans. "The rise and progress of the church or nation" (another parallel cited by Watson), is also a phrase common among popular religious writers, indicates De Pillis. He believes that White is a part of a "popular visionary culture of the time," thus mirroring Bushman's assessment.

### Researcher Phyllis Watson

Researcher Phyllis Watson devoted much of the last 15 years to painstakingly comparing the writings of Ellen White and Joseph Smith. She plans to publish a book of parallel columns from the two authors. She has underscored similar words and phrases in her extensive manuscript. A summary of the parallel words and ideas is listed at the bottom of each page of parallels, with occasional explanatory notes.

Watson comes from three generations of Adventists. She has deep roots at Angwin, only 5 miles from the denominational landmark Elmshaven, where Ellen White lived out her last several years. Watson's grandmother was a personal friend of Ellen White.

A secretary at the Napa High School for years, Watson never aspired to the role of religious literary analyst. The unsought career began when Watson was dusting some books and the *Book of Mormon*, picked up at a garage sale, dropped to the floor opening to the index. Noticing the entry "probation" and being surprised because she assumed this was a particularly Adventist notion, Watson read in Smith something similar to Adventist teaching. This whetted her curiosity and provided years of work.

In a phone interview with *Adventist Today*, Watson repeatedly expressed her reluctance to see her research come to light and her hope that readers will understand her honesty and lack of ill intent. Because of differences over church teachings, Watson and her husband chose several years ago to drop their Adventist church membership; however they still identify closely with the Adventist tradition, and express a "great love and respect for the Adventist people."

### A Noteworthy Contribution

Unless Watson chooses an historian to provide a context and interpretation for her

## Examples of Phyllis Watson's Parallels

### Others tell them that their visions are of the devil

**Joseph Smith:** I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had...he treated my communication...with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil.... *Pearl of Great Price* 48:21

**Ellen White:** I felt forbidden to relate my vision in such company....They denounced my visions as being of the devil...Mr. Thayer the owner of the house, was not fully satisfied that her vision was of the devil as Robbins declared it to be. Omitted in *Testimonies*: included in *Spiritual Gifts* 2:67-79.

### Lying helpless and then strength returning

**Joseph Smith:** When I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven. When the light departed I had no strength: But recovering in some degree I went home...." *PGP* 48:20

**Ellen White:** While I was lying helpless there, scenes of beauty and glory passed before me, and I seemed to have reached the safety and peace of heaven. At last my strength returned and I arose...." *Testimonies* 1:29; *Life Sketches* 157

### In confusion go to the woods and pray vocally

**Joseph Smith:** "At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain....confusion, or...ask of God....in accordance with this, my determination to ask of God...I retired to the woods to make an attempt. It was on the morning of a beautiful, clear day...I had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally....I knelt down and began to offer up the desire of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak....But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized me...the power of some actual being from the unseen world...." *JSH* 2:13-16

**Ellen White:** "I had never prayed vocally....Then I would go away in the woods, where no eye or ear but God's could see or hear, and pray to Him, and He would sometimes give me a vision there. I then rejoiced, and told them God had revealed to me alone, where no mortal could influence me. But I was told by some that I could mesmerize myself....in this confusion I was sometimes tempted to doubt my own experience. While at family prayers one morning, the power of God began to rest upon me, and the thought rushed into my mind that it was mesmerism and I resisted it. Immediately I was struck dumb...." *Evangelism* 21-23

### Phyllis Watson cites the following similarities:

**JS:** In great confusion

**JS:** I retired to the woods to make an attempt to pray

**JS:** I had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally

**JS:** Prayed in the morning

**JS:** Seized upon by power which entirely overcame him

**JS:** Immediately I was seized upon by some power

**JS:** Power had influence over me

**JS:** Tongue bound so he could not speak

**JS:** As soon as he began to pray a power seized him

**EW:** In confusion

**EW:** I would go away in the woods and pray

**EW:** I had never prayed vocally

**EW:** Prayed in the morning

**EW:** Power of God began to rest on her

**EW:** Immediately I was struck dumb

**EW:** Could not be influenced

**EW:** Struck dumb

**EW:** As soon as she began to pray a power seized her

work, it is unlikely that established publishers would take her manuscript, say a couple of *Adventist Today's* consulting historians. Regardless, Watson's White/Smith parallels appear to add an important chapter to Ellen White studies.

Watson has not demonstrated Ellen White's direct literary dependency on Smith. But Watson has documented something not formerly recognized: Ellen White's extensive reflection of a visionary culture shared by a number of figures in nineteenth century New England.



# The Internal Revenue Service and the Redefinition of Adventist Ministry

by Bert Haloviak



Bert B. Haloviak is a historian who works in the official Seventh-day Adventist Office of Archives and Statistics. His academic specialty is 19th century religious history.

**F**or more than 100 years, Seventh-day Adventists held that the functions of the licensed and ordained ministry were different. We claimed the support of scripture and of Ellen White for our position. By the 1970's, however, this traditional policy was changed in response to new IRS regulations. This paper shows the context and development of the change.

## 1965: IRS Refuses Benefits for Licentiate

In 1965 the U.S. Internal Revenue Service ruled that in order to receive the parsonage allowance and other tax benefits along with ordained ministers, licensed ministers "must be invested with the status and authority of an ordained minister." They must be "fully qualified to exercise all of the ecclesiastical duties" of the ordained.

On October 6, 1965, the General Conference officers affirmed that "this, of course, the denomi-

nation is unable to state." That meant the licensed ministry would receive about 9 percent less total income. This no doubt would be mollified by denominational entities making up some of the difference. The employing organization would also have to assume 50 percent of the social security payments formerly paid by the self-employed licensed minister.

General Conference President Reuben Figuhr and Secretary Walter Beach wrote to the IRS and intentionally minimized the differences between the licensed and ordained ministry, but conceded that the licensed minister did not perform all the functions of the ordained minister.

Their letter described the ministry as a one-track system where "the difference lies simply in the matter of growth in experience." The duties of licensed and ordained ministers were "substantially equivalent." At the time, seven licensed women ministers served in North America, and by definitions of this letter as well as by actions since the 1870s, when Adventist women were first licensed, women were on the track for ordination.

The IRS ruling regarding licensed ministers remained inflexible. Since the Figuhr-Beach letter did not establish equivalency between the licensed



and ordained ministry, the IRS determined that “licensed ministers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church do not qualify as ministers of the gospel” for tax purposes.

### 1966: Wilson and Osborn Assess Problem

At the 1966 General Conference session Robert Pierson and Kenneth Emmerson replaced retiring GC President Figuhr and Treasurer Chester Torrey. Neal Wilson became the Vice President for North America. Robert Osborn had been called as an assistant treasurer of the GC earlier in 1966.

The IRS issue was discussed in at least three meetings by these newly elected officials at the Detroit GC session of 1966. North American leaders “informally agreed” to continue to treat licensed ministers the same as ordained ministers as regards tax status. At the same time, the leaders would secure legal counsel.

Osborn emphasized that the North American action “drastically altered the previous position taken by the officers.” It seemed to defy the IRS ruling. The church should find some way to reimburse those who would now lose tax privileges they had had. He thought the church should acknowledge the IRS letter and respond to it seriously. Thus Osborn as well as the other General Conference treasurers preferred a very different approach from that pursued by Neal Wilson.

### 1966-1968: Church Leadership Begins To Redefine Licensed Ministry

In September, 1966, Attorney William Donnelly, of Washington, DC, suggested a new avenue—to claim that a licensed minister “who has also been ordained as an elder of a particular church of the denomination, is a ‘minister of the gospel’ within the IRS definitions. Donnelly suggested that “if the *Church Manual* spelled out affirmatively the authority of the ordained elder-licensed minister,” IRS regulations might be satisfied.

Such a redefinition of the prerogatives of the licensed minister in a “positive way” seemed to offer hope. Though there were policies that precluded the licentiate

from administering ordinances as a licentiate, one could do so as an ordained elder.

By August 7, 1968, various committees had extensively redefined the role of the licensed minister. They had deleted the stipulation that the licentiate could not administer baptism or the Lord’s Supper or perform the marriage ceremony. Instead, the language emphasized the ability to assist in those ordinances and services. When elected and ordained as a church elder, the licentiate could “conduct the communion service and other services of the church and to preside at business meetings.” Deleted was the statement “among Seventh-day Adventists, only ordained ministers are authorized to perform the marriage ceremony.”

On June 19, 1970, these changes breezed through the GC session and were later incorporated into the *Manual for Ministers* and the *Church Manual*.

### 1971: Treasurers Are Frightened

A number of meetings in 1971 revealed a continuing difference between GC treasurers and NAD

leadership. In conjunction with documents discussed at one such meeting, Pierson wrote in his shorthand: “Stretched every point possible to show licensed ministers very much like ordained ministers. I’d not go further. There is and should be a difference!”

Osborn pointed out that despite changes in definition of the licensed minister, church policy still did not satisfy the IRS. Yet the church continued to treat licensed ministers as full ministers for tax purposes.

An emergency meeting of GC officers, union officers and some local conference presidents occurred on December 21, 1971. Osborn presented a seven-page paper outlining the history of the tax

issue since 1965. Coming to recent history, he referred to a September 22, 1971, observation of tax attorneys Prerau and Teitell: “We do not believe a further request [to the IRS] for ruling would be helpful unless the ‘licensed minister’ were given entirely the same status as the ‘credentialed minister.’”

In his handwritten notes on this document, Robert Pierson worried, “6 yrs of tax exposure \$1100 per lic min per yr!” The total for 850 licensed ministers would be over \$5 million in back taxes owed since the 1965 IRS letter, if the church could not convince the IRS to accept its procedures of the last six years.

Osborn summarized: “Unless we are willing by amending at a General

Conference Session the *Church Manual* and the *Manual for Ministers* to give our licensed ministers the same status and authority as our ordained ministers, it seems very clear that we cannot by law and IRS regulations and rules continue to consider them as ministers of the gospel for tax purposes.”

Osborn left for a California appointment following the meeting and upon

arrival sent a telex message to Emmerson, Pierson and Wilson. He summarized the church’s dilemma:

“We have arrived at a regrettable day as we have departed from our traditional approach to governmental authority and now apparently are going to perpetuate this untenable six year position.

“Also to recommend change of long-standing denominational practices re authority of ministers primarily for tax considerations hardly is becoming. There should be other reasons for change or we should not amend the manuals.

“When this matter comes to GC Com or NADCA tomorrow I respectfully request you to bring my viewpoint to the group as expressed in this telex.”

**The total for 850 licensed ministers would be over \$5 million in back taxes owed since the 1965 IRS letter...**



In spite of Osborn's appeals, the next day the North American Division Committee on Administration voted to ask GC officers to "take whatever steps are necessary to secure for licensed ministers full status as ministers of the gospel."

#### 1974: Neal Wilson Plans Appeal

The issue remained in limbo over the next several years. In 1974, North American President Neal Wilson vigorously sought to resolve the issue. He initiated contacts with several U.S. Congressmen, including Adventist Congressman Jerry Pettis, member of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee. In March of 1974, Wilson revealed his plan to appeal the IRS ruling. He drafted a 14-page memorandum giving the basis for the Adventist appeal.

Wilson emphasized modifications formalized at the 1970 GC session that allowed the conclusion that the licensed minister "who has also been ordained as an elder of a particular church" was indeed a minister of the gospel within the IRS meaning.

Wilson sent the memo to Jerry Pettis, who sought advice from Minority Counsel Dick Wilbur. The June 28 analysis by Wilbur, recently sworn in as judge of the U.S. Tax Court, stressed that all hinged on "the nature of the services that the licensed ministers are authorized to perform." Unless the licensed minister held "coextensive authority" with the ordained ministry, "then the Service holds that the licensed ministers are not 'ministers of the gospel'" for tax purposes. If the licensed minister could now solemnize marriages, then Adventists might "request the Service to reconsider the original ruling."

#### 1975-1976: IRS Action Leads to Church Action

GC administrators' hopes received a setback when Jerry Pettis was tragically killed in an airplane crash on February 14, 1975. The issue intensified the next month. For the first time since 1966, the Adventist position was openly challenged by the IRS. Branches of the IRS were making "protective assessments" for tax liabilities against various conferences, preparing to seize church properties for payment of back taxes.

During the April, 1975, Spring Meeting, implications for Adventist women in ministry were becoming evident. At this meeting women became eligible for ordination as church deaconesses and elders in North America. But what if they also held the ministerial license, as

in the past? This situation troubled some church leaders.

The Spring Meeting thus passed this resolution:

"[We] recommend that where Bible Instructors or other women with suitable qualifications and experience are able to fill ministerial roles, they be assigned as assistant pastors, their credentials being

missionary license or missionary credential."

Women were no longer eligible for the ministerial license, since that license had been redefined to allow prerogatives that were then seen as off-limits for women. For women, a different track of ministry was being paved.

After consultation with IRS officials in late April, GC administrators decided to officially request the IRS to review their 1966 ruling against the GC. By November, Wilson had drafted a letter and memorandum making such a request. He submitted it on December 30, 1975. In his covering letter, Wilson appealed for reconsideration "in light of many changes that have developed since 1966." He

enclosed an 11-page "Memorandum of the Status of Licensed Ministers in the SDA Church" that formed the basis for his appeal.

In this memo, Wilson emphasized that "the role of the licensed minister has been redefined by the Seventh-day Adventist Church." The licensed minister "can perform sacraments which are much more meaningful than the marriage ceremony—such as the holy communion, preaching the Word, baptisms, conducting funerals, etc." He stressed that the licensed minister within the Adventist Church was not a separate category of minister.

In April, 1976, the IRS informed Wilson that although the licensed minister could preside at any of the church ordinances, he still could not solemnize marriages. Thus "the licensing of a minister of the gospel by the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not, in every respect, establish a status that is the equivalent of ordination." Wilson's appeal was rejected.

By this time several conferences had received "final notice before seizure" of church property in lieu of back taxes. In June, Osborn suggested a variation within the legal line of pursuit. Rather than constantly redefining licensed ministers and their prerogatives, why not challenge the IRS ruling as being too restrictive? "Our case should not be based on trying to show how close our licensed ministers are to our ordained ministers ecclesiastically speaking—there is a gap which is not bridged until ordination." To Osborn, it was "incorrect to try to equate our licensed ministers with our ordained ministers." In another letter written in June, Osborn noted: "There is a definite detected feeling that it is hardly becoming to alter our attitude toward our licensed ministers for tax considerations in a particular country."

#### 1976: New Definition Makes Functions Equal

It soon became apparent that Osborn's approach would be rejected. The officers instead decided "to reexamine the position we have taken on the licensed minister." The President's Executive Advisory Committee (PREX-

To recommend change of longstanding denominational practices regarding authority of ministers primarily for tax considerations hardly is becoming.



AD) reviewed a document that suggested changing the responsibility of a fully-trained, licensed minister. Could he be authorized "on a probationary basis to perform all of the functions of an ordained minister under the supervision of his ecclesiastical superior?" PREXAD agreed "to ask the Presidential staff to study the suggestions for changing the authority of the licensed minister."

In August, the NAD union presidents approved such a proposal, and Wilson presented it to PREXAD on September 14. In his presentation, Wilson rehearsed the history of the problem since 1965. He stressed the "considerable financial involvement," of both the Adventist church and of the individual licensed ministers. He believed that the difference between the functions of the licensed and ordained ministry was not a moral or theological issue, but a matter of church policy.

According to Wilson here were two alternatives to going to court against the government: give in, or change the status of the licensed

minister. It seemed wiser to change the functions of the licensed minister. After all, the functions of the licensed minister were now almost identical to those of the ordained minister. Policy was much more restrictive than practice. The crucial phrase in the Wilson proposal read:

"A licensed minister is authorized by the Conference/Mission Executive Committee to perform all the functions of the ordained minister in the church or churches where he is assigned."

PREXAD and then PRADCO approved this proposal.

### 1976: Divisions Have Latitude and Flexibility

Meeting just prior to the full Annual Council session, the Home and Overseas Officers and Union Presidents made it apparent that the field outside the United States would not approve the critical phrase quoted above. Thus the action voted at the October 20 afternoon Annual Council session differed from that voted at the North American section of the Annual Council held in the evening of October 20. Interestingly, the critical

phrase was not printed in the Annual Council booklets for 1976, nor in the *Review* listing of Annual Council actions.

On December 30, Wilson explained in a *Review* article the reasons for modifying the policy on the status of licensed ministers. While not giving the specifics of the change, he noted that "the process by which the church trains its ministers obviously is not a matter of theology nor doctrine, but one of methodology, policy." After much prayerful discussion "with the view of

preserving the unity and strength of the church," the 1976 Annual Council "voted to amend the policy governing licensed ministers to provide for appropriate latitude and flexibility within each division of the General Conference."

### 1977-78: IRS Accepts Church Policy

In October of 1977, Wilson wrote the Commissioner of Internal Revenue about "some rather extensive ecclesiastical policy changes" taken by Adventists. He enclosed the 1976 NAD Annual

Council action that authorized the licensed minister to "perform all the functions of the ordained minister" in his local church. There was joy at church world headquarters when it received the IRS letter of September 23, 1977: "We have reviewed the changes in your church's ecclesiastical policy, and it is our view that licensed ministers in your church have, effective October 20, 1976, a recognized status that is the equivalent of ordination." After a decade, the licensed minister was again legally entitled to all tax advantages.

The 1977 NAD Annual Council added a new term to its policy book: "Associates in Pastoral Care." That phrase identified "persons who are employed on pastoral staffs but who are not in line for ordination." Women were formally placed upon this separate track within Adventist ministry.

Less than a year later, in August of 1978, the IRS modified its working policy. If licensed or commissioned ministers performed "substantially" all the religious functions of the ordained minister, they were eligible for tax benefits.

By this time, Adventist women were excluded from receiving the ministerial license that had been given women beginning in the 1870s. While women could once again be defined as ministerial workers, they still were not back on the track for ordination, where they had been before the IRS problems of the 1960s.

The inconsistency reached new dimensions in 1989 when the Annual Council voted not to recommend women to be ordained to the gospel ministry, but allowed women ministers to "perform essentially the ministerial functions of an ordained minister of the gospel in the churches to which they are assigned."

Ironically, even though Adventist church representatives decided that women ministers were "not in line for ordination," they were now defined by the IRS as eligible for the tax benefits of the ministry.

The interrelationship between money, theology, the IRS, and church administration had converged to create a moral dilemma within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

**W**omen were no longer eligible for the ministerial license, since that license had been redefined to allow prerogatives that were then seen as off-limits for women...



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# Tithe or Solomon's Tax

*Getting up-to-date information about tithe in Adventism from reliable sources often proves very difficult, if not impossible.*

by Steve Daily

**C**omedian Milton Berle tells the story of a wealthy eastern potentate who came to New York City and checked into the biggest suite of the fanciest hotel. The potentate, who spoke no English, engaged a highly respected interpreter. The two were working on a speech, when a noise from the next room diverted their attention. Before they could make a move, two masked bandits stormed in with guns drawn. They demanded the potentate's famous jewels.

The interpreter translated their demands. In his native tongue, the potentate told the bandits they had made a terrible mistake, for he had not brought his jewels with him.

One of the bandits screamed, "We know he has the jewels with

him. We're going to count to three and if we don't get the jewels, we're going to shoot him!"

The interpreter, terrified, conveyed the message to the potentate, who said in his own language, "I don't want to die. Tell them that the jewels are hidden in the chandelier in the outer room."

The interpreter, quickly nodding his head, turned to the bandits and, in a solemn and dignified voice, announced, "His majesty said he would rather die than tell you where the jewels are hidden!"

This story illustrates that money can transform seemingly good and respectable people into something tragically more immoral than they ever thought they'd be (from respected interpreter to lying thief). A classic example of this in Scripture is a wealthy potentate from the east who was blinded for much of his life by his own desire for treasures and jewels. The most scary thing about King Solomon, however, is that he instituted his burdensome taxes, forced labor, and extravagance in the name of God, so he didn't think it mattered that he was building the Temple of the Lord on the backs of the poor and making a mockery of God's covenant in the process.

In fact, Solomon's taxes became so oppressive that the people literally cried out to his son to relieve their burdens after his father's death. But Rehoboam, who had watched his father become one of the wealthiest men in the world at the expense of the poor in his country, responded with an even harder heart. "My father whipped you with whips," he said, "but I will sting you with scorpions" (I Kgs 12:11).



Steve Daily is campus chaplain at La Sierra University. He is the author of *Adventism for a New Generation* (Better Living Publ., Portland, Ore.).



Wealth and power often have a numbing effect on those who benefit from them. It is hardly realistic to expect those in positions of power to reduce their power even when changing times demand it. The government never feels that it has enough tax money (especially with a national debt in the trillions). And the conferences, unions, divisions and General Conference in the church never feel they have enough tithe. This is why local churches must have greater input in determining how tithe monies will be spent in the church at large.

I recently sat in a meeting with a group of pastors who expressed their frustration over how the local church is stripped of its financial resources in the Adventist subculture by the demands of heavy layers of administrative bureaucracy, but is still expected to function alongside churches of other denominations that are not burdened down supporting large bureaucracies.

In today's business world companies and corporations are cutting back their levels of management in an unprecedented manner. The most obvious recent example of this is AT&T's elimination of some 40,000 management level positions (*New York Times*, Feb. 13, 1996, D1:2). With mega-changes in communication, organizations do not need multiple layers of management and administrative bureaucracy.

How will the church respond to this changing climate? Should we simply follow the world of business and opt for massive cuts in our administrative overhead? Or should we return to our biblical roots and attempt to redefine the system on principles that are grounded in Scripture? The latter option seems more appropriate for a church which claims to operate by the principles of the Kingdom of God.

### Tracing the Tantalizing Trail of the Tithe

As I considered the questions above, I first tried to develop an overview of how tithe monies are currently used in the Adventist church. The first thing I learned in my research was that getting up-to-date information about tithe in Adventism from reliable sources often proves very difficult, if not impossible. Many of us in the church feel that such information should be easily accessible to all church members who desire to know how their tithe money is being spent. Opening the books has proved enormously helpful in big business and industry. For instance, Martha Groves (*Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 29, 1995) describes the amazing revolution that occurred when CEO Jack Stack opened up his corporation's books to his employees.

I want to express my appreciation to those church officials who were candid and open in response to my inquiries. Tom Staples, Martin Ytreburg, Pat Forrest, and Leon Sanders were especially helpful. I also appreciated George Crumley's book, *Financial Report on the Use of Tithe 1994*.

The chart below, obtained from the Southeastern California Conference treasurer's office, provides the most current information on how the tithe is divided among the conference, union, North American Division and General Conference.

Between 1991 and 1995 the GC's share of the tithe dropped from 11.95 percent to 11.35 percent, indicating at least a desire to make some cuts at the highest levels of church leadership.

The chart does not show the details of how the conferences spend the 55.25 percent of the tithe that is kept at the local level, the 3.69 percent that the union keeps,

and the 21 percent that goes to the General Conference and the North American Division. My discussions with church leaders revealed these facts: Local tithe funds in the Southeastern California Conference are spent according to these percentages:

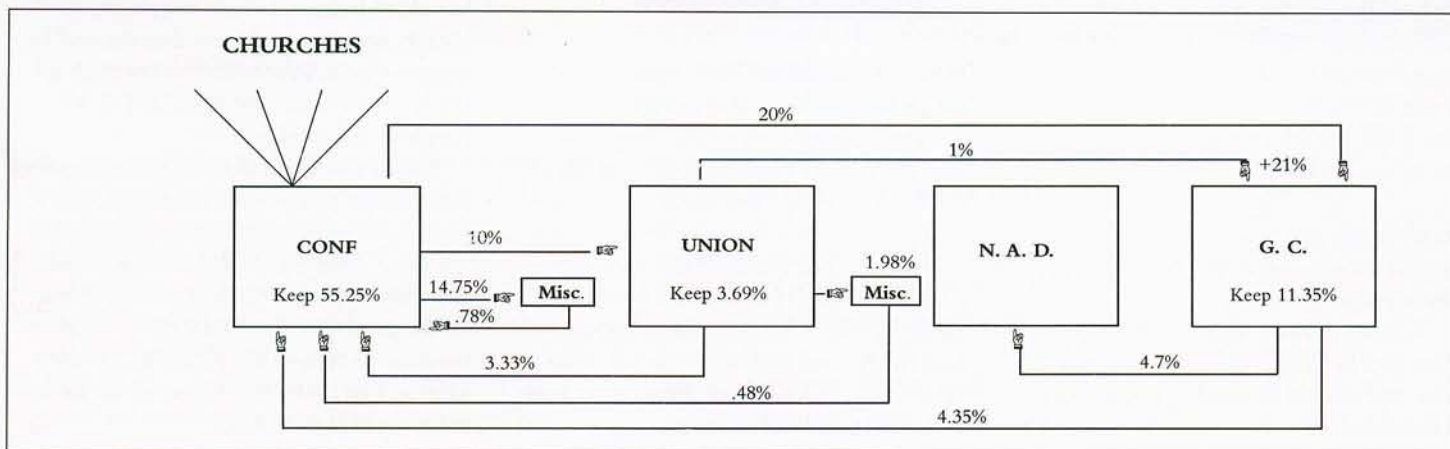
#### 1995 Distribution and Use of Southeastern California Conference Tithe:

- Ministry - 42.9%
- Education - 27.7%
- Departmental Services - 14.5%
- Administration - 11.3%
- Grants and appropriations - 3.6%

The 3.69 percent of the tithe that goes to the union is divided between administrative costs (21.1 percent) and departmental services at the Union level (78.9 percent). The 4.7 percent of the tithe that goes to the North American Division is used similarly, with 18 percent going for administrative costs and 82 percent for departmental services.

While exact figures are unavailable at the General Conference level, estimates are that 66 percent of the GC tithe money goes to support administration, departments and overseas missions. The other third is divided fairly equally between GC operations and administration and GC departmental services in North America.

I also learned that the amount of tithe being used to support pastors and evangelists working in local churches has dropped to a low of 30 percent, 70 percent being used for other things. However, some small local churches benefit disproportionately from the tithe system because the local conference pays for their pastor's salary, a cost that they might not be able to afford on their own.





## IS IT MORAL TO PAY TITHE THE WAY WE ARE DOING IT?

Last January, Mike Pionkowski, senior pastor of the 1,500-member Takoma Park Church, was fired for choosing to pay his tithe to the local church rather than through the required channels (see separate story). This action raises many important questions which need to be addressed.

### How is tithe money supposed to be used, according to Scripture?

Laurence Turner, professor of Old Testament Studies at Avondale College, has studied this question extensively. He concludes that two thirds of the tithe in biblical Israel was used to support priests and Levites or those directly involved in the work of the sanctuary (Lev 27:30-33; Num 18:21-32). The other third of the tithe was to remain in the area that produced it and benefit the local people, including the poor (Deut 14:22-29). (Laurence Turner, *The Adventist Professional*, Sept. 1989) Only 30 percent of our current tithe funds are going to support pastors in the field. None of these funds are used to help the poor, and the local church has no say in how tithe funds are currently distributed.

### Do local churches have a biblical right to determine how some of the tithe money is used?

Every third year, the tithe in ancient Israel was not sent to Jerusalem; it was kept in the towns and used to benefit the needs of local Levites and to help "the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow" (Deut 14:29). Some have suggested that this was actually a "second tithe" in addition to what the people were already paying. But there is no direct evidence in the text to support such a position. Turner holds that "the tithe laws acknowledge the role of central authority but also show quite clearly that believers in local congregations have some right to decide where and how the tithe is spent."

### Should a minister or any other church member be required to pay tithe in a specific manner?

The professional clergy, or tribe of Levi, in ancient Israel did not receive an inheritance and was not required to pay any kind of individual tithe. Because, as Protestants,

we believe in the priesthood of all believers, we should not draw direct scriptural parallels between the Adventist ministry and the priests and Levites of the Old Testament. Neither should we treat ministers (or other denominational employees) in ways which compromise the confidentiality of their tithe paying. If our present model for paying tithe is not specifically grounded in Scripture, how can we discipline members who are convicted by the Spirit of God to pay their tithe to the church in a manner that seems more biblical to them?

### What does Jesus specifically say about tithe paying and money?

Jesus' three references to tithing in the gospels are used as examples of legalism or of a "minimalist approach" to God. What Jesus said on the subject of money was so radical, not only for our day but for his as well, that we tend to ignore it. Jewish literature before Christ did not directly praise either poverty or the poor. The rabbis specifically condemned "extreme generosity" (giving more than 20 percent of one's income to charity), and were often generous in their praise of wealth. (Norman Young, *The Adventist Professional*, Sept. 1989)

Jesus, on the other hand, specifically praised the poor (Luke 6:20, 21) and counted himself among the homeless who owned virtually nothing (Matt 8:20). He told the rich young ruler to give everything he had to the poor (Mark 10:21) and proved that this was no exception by making it a stipulation for all his followers (Luke 12:33). As Young points out, Jesus showed that "preoccupation with the tenth (tithe) had blinded the conscientious practitioner" to the true spirit of giving, and "one may give large sums of money to the church and still be greedy and exploitive."

### What role should the Holy Spirit play in the giving of tithes and offerings?

Jesus counsels each of the seven churches in the book of Revelation to "hear what the Spirit is saying;" and the Spirit is saying something different to each of these churches, based on their needs. The church of God is not intended to function like a military hierarchy where orders are barked down from the top and uniformly enacted in the "lower ranks." God's Spirit speaks to individual believers in local situations.

Centralized power can be dangerous. As Lord Acton put it, "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Although local Levites (priests) in ancient Judah were supposed to give to the high priests a tenth of the tithes they received, Josephus records how the high priests sent bands of ruffians to the threshing floors to seize the whole tithe by force. This chronicle might well serve as a warning that even God-fearing spiritual leaders in positions of high authority need to be held accountable to a system of checks and balances.

Some fear that more authority and power given to the local church will likely mean a move toward congregationalism. I for one would not like to see the church lose its world-wide sense of family and connection. I have experienced firsthand the hospitality and fellowship with other Adventists as I have traveled in more than 40 countries.

But I am not convinced that giving local congregations greater autonomy necessitates the demise of our Adventist global community or world wide networking. The Internet alone has increased our sense of global community exponentially. Movements such as Promise Keepers, as well as thriving churches (the Vineyard, Willow Creek, New Hope Community Church and the Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea), have demonstrated that networking and small groups are the wave of the future for God's people. I see congregational networking as a preparation for the soon fulfillment of Revelation 13. Once the beastly power is established, there will be no more institutional churches except those that have chosen to worship the beast. If we truly believe we are near the end of time, the day is coming soon when congregationalism and networking will be the only options for God's people. As a church, we must anticipate that day and be prepared for it. Part of that preparation certainly involves the empowerment of our people at the local level.

Solomon was not alone in his misuse of position and power to exploit the people of God. So today we must ask ourselves the questions, "Are the tithe funds being used fairly with regard to the local church?" and "Is the process of determining how these funds are to be used a biblical one?" If not, what will we do to ensure that we are paying tithe, not Solomon's tax?



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# Tithing as Sacred Ritual and Spiritual Discipline

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*Does tithing have anything to do with true spirituality, or is it a vestige of institutionalism, legalism and magic?*

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by John K. Testerman

**T**ithing. A musty institutional scent clings to the word. In the now-popular distinction between spirituality and religion, tithing clearly falls under the category of religion. The word also conjures up memories of kindergarten stories such as swarms of locusts passing over the tithing farmer's fields, while devouring the farms of disobedient neighbors. Does tithing have anything to do with true spirituality, or is it a vestige of institutionalism, legalism and magic? Answering that question requires considering the larger relationship of religion to spirituality.

## Spirituality Versus Religion

Spirituality assumes that human beings dwell in a spiritual, as well as physical, universe. It implies an inner world of the soul that we can either nourish or neglect. At a minimum, living a spiritual life means living in relationship to transcendent meanings and values. For Christians, the spiritual life involves an inner faith journey of deepening relationship with God. Spirituality is personal and private.

We nurture spirituality in the context of religion, "an organized search for the transcendent."

Religion is the form that spirituality takes on the cultural level, connecting the inner world of the spirit to the outer world of culture and history. Religion challenges our egocentricity, rescuing spirituality from a mere privatized, other-worldly experience unconnected to the social dimension. Religion says that spirituality also has to do with how you vote or spend your money and time—with how you treat your neighbor.

In contrast with spirituality, which is universal and has no boundaries, religion incarnates spirituality into the particular, giving it concrete cultural expressions with continuity in time. It therefore participates in the "scandal of particularity," manifesting itself in particular institutions, beliefs, customs, rituals and arts that are lived out in specific faith communities. Why is the tithe 10 percent of income? Why not 5 percent, or 20 percent, for that matter? There are no rational answers to such questions, as there is an irreducible, arbitrary element to religious customs and rituals, of which the tithe is a prime example. It is part of the nonrational language of religion.

## Language to Speak About God

Religion provides language to speak about God



John K. Testerman is Director of the Family Practice Residency program at Loma Linda University School of Medicine. During the last eight years, he has pursued an interest in spiritual journeying and spiritual disciplines.



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and spiritual things. It is important for our purposes to understand that this language is of two distinct types. The first type is rational discourse—what we think of as ordinary language—the word-based language that is spoken and understood by our conscious minds. It provides a framework of concepts and beliefs that ties all of life together into a coherent worldview.

But the soul does not speak the language of subject, verb and predicate, rather the nonrational, highly symbolic language of story, ritual process, drama, music, art, architecture, landscape, dance, poetry and worship. This second type of language, when it uses words at all, uses them as an artist uses paint, to paint word pictures for the imagination, to communicate truth that is beyond words. This is why our religious life and worship are full of music, liturgy and stories, and sacred rituals such as baptism and the communion service,

Christmas, Sabbath-keeping, and tithing. Participation in these symbols affects the soul at a deeper level than concepts can reach.

#### **Sacred Rituals**

By sacred ritual we set aside certain things or actions as sacred. Paradoxically, this ultimately abolishes the distinction between the sacred and the ordinary, in favor of subsuming all of life under the sacred. By letting the part stand for the whole, the whole is sanctified along with the part. The bread and the wine of the Eucharist declare matter a fit dwelling for the divine. The Sabbath samples time and finds eternity. Tithing takes a biopsy of the secular world of economics and proclaims it the Kingdom of God.

By participation in these sacred dramas or rituals, we enact the profound unity of the world under the lordship of God, and are helped to bring our inner and outer lives into harmony with it. The drama of tithing helps to heal the seeming unbridgeable split between our economic and spiritual selves, inviting us to enter the business world and make of it God's kingdom, using the power of money to do his will in the world. It

teaches us through participatory ritual that all resources are God's, and that we are his stewards in the world.


#### **Spiritual Disciplines**

Tithing is also a spiritual discipline. To most Protestants, the term "spiritual discipline" conjures up images of starving monks, praying and chanting for long hours on their knees in cold cells, hoping to win points with God. Medieval excesses gave spiritual disciplines a bad name. But spiritual disciplines have nothing to do with meriting God's favor. They are simply tools for helping us along our spiritual journeys. They prepare the soil of our lives to be open and receptive to God's initiative, as he may choose to be present to us in the inner world of the spirit or the outer world of human need. We may find that they are spiritually necessary choices.

Setting aside regular time for prayer, meditation and spiritual reading is the most basic spiritual discipline. Keeping a Sabbath, making a retreat to a quiet place, and participating in the liturgy and music of worship are also spiritual disciplines. Acts of service (not connected with our regular job) help us to see God in the face of the needy and to respond accordingly.

Tithing is a crucial spiritual discipline, because it strikes at the root of our addiction to money, which holds us in bondage to the world system. It is virtually impossible for a Christian to be effective in the world without dealing with this addiction. Placing our checkbooks under the discipline of tithing requires putting our whole lifestyle under discipline. It is probably the most challenging spiritual discipline of all. Practicing it for the right reasons can help to free us from our scramble for material security so we can better see and do God's work in the world.

#### **A Way to Encounter God**

The spiritual life is the encounter with, and journey into, greater intimacy with God. Religion is the social setting or vessel for the encounter with God. It is not itself that encounter. Religion provides community, language and a set of tools that connect into one coherent whole the outer world of people and culture with the inner world of spiritual realities and God. If there is excessive focus on the institution or its theology or behaviors at the expense of the encounter with God, a religion and its practices and spiritual disciplines, including tithing, may become idolatrous substitutes for the spiritual life. On the other hand, tithing, and other religious practices, can be indispensable aids to one's spiritual journey. 

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*Tithing is a crucial spiritual discipline, because it strikes at the root of our addiction to money, which holds us in bondage to the world system.*

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# Voices in the Wilderness

## Learning From the Independents

by Maryan Stirling

There's a steady trickle of mail onto my desk from little groups out in the hills or deserts. They have something to say that they believe I need to hear.

I don't throw that kind of thing away. It goes under "Ministries, Independent." And I read it. I owe it that much time, just for caring.

One tells me, from Oregon, I'm lost if I don't leave the SDA Church. Out of Babylon! Come out of her, my people. There's room in the file for that one. Another offers me a book, *Pretty Pastors*. I can figure out where that one comes down on ordination.

Thanks anyway.

Out at Yucca Valley I phoned a small group. A sweet voice suggested that I wait a while before coming out to see them. Their little medical mission isn't doing any business yet. A few blocks from Loma Linda University a home church meets. A week after I talked with the friendly host couple, a big envelope came from Maine. Two issues of a magazine called, *The Home Church*. Tells you how to form a church with a small group. Plus a thick tabloid with lots of cartoons. The Adventist church is fallen, fallen. Who really killed Abraham Lincoln? And Bill Clinton is a servant of you-know-who.

At North Fork (up near Yosemite) a gracious couple take time to answer my questions.

"Not to be nosy, but I'm trying to find a common denominator. Do you believe that perfection is attainable here on Planet Earth?"

"Oh, absolutely." No hesitation at all. And that's about what I was getting from every group I asked. The rest told me in

their publications. That may not be the bottom line, but it's the bottom line I got. Wherever the groups are, some of them are pulling away from the imper-

### ANALYSIS

fections of the church and its hymnal and its publications and its schools—and I've been there. Right where they are. The mindset is: If you're not perfect before Jesus comes, that's it. If you're not perfect before he gets to your name in the judgment-scroll, you're gone. If your children aren't perfect, they're lost and

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*I don't know how many little groups there are, meeting and praying and mailing out printed things. Hundreds and hundreds, I think, in this country. And in the Philippines and France and everywhere else. They even have a prophet in France. Her name is Jeanine Sautron, in case you want to know.*

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it's your fault. And if anybody else isn't ready and you could have gotten them ready, bad news.

I don't know how many little groups there are, meeting and praying and mailing out printed things. Hundreds and hundreds, I think, in this country. And in the Philippines and France and everywhere else. They even have a prophet in France. Her name is Jeanine Sautron, in case you want to know. The people I talked with don't give her much credence. Others do.

I worry about people trying terribly hard, because I've been there and it's a hard life. I'm beginning to reflect that maybe the pursuit of perfection is a

process. Like the Slough of Despond, it's there, along the way to the Celestial City, and you've got to go through it. There's a helper, isn't there, in Pilgrim's Progress? He stands at the far end and gives you a hand. He's got the gospel and you know it's good news. You might not know how good it is, if you never fell into the mud.

So there are hundreds of groups seeking perfection, and forty years ago there were hundreds of groups, and next year there'll be hundreds of groups getting sinless. But it's not the same people year after year. They go in; they come out. They grapple with reality and grow and find a Saviour. No, I shouldn't say "they" do that. We do. Include me in it. We learn. For some of us there's no other way. I actually went to Wildwood, Georgia, with my first husband and three sons. Little boys are a pretty good reality-check for righteousness. But it

takes time. Nobody can tell you the little group toiling up the ladder has leaned their ladder against the hen house and they'll only have to climb down again. You figure it out eventually.

The ones who stay, long-term, may be the ones who are getting the rewards: money, power, control of underlings, good housing. Add to that, that there are dear, dear saints who serve self-

lessly year after year, with no rewards that I can compute.

I really thought, when I started to work on this article, that there's a huge upsurge in new groups. I can't document it. There may be. I thought that the year 1996 is the year Ussher's chronology runs out. It's the end of the agenda—the end of the world—time to adjourn. If that's true, maybe someone can research it better. What I'm finding is that there have been little groups for a long, long time. And when I read their books and papers, I learn things I'd never learn anywhere else.

Some of it may be true. I certainly hope some of it isn't!



# The Good New Review Reviewed

by Roberta J. Moore

When readers of the *Adventist Review* started hearing rumors of change in what for nearly 150 years had been the “general paper” of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, reactions varied from “about time” to “I like it the way it is.”

The editor himself, William G. Johnsson, gave credence to what had been only rumor when he started writing about “the good new *Review*.” But even readers who had been hoping for change got a surprise with the monthly issue for the North American Division, dated April, 1996.

It started with the cover, in full color, showing a professional man in his seat by the window of a plane. His collar is open, the cuffs of his sleeves rolled up. The heading, “God at 30,000 Feet.” The same picture appears at the beginning of the article, which fills most of six pages.

Here is the experience of Kent A. Hansen, an attorney in Corona, California. His style is thoughtful but relaxed and conversational. At the end of his story—“just some story of a burned-out yuppie lawyer”—he speaks to the reader:

“If you don’t know how to start a relationship with Him, why not try telling Him what I did: ‘God, I want to talk to You, but I don’t know how.’

“He’ll do the rest.”

Most of the issue, “the good new *Review*,” is also relaxed and conversational. Editor Johnsson, for example, introduces a

column “written by two young bundles of pizzazz...”

Back in September, 1995, Johnsson had promised a major restyling, and under the

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title “Write Now,” he filled two pages describing what the *Review* wanted, what it did not want and how writers should go about getting their work accepted and published. It is probably fair to say that he caught some writers off guard with the new rates of payment.

*Of course, it’s not all brand new. Church officials and long-time Review staff members are still filling pages with material little different from last year, in the style faithful readers will recognize.*

“We’re looking for writers,” he said, “people with pens and a passion for God.”

Since then, as the staff get used to doing what they had dreamed about for a year, both contents and looks show a remarkable change: color on most pages, attractive layout (including a children’s page with clowns), features that are personal in nature, letters and church news.

Not to be overlooked is the return of Miriam Wood, long known for her “Dear Miriam” column. She is now the author of a feature she calls “Golden Rule Days,” to appear in the fourth issue of each month.

Of course, it’s not all brand new. Church officials and long-time *Review* staff members are still filling pages with material little different from last year, in the style faithful readers will recognize.

This probably relieved some; on the letter page of the last issue of “the good old *Review*,” (March, 1996) a writer from Dayton, Tennessee, wrote:

I have been a reader for about 40 years...However, now I have a concern. You are talking about the “new *Review*.” I don’t know if I like the sound of that or not. I love the “good old *Review*.” I hate to see it changed.”

To this the editors replied: “...don’t worry. We think you’ll find the new *Review* a beautiful blend of past strengths and present freshness.”

After five issues of the new *Review*, appearance shows a greater change than content. The two “young bundles of pizzazz,” for example, write about Sabbath observance and theater going. And while the editor in the first issue of the new *Review* points out details of its newness, he repeats the word “more”: more “God of the real world” articles, more letters, “news that’s more personal.”

And he goes on to say that several features, which he calls “your old favorites,” will continue.

Probably the staff of the *Adventist Review* would be the first to admit that their publication since April 1 has not yet reached the goals they have set for it.

One problem is that some pages look cluttered, given the number of short news and features. Faced with so much, attention may wander from one piece to another to another. The lines separating news items and the number of heads and subheads add to the clutter.

And some readers wonder why the *Review* relies so much on drawings with the wealth of available photographs, especially when the drawings fill a full page. Some, of course, are clever, such as the one showing a woman wearing seven hats, each with a different label. (April 25, 1996, p. 28)

By the end of April, letters giving readers’ reactions had not caught up with the changes.

But after nearly 150 years of “news and inspiration for Seventh-day Adventists,” the good new *Review* is probably for most readers welcome. It is to be hoped that even the long-time reader from Dayton, Tennessee, will acknowledge the improvement.



Roberta J. Moore taught writing for publication for over 30 years in Adventist colleges.



# MIRROR MIRROR

by Bonnie L. Casey

**O**ne morning not long ago, as my second-grader and I were eating breakfast in the kitchen, he looked at me curiously over his corn puffs and said, "You look different this morning, Mom. I don't think your makeup is working yet." I'm used to Conor's koan-like utterances, but this one stopped me in mid-bite. What did he mean, my makeup wasn't working yet?

I left the table and checked my face in a mirror. Granted, I don't spend much time on beautification rituals, and the light on my dressing table could be better, but I didn't see anything amiss. Just the middle-aged pallor I'm grudgingly getting used to.

All that day I was slightly on edge. I couldn't help wondering what else about my carefully constructed facade wasn't "working." How many of my other masks were slightly askew? What about the image of unflappable competence I try to project at work? What about my efforts to appear charitable, thoughtful, involved? Suddenly my son's offhand remark made me feel like some ancient Italian fresco in need of cleaning and restoration.

It's a truism that we all wear a variety of masks — one for work, one for church, one for our families, one for crowded elevators. Our personalities, while partially determined by DNA, are really very complex, sometimes flimsy edifices, constructed of various identities projected from within and imposed on us by others. Well-adjusted people are comfortable with their menu of masks and can shift smoothly from one to another without losing their basic integrity.

I said well-adjusted people. The rest of us are occasionally confused. One of my favorite TV ads, for our regional phone company, concerns two Elvis impersonators involved in a fender bender. As they confront each other pompadour-to-pompadour, Elvis No. 1 snarls, "Who do you think you are?" After a baffled pause, Elvis No. 2 replies, "Well, who do you think I . . . think I am?" It's a uniquely Western question.

When I grow weary of rugged individualism and the quest for identity, I sometimes envy a Native American, someone for whom spirituality means, not personal salvation and authentication, but harmony in the universe. What a relief to see yourself as part of

a larger community of living things, instead of struggling to get in touch with your inner child (or inner crybaby, as the case may be). Instead of being consumed with forging a unique identity, you could revel in being sister to the sky and water, brother to the wolf, and neighbor to all humankind.

I'm oversimplifying entire cultures to make the point that glorifying individuality is an alienating and sometimes exhausting enterprise. We Westerners are forever sorting, separating, categorizing, differentiating things, and ourselves, one from another. We

build fences, get tinted windows, make "Best and Worst" lists. Except on Super Bowl Sunday, we're not good at seeing ourselves as part of a larger whole.

I'm fortunate to be part of an effort to reverse this process; my neighborhood in Takoma Park, Maryland, has begun to organize.

A series of natural disasters and burglaries has made us trade some privacy for increased security. Every few weeks we meet in someone's home to share a potluck supper and information on crime, parking regulations, efforts to get a new stop sign, and whom to call when the storm drain clogs. We've learned the names of people we've lived by for years, and found out who's got kids, who's home during the day, who knows someone at the power company.

It was unsettling at first, after years of peering at each other through the curtains. But we've discovered we live among caring, interesting people. And during the Blizzard of '96 we pulled together in ways that made us grateful and proud.

Maybe I'm fooling myself. Maybe I'm not really changing my outlook, just adding another mask to my repertoire. "Look at me! The Good Neighbor." Like everyone, my identity is cobbled together and doesn't bear close inspection. Like everyone, I sometimes wonder if people are asking, "Who do you think you are?" I haven't solved that puzzle, but I've added another possible response: I'm your neighbor. Would your son like to play with my son for a few hours? Can I help you shovel your driveway? Can I bring in your newspaper while you're at the beach?

It's a small step in the long process of becoming. In the meantime, I'm getting a stronger light for my dressing table.

*...glorifying individuality is an alienating and sometimes exhausting enterprise.*



Bonnie Casey writes from Takoma Park, Maryland, where she devotes herself to her family, her work, gourmet vegetarian cooking, and mysteries written by British women.



# Walla Walla College Criticized

**W**alla Walla College received a barrage of sustained criticism from a conservative Adventist publication and also from the General Conference president. Robert Folkenberg attempted to persuade the college's president, W.G. Nelson, to initiate establishing a task force to examine alleged problems at the college. However, over the weekend of May 18, both the college constituency and the North Pacific Union constituency met in Portland, Oregon, and no one rose to criticize the Union's college.

In a 16-page broadside mailed to each member attending the Union constituency meeting and to parents of the college's students, Vance Ferrell's publication *Pilgrim's Rest* listed 11 charges of religious laxity, the lead item being the establishment of a support group for gay and lesbian students. Ferrell quotes liberally from *The Collegian*, the student paper, to make his points. Ferrell reprints a *Collegian* arti-

cle with the headline and lead paragraph: "Gay support group forms." "The Gay and Lesbian Christian Alliance, an organization made up of WWC staff and students, seeks to give support to homosexuals and to inform students on issues surrounding homosexuality."

One faculty delegate to the constituency meetings called the broadside "garbage." He stated that even one of his very conservative colleagues thought the charges were misplaced and some were in total error. Ferrell includes a challenge to the lay constituents to take back their college by following several steps, including demanding a discussion of "worldliness" at WWC and setting up a 60 percent layperson task force to study and report on the supposed problems.

Not only did the assembled delegates not follow Ferrell's directive, but after WWC president Nelson's report on the college, he received sustained applause.

Nelson referred to homosexuality on campus by suggesting that the delegates may have read of a gay support group. He acknowledged that the college accepts gay students, believing that the college is a place for all Adventist students, regardless of their problems, and the college seeks to help.

Earlier in the weekend, on Sabbath morning, Robert Folkenberg visited with Nelson seeking to persuade him that a blue ribbon committee should be established to look into areas of supposed deviance from the Adventist tradition on campus. Nelson, reportedly, resisted championing this idea, telling Folkenberg that there were established mechanisms for handling such questions, and that these avenues were available. Few constituents who met at the sessions on Saturday night and Sunday knew of the Nelson-Folkenberg discussion, but word of it quickly spread at WWC and beyond.

## Who Reads *Adventist Today*?

**L**ast Fall *Adventist Today* polled its subscribers (1300 responded) and found that readers, generally speaking, are highly educated, suburban, middle-aged, theologically moderate and congregation-oriented.

Following are specific characteristics of *AT* subscribers:

**Education:** 80% possess a B.A. or B.S., 28% hold an M.A., and 35% have a doctorate. Leading professional fields are: medicine or dentistry, 20%; religion, 15%; education, 13%.

**Home:** 55% live in suburbia, 35% in rural areas, and 10% in downtown locations.

**Age:** 50% of subscribers are 50-69 years old, 9% are under 39 and 9% are over 80.

**Ideology:** 60% see themselves as middle-of-the-road theologically, 25% are liberal, and 15% are conservative.

**Adventist doctrines:** Respondents were asked to indicate how they viewed themselves regarding the doctrines in terms of the following categories: very traditional (7%), usually traditional (44%), often non-traditional (31%), not traditional (18%).

**Church authority:** Respondents were asked where authority should be the strongest: Congregation (53%), Conference (17%), Union (6%), Division

(17%), and General Conference (7%).

**Church Priorities:** Subscribers ranked in importance several of the issues discussed at the 1995 General Conference session in Utrecht. The results follow in descending importance: How to interpret the Scripture (37%), Women's ordination (20%), World church financing (12%), GC Executive Committee and the next GC Session (7%).

The final option was: None of the above (25%). Those choosing "None of the above" could write in their own priorities, and a quarter of the respondents listed the priority of personal spiritual life, and nearly that many listed the importance of spreading the gospel.

*The poll was conducted by Dean Kinsey, past director of development for Adventist Today*