

**DENNIS LAWSUIT UPDATE**

NEWS • ANALYSIS • OPINION

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# ADVENTIST TODAY

VOL. 5, NO. 3

MAY • JUNE 1997

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Pastor Fired**

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**Book Plays Role in  
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## Worldview and Faith:

# When the Earth Was Flatter Than It Is Today

**EXCLUSIVE:  
Adventist Time of  
Trouble in Ethiopia**



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## Inside Adventist Today

# The Challenge of Blending New & Old

**Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.—Jesus**

**S**ome current events in Adventist congregations—two of which are reported in this issue of AT—raise a fundamental question: is our denomination sufficiently flexible to allow for (we're not talking about *fostering*) innovative approaches to non-traditional Adventists and their peers?

The "non-traditional" Adventists I have in mind are characterized by such traits as a thirst for contemporary spiritual equality, suspicion of bureaucracies, a quest for meaning and a need for community. Also, they generally happen to be people who are independent, educated and emotionally open.

These folk are not fulfilled by sermons that are long on Ellen White proof texts and short on today's human experience. The fact that the church service, evangelism and offerings have been structured in a certain pattern for a hundred years, does not impress this crowd.

These untraditional Adventists don't see the church as centered in Silver Spring or at the local conference headquarters building; they see church as God-among-us—right now, right here.

Have these free-thinking-and-acting Adventists been influenced by contemporary America? Of course they have. Just as those free-thinking Adventists of the last century were influenced by a Jacksonian America when, for example, health reform was a hot topic.

In fact, the Adventist pioneers did not criticize certain contemporary movements; they sanctified them, calling them "present truth." Thus the notion of teetotalism, though not advocated in the Bible, was seen by our forebears as a truth present for their own time.

### Adventist Pioneer Spirit

Regardless of the merits of innovations at the Sunnyside and Grace Place congregations,

at least this may be said: the Adventist pioneer spirit of reform and relevance is alive and well. The movement these congregations represent raises large questions for the denomination:

- Are such episodes indicators of a healthy change of attitude in the church, or are they events that evidence unwelcome deviance?
- What does it mean to be an Adventist? Assent to basic doctrines? Voluntary and positive identification with the church and its tradition? Involvement in the life of the church?
- In 25 years, will the denominational loyalty of today's older members (over 50) hold among the present younger members (under 50)?

### God Is Involved in 2001

As I see the honest restlessness of a number of modern Adventists, and as I witness among my Adventist university students a widespread disinterest in the organized church, I believe that the North American Division should take stock. As open, democratic groups often do, why don't we set up a task force of diverse and respected church people to look into and report on current trends in North American Adventism? For some, such a move would suggest doubt about God's former leading of our church. But I contend that it would indicate a belief in a living God who is as needed and as involved in 2001 as our pioneers knew him to be in the 19th century.

The traditional spirit of Adventism calls for a careful assessment of what the Spirit may be doing today that is new as well as old.

**Jim Walters**

**...Adventist pioneers did not criticize certain contemporary movements; they sanctified them, calling them "present truth."**





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People's worldviews have always been linked to their religions. The ancients believed wind to be a caprice of the gods who ruled over a flat Earth at the center of the universe. Today we struggle to integrate physical evidence with our belief in creation and with faith in our Creator.

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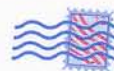
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# FIRST CLASS



Letters to the Editor  
Adventist Today  
P.O. Box 1220  
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## Walla Walla Religion Faculty

We read in the Jan./Feb issue of *Adventist Today* of the Portland meeting between Walla Walla Religion Professors and Conference Presidents. We have since learned more from very reliable sources about the issues involved.

We have been (and still are) very active members of the SDA family for over 50 years. We have contributed endless hours of service, and tens of thousands of dollars to "our church."

We have also come to realize that there is a difference between God's Truth, which is timeless, and what we used to call Present Truth, which is temporary and based on insufficient or transitory data. Issues that were paramount in our childhood and youth are no longer of significance. . . . God's Truth is never static, but always a progressive march forward. As you and we know from history there have always been those who felt they needed to cleanse the church from erroneous doctrines to preserve "traditional doctrinal formulation." We also know the sad results of this process.

We are very concerned and fearful that "our church" should repeat the fallacies of the past and think that Truth must be preserved by any human means, whether by psychological or other pressures, by censure, expulsion, or purging of any kind. . . .

As we see it, the future of "our church" does not stand or fall by the purity of its "traditional doctrinal formulations," but by how closely we "follow the example of Jesus. He went out into the market place, met people on their own terms and helped them. If they were sick, he healed them; if they were discouraged, he consoled them; if they were hungry, he fed them. Going back

to what Jesus did would be the most powerful soul-winning endeavor imaginable, because it isn't aimed at soul-winning. The best way to save a person's soul is often indirect—by focusing on their felt needs." (Adventist Futurist Leland Kaiser).

From what we have personally seen and heard, the Religion Faculty at Walla Walla

College is indeed following the example of Jesus. They are giving a message that is relevant to the future members of "our church," a message that will improve people's

lives, meet their unmet spiritual needs, meet them on their own ground, on their own terms. We believe that their unselfish, dedicated service is indeed of God, and that if their voices are stilled "the stones would shout out." God's Truth will always emerge.

*Hjaltar and Hanna Helmersen*  
Shoreline, Washington

## Burned, Bored, Bypassed

Has anyone written you about our new congregation in Berthoud, Colorado? "Grace Place" CAF is an experimental outreach project sponsored by the Christ Advent Fellowship (CAF). We have been meeting together in a rented high school auditorium since September 1996. Last week we had 453 present. We are ministering to the Burned, the Bored, and the Bypassed.

*Kenneth and Barbra Konrad*  
Loveland, Colorado

## Good Children but Unbelievers

John McLarty's article, "Good Children but Unbelievers" was of great comfort to me and I'm sure to many other concerned mothers. The reminder that God's grace covers all and that God sees the goodness in

each heart is very comforting to mothers. In this world of pretense and hypocrisy even in the church it is natural that young people would be turned off by it. Thank you for reminding us of that fact and for our hope in God's grace. Perhaps this article should also be published in another church paper which has a wider circulation.

*Bessie Siemens Lobsien*  
Redding, California

"Good Children but Unbelievers" reminded me of the oncology patients at Edward Hines, Jr., Veterans Administration Medical Center near Chicago. These patients had rough exteriors; but, once understood they could be thoughtful, kind, humorous, and teachable. I hope to see some of these patients again on resurrection morning, free of cancer and full of health and vitality and grace.

*Brit Stickle*  
Sedro Wooley, Washington

## Original Thinkers

Virtually every issue of AT includes a letter blasting the magazine for fostering controversy. I suspect that those who write such letters have never run afoul of mainstream, "red book," bureaucratic Adventism. There are, however, thousands who have dared to think original thoughts and who read no SDA publication other than AT. Crossing the "color line" in dating caused my expulsion from an SDA college. Bible studies with Brinsmead and Ford resulted in my parents' excommunication from the SDA Church. My father went to his grave as a non-SDA believer. My mother's only contact with the SDA Church is *Adventist Today* and she reads it from cover to cover.

Those who complain about your candid discussion of significant issues of our generation, have their heads in the sand!

*Vernon P. Wagner*  
Huntington Harbour, California

...there have always  
been those who felt  
they needed to cleanse  
the church...



## Why we need fresh viewpoints

Regarding letter from College Place, WA about questioning AT building faith: It caused me to think of my last 40 years of work training and working as a hospital and forensic pathologist, first at the L.A. County Hospital, then in Fresno, CA. During training, with a family of three to support, I doubled time at the LA County Coroner's office and at a Van Nuys Hospital emergency room.

When I came to Fresno I never wanted to go to court for a homicide again. But the training I had put me there frequently, not only with the hospital surgeons, but with the district attorneys and homicide crew. I let them know I wanted to know everything there was to know about any case in order to render the best testimony when questioned. One reason I had studied medicine was to see as much of life without experiencing all of it personally.

My cup nearly ran over and I am glad to be retired now. But while I'd rather see only blue sky, knowing the rougher side of life enables me to pass along warnings to my family.

Christ showed us the awful side in Gethsemane and on the cross so that we could understand. We still have choices only when we have the benefit of more than one viewpoint.

**T. Clint Nelson, M.D.**  
Fresno, California

## Hammill Interviewed

I appreciate the interview of Richard Hammill [March/April, 1997]. I do wish, however, that Walters had asked him how he reconciled God's creating "over long periods of time...new forms of life leading up to the final capstone," man, with the repeated Scriptural insistence that it was all done in a consecutive seven days—establishing there-with a weekly cycle, and a memorial day of rest/worship at the end of that week. He surely would have thought much about that. We are all in Hammill's debt for the years of devoted service he gave to the church. While I have appreciated his candor in the interview and also in his book *Pilgrimage* (1992) I wish that it had all come earlier. Sharing his views, and the reasons for them, while still in SDA educational leadership, could have made his impact more useful. Not doing so for reasons of "respect" and loyalty to the institutional bureaucracy implies rather that

it was too risky to have an open and inquiring, thoughtful mind in the assembly of often closed minds where he lived and worked. That he assesses the "top leaders" as little interested in the concept of a "first-class university," and deliberately organizing a Geoscience Research(!) Institute to prove a point of view rather than to grapple with reality as it comes, says more than one really wants to know about SDA leadership affection for academic excellence and objectivity. Hammill is neither the first nor the last to keep many of his thoughts to himself while in the rarified atmosphere of GCville.

**Frank R. Lemon.**  
Beaumont, California

## Global Mission

This letter is in response to our letter of September 3, 1996 which you published in the March-April 1997 issue of *Adventist Today*. We missed our original letter of June 30, 1996 in response to the article entitled "Global Mission Accountability Investigated," as well as Lawrence Downing's immediate response to our letter.

In addition, you deleted a significant portion of the second paragraph which would have provided improved understanding to the isolated letter. The most critical omission was "Elder Downing begins by stating that the 'Global Mission piece was not an investigative article.' " That is a curious statement given the title of the article "Global Mission Accountability Investigated."

We were challenging the lack of investigation in Elder Downing's original article entitled, "Global Mission Accountability Investigated," published in the May-June 1996 issue of *Adventist Today*. These two sentences would have clarified our complaint concerning the original article. Is it standard policy of *Adventist Today* to delete portions of Letters to the Editor?

**Stewart W. Shankel, M.D.**  
**George M. Grames, M.D.**  
Redlands, California

*Editor's Reply:*

*AT is pleased to hear from all readers. We are especially pleased with letters that comment*

*directly on articles that have appeared in the journal, or in ongoing discussions of such topics.*

*If readers send us other material we use our discretion in reproducing their letters.*

*We do exercise the prerogative to edit letters, occasionally shortening them to conserve space and to give readers the heart of the writer's argument. In doing so, however, we aim to retain the original wording of the author and to indicate with leaders wherever deletions occur. We regret if we deleted something you felt was significant. Your comments here may be of help to some of the readers. JHS*

## Theologians and Women's Ordination

As a matter of clarification to the fine letter by Carol Mayes in the September/October issue, I know that quite a number of my Andrews University faculty colleagues who are theologians (I am not) fully support women's ordination. Indeed, the retired dean

of the Seminary, Raoul Dederen, gave a major speech to that effect at the General Conference in Utrecht. In fact, it may well be that "the theologians at Andrews University"

which Ms. Mayes refers to may be in a minority among theologians here.

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

## Caring Counts

The March-April issue of *Adventist Today* was excellent. I especially enjoyed the interview with Dr. Hammill and the articles by Dupertuis, Mace, McGrew and McLarty. They seemed to me to make a very fundamental point: our ability to work with God to attract people to a relationship with Him will depend on our willingness to be tolerant, loving, honest, and accepting.

**Kenneth E. James**  
Tigard, Oregon

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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# Adventist Time of Trouble in Ethiopia

## SDA Faction Used Police Against Rivals

JIM WALTERS

*This account of the current crisis in Ethiopia reflects the experience and point of view of perhaps half of its 100,000 or so Adventist members. In view of the fact that the current leadership of the Ethiopian Union was endorsed and supported by the president of the General Conference and associate secretary Maurice Battle, Adventist Today contacted the latter for a statement of the GC perspective of the issue. He declined to provide information and referred us to L. D. Raelly, president of the Eastern Africa Division. Repeated attempts to contact Raelly proved unavailing. If we eventually succeed, AT will report his perspective in our next issue. —The Editors*

The Adventist church in Ethiopia is facing a formal schism, according to numerous reports reaching the United States in recent weeks. Despite several mediation attempts by General Conference officials including Robert

been illegally imprisoned without charges. These arrests stemmed from the victims' resistance to Tollosa and to his methods of gaining and holding control.

In an effort to silence all dissent, Pastor Tollosa and his hand-picked officers have fired 74 church employees since January. Over the last year, the same group has expelled from the country ten foreign missionaries and their families. Among those ordered to leave was Colin Richardson, ADRA director, with the result that SDA relief activities in Ethiopia are uncertain.

One missionary, Veslemay Hogganvik of Norway, was briefly imprisoned for her opposition to what she considered high-handed tactics of the Tollosa faction. A second-generation missionary, considered by many local believers to be "an honorary Ethiopian," she was then deported.

Opponents of Tollosa and his group accuse them of a variety of specific sins. Individual charges include corruption, embezzlement of church funds, bigamy, public use of alcoholic drinks, and sexual immorality. The newly re-elected treasurer

criticism by pointing to ethnic divisions within Ethiopia. "They claim to be defending the majority from 'oppression' from the Amhara ethnic group," commented Miss Hogganvik, a life-resident of Ethiopia and fluent in the national language. "The fact is that both of the rival candidates for union president were members of the Oromo group." Opponents of Tollosa come from all the major ethnic groups in Ethiopia, observers note.

### Police Control Employed

Beginning May 10, the main church in Addis Ababa has been the site of a remarkable demonstration against "church corruption." The protests began after the new Union leaders took the unprecedented step of dismissing the entire church board. With no visible leadership, the congregation at the thousand-member Filwoha church carried on an extended song service, refusing to stop when the new leaders of the Union tried to speak. As the songs went on and on, the Tollosa faction, thoroughly frustrated and embarrassed, resorted to calling the police, who had no idea what they could do about this "problem." During the following week, the Tollosa faction apparently discussed tactics with the police. In any case, 28 believers were arrested and taken off to prison from church—an apocalyptic scenario only dreamed of by most American SDA's. More church members were arrested the following week.

According to sources in Ethiopia, Pastor Tollosa has assured civil authorities that the SDA church is not a democracy, that laymen have no right to protest, and that he is simply carrying out his role as authorized by the Eastern Africa Division and the General Conference.

Although his critics reject his view of church governance, they do see the General Conference as playing a role in the crisis. After Elder Folkenberg's visit to Ethiopia, a group of Ethiopian Adventists wrote to him in protest: "From your message we understand that believers have no right to oppose the bad behavior of church leaders."

**"...these men have treated the church as their private business..."**

Folkenberg, about half of the SDA's in the east African country refuse to recognize the president of the Ethiopia Union, who claimed the office last year in a disputed election.

Folkenberg's visit in February had the effect of "emboldening" Pastor Tinsae Tollosa and his associates in the Union office. They began "to persecute their own members with impunity," according to an April 19 protest from a group of Ethiopian Adventists in the United States. Although Folkenberg met with police officials and Ethiopia's current president, at least 78 Adventist pastors and lay leaders have been arrested, and many of them have

of the Ethiopian Union has fathered two illegitimate children, according to the protesting Adventists.

"The basic problem is that these men have treated the church as their private business," charges Worku Negash, an Ethiopian-born American resident. "Like dictators in many parts of the developing world—or corrupt bosses in American cities—they have built mansions for themselves, demanding free labor from church members," he said. Several of the claimants to church office were under local church discipline at the time of their "election" to power.

The Tollosa faction has responded to all



The protests at the Filwoha church are likely to continue. A high-ranking police official warned congregational leaders that they would be arrested again if "disruptive" singing continued. "Come prepared to arrest us," was the response. Perhaps in reaction to this determination, Union leaders have recently adopted a new tactic: using armed policemen to bar selected "trouble makers" at the door of the church rather than making arrests after church. On one recent Sabbath more than one hundred believers were prevented from worshipping.

The men claiming the offices of Union president, secretary, and treasurer have, in the meantime, hired armed body guards from the ranks of unemployed former soldiers of the communist dictatorship deposed in 1991. The protesting Adventists, however, have been entirely peaceful.

Tollosa and his associates "are unfit to be church leaders," says one lay leader at the Filwoha church, "much less spiritual guides." He emphatically rejected the idea that the conflict in Ethiopia is an ethnic conflict. "This is a lie to distract outsiders from the real problems."

According to this church member, the current crisis has been "only made worse" by the involvement of Elder Folkenberg and other world leaders, including Elder Maurice Battle. Though these Americans have been repeatedly told about the problems in Ethiopia, they have so far refused to act or even to investigate the charges against the Tollosa faction.

"Our only hope is for the General Conference and the Eastern African Division to step in," declares a former church administrator deposed by Tollosa. "This is the only way that the persecution of faithful Adventists will stop," adds a layman active in the protest movement.

The crisis in Ethiopia has deep roots. The Adventist work in this old, long-independent nation began in 1907, though it was seriously disrupted by World War I and a brutal Italian occupation (1935-41). After 1941 SDA missionaries played a crucial role in building a strong national church. The growth of the church was also aided by the friendly attitude of Emperor Haile Selassie and his government. Until the revolution of 1974, the Adventist

church made great strides, building institutions and developing a large group of educated national workers.

Between 1974 and 1991 Ethiopia's communist government severely persecuted Adventists, closing many churches and imprisoning, even torturing church members. Only with the overthrow of this regime was the church able to resume steady growth.

### **Tollosa Orchestrates Coup**

The self-destruction of Ethiopian Adventism began in 1995, in what some members call a "creeping coup" orchestrated by Tollosa. Then a field (conference) president, Tollosa and his supporters boycotted the Eastern Africa Division session in November 1995, demanding more representation from his conference. In a gesture of conciliation, Division officials postponed the election of Ethiopian Union officers until March 1996.

When Pastor Fekadu Olana defeated Tollosa 25 votes to 11 in the March meeting held in Nairobi, Kenya, Tollosa's faction protested the result and demanded a suspension of the election until "reconciliation" could be arranged in Ethiopia. But after Division leaders agreed to these new demands, Tollosa proceeded to replace delegates who had voted against him, ignoring the reconciliation process completely, according to Olana and others. Finally Tollosa was declared elected by a rump Union session held in Addis Ababa in November of 1996, with two of the four field presidents absent.

The fate of 100,000 Adventists in Ethiopia is a matter of intense interest to hundreds of believers scattered around the world in an Ethiopian diaspora. Events that once would not have been reported for months are now reported immediately. Prosperous and highly educated Ethiopian migrants use e-mail and long distance telephone calls to keep track of a rapidly deteriorating situation. Many of them are ready to provide financial support to beleaguered fellow believers in the old country.

"Such outrages would never be tolerated in Ontario or Texas or New South Wales," commented one expatriate. "Why do church leaders do nothing about a crisis in Ethiopia? Maybe they don't expect much from Africa."

## **Update on Ethiopia:**

ADDIS ABABA—After months of preparation, a constituency meeting of the Filwoha church convened June 15, with more than 500 people in attendance. Since current Union leaders have forbidden the use of the church building for this purpose, the constituents were forced to meet in a rented hall.

In a seven-hour marathon session, the constituents unanimously passed resolutions:

1. rejecting the election that brought Tollosa and associates to power,
2. condemning the immoral lifestyle and "lack of spiritual commitment" demonstrated by the current Ethiopian Union officers and many of their appointees,
3. denying that the current crisis is based on ethnic conflict,
4. resolving "to continue the peaceful struggle against the current church leaders in Ethiopia,"
5. opposing all attempts "to split the Ethiopian Seventh-day Adventist Church, under any pretext,"
6. inviting back "missionaries recently expelled by the current church leaders,"
7. reaffirming support for "the legitimate leaders" of the Filwoha church and the Central Ethiopia field,
8. appealing to the Ethiopian government to respect religious freedom "and leave the internal church problems to the members of the church to solve,"
9. condemning the illegal firing of church employees and their appointees by the current Ethiopian Union leaders and urgently calling for their reinstatement,
10. affirming "our strong commitment to pay our tithes and offerings to the Central Ethiopian Field leaders, who continue to stand in opposition to the current Union leaders and their appointees."



# Book Plays Role in Church's Reform

## Former SDA's Book Affects Worldwide Church of God

COLLEEN MOORE TINKER

**S**abbath in Crisis, the 1990 book published by former Adventist pastor Dale Ratzlaff, played a significant role in the Worldwide Church of God's change from a legalistic, old covenant cult to a mainstream evangelical church, claims Ratzlaff.

"I sent a few copies to 300 W. Green Street, Pasadena, California, the headquarters for the Worldwide Church of God [WCG]. Slowly the sales picked up from all over the country," he recounts. "Hundreds of individuals in the WCG personally ordered *Sabbath in Crisis*, and I have received many letters from them thanking me for it."

Others claim that the church's new theological understanding came about because many of the leaders and pastors began doing graduate work at Christian universities, such as nearby Azusa Pacific University, where they learned about salvation by grace and faith.

The full story, asserts Greg Albrecht, editor of the bimonthly magazine *Plain Truth*, is that the Holy Spirit was leading pastors and laymen independently to an understanding of salvation. Ratzlaff's book and Christian graduate work as well as a number of other factors came at the right times to affirm many of the members' growing convictions.

The Worldwide Church of God, founded in 1934 by Herbert W. Armstrong, grew out of the Church of God (COG) Seventh-Day which originated in the Millerite movement of the 1840's. During the 1860's, the COG Seventh-Day separated from the fledgling Adventists of which they had been a part and formed a separate denomination.

Armstrong's church, the Worldwide Church of God, was strictly Sabbatarian. It also espoused the clean/unclean meat dietary laws and observed all of the Old Testament feast days. Conversely, they did not observe Christmas or Easter because of their pagan origins.

Additionally, the WCG had a strong focus on prophecy and end-time events. They observed strict dress codes and held tithing and the soul-sleep of the dead as central doctrines.

In 1989, after Herbert Armstrong had died, three of the men who were in charge of answering theological questions that arrived in the mail at church headquarters were Joe Tkach, Jr. (now the WCG pastor general), Greg Albrecht, and Mike Feazell (now executive director). Some letters questioned things they'd never heard of before. Independently they began to study.

"I began to discover that many things I had believed weren't true," Tkach said. "At first the three of us were afraid to talk to each other about what we were discovering, but when we finally did,

mend it to other pastors. In this region alone somewhere between 300 to 500 books got into church members' hands."

Pastors and laymen in all regions of the U.S. began ordering and recommending the book.

To congregations meeting on the first Sabbath in January, 1995, every WCG pastor played a two-hour video tape in which the pastor general announced that the church was officially moving from a legalistic viewpoint to an acceptance of salvation by grace and faith alone. This change meant that the church would no longer require the old covenant mandates such as the feast days, the seventh-day Sabbath, the food laws, and exclusivity.

"The hardest part for me was emotionally accepting that the Sabbath was not a New Testament command," says Lloyd

**"There is a movement in the Adventist church that reflects the one in yours."**

each of us had independently come to the same conclusions."

In the early 90's someone recommended Ratzlaff's book. When Tkach read it, he found it to be clear, logical, well-organized, and articulate. He began to recommend it to fellow church members and personally distributed a case of books to his friends.

### Doctrinal Transformation

Across the country other WCG pastors and laymen were simultaneously discovering salvation by grace and faith. "In the middle of 1994," says Lloyd Garrett, a pastor in Washington, D.C., "I was dealing with doctrinal changes, especially the Sabbath. Another pastor recommended Ratzlaff's book. It did a better job than I did articulating the change from the old covenant to the new. I began to recom-

Garrett. "But if Jesus saved me, He finished the job on the cross. The Sabbath doesn't complete my salvation, and it's not a requirement."

"We are learning that there's not just one true church," comments Greg Albrecht. "We see part of our current ministry to be reconciliation," he continues. "We have gone to Church of God Seventh-Day congregations and apologized for our arrogance and our judgment of them. We also went to Washington, D.C., and apologized to the Seventh-day Adventists at the General Conference headquarters for being haughty toward them."

### A Movement in Adventism

"The Adventists were gracious and gave us a grand tour of their headquarters," Joe Tkach, Jr. remembers. "During



the tour about a dozen people escorted us. Still, throughout the tour, different people made their way through the entourage and pulled on my sleeve. Each of them said, essentially, 'There is a movement in the Adventist church that reflects the one in yours.' Apparently many Adventists believe that salvation is by grace alone with no old covenant requirements, but it seems to them that church leadership is not addressing this."

Meanwhile, sales of Ratzlaff's second book, *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*, as well as *Sabbath in Crisis*, are increasing in Adventist circles, Ratzlaff reports.

"Observing the seventh-day Sabbath isn't an old covenant obligation," claims one Adventist theologian. "It's one denomination's way of celebrating divine creation. Sunday observance celebrates divine resurrection."

Today, the main opposition to the Worldwide Church of God comes from the Church of God Seventh-Day and from Adventists. Both denominations say the WCG is wrong about the Sabbath.

But the church remains unruffled. "Our transformation was a move of the Holy Spirit," Greg Albrecht affirms. "It was not accomplished by people of importance or position. It was a work of God."

## For further reading:

*The Plain Truth*  
The Worldwide Church of God  
300 W. Green St., Pasadena, CA 91129  
Phone: 1-800-309-4466

*The Sabbath in Crisis*  
*The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*  
Life Assurance Ministries  
19109 N. 71st Dr., Glendale, AZ 85308  
Phone: 1-602-572-9597

The views expressed in these publications do not necessarily represent those of *Adventist Today*.

# Dennis Lawsuit Update

ALBERT DITTES

David Dennis's suit against the Adventist church for defamation of character is set for February, 1998, at the Montgomery County Circuit Court in Rockville, MD. In the suit David D. Dennis v. Robert S. Folkenberg, et al., Dennis originally accused the General Conference of wrongfully terminating his employment, of breach of contract and of defamation of character. The court granted a motion to dismiss the first two charges. The February trial-by-jury will determine the validity of the alleged defamation. Events leading to this lawsuit began with the December, 1994, termination of Dennis as director of the General Conference Auditing Service "for engaging in conduct unbecoming an ordained minister and an elected leader of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," according to a press release of the Adventist News Network (ANN).

Dennis countered by filing suit against the church in February, 1995. His court documents accuse the General Conference of "publishing their defamatory statements to the world...not only to other members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but also to the public at large via press releases and the Internet."

The suit also claims the General Conference fired Dennis "because of false allegations of sexual molestation and lying."

The Adventist News Network press release stated that a woman went to General Conference authorities in mid-1994 accusing Dennis of fondling and attempting to have sexual relations with her while she was a high school student in Singapore and later having actual sex with her in Nashville, Tenn., when she was an adult. A subsequent investigation showed Dennis to have been in these two cities at the times the woman accused him of these improprieties. "Because Mr. Dennis was an ordained

minister and elected leader of the Church, Elder Robert S. Folkenberg asked attorney Walter E. Carson (from the office of the General Council) and Elder Kenneth J. Mittleider (a Vice President) to investigate the matter," according to ANN.

"During the course of the investigation, Mr. Carson visited EA (the woman) in Ohio. During that visit, EA gave Mr. Carson a sworn affidavit which set forth in significant detail her claims of sexual abuse and adultery."

An article in *Pilgrims' Rest* newsletter, published in Beersheba Springs, Tenn., implies the General Conference dropped Dennis because of his trying to expose financial misconduct in several

**...the General Conference dropped Dennis because of his trying to expose financial misconduct in several Adventist institutions.**

Adventist institutions. "Because of his position, Dennis was well acquainted with a number of irregularities at the General Conference and elsewhere in the world church," the article states. "He had repeatedly reported these improprieties in the handling of money and related matters to the proper authorities, but his concerns were consistently ignored."

"Mr. Dennis' allegations regarding his attempts to expose corruption in such issues as the Davenport investments, Harris Pine Mills, salaries in the Adventist Health System, the 1990 Nominating Committee process, the



Adventist Development and Relief Agency, 'the Worthy Student Fund,' Global Mission, the auditing staff, the operation of union offices, the employment of Elder Ronald Wisbey, the parsonage exclusion, and alleged business dealings of Elder Folkenberg are completely without merit and irrelevant to the disciplinary actions taken against him," the ANN press release says.

"It is not clear from the pleading the exact nature of the employment contract," wrote William P. Turner, judge of the Circuit Court for Montgomery County, Maryland. "The allegations in this case are that the plaintiff was wrongfully discharged because he was attempting to prevent diversion and misuse of corporate assets. A complete review of all the facts alleged in the complaint does not establish a cause of action for wrongful discharge. The only Defendant that could possibly be charged with unlawful discharge would be the General Council of Seventh-day Adventists. However, they are permitted to conduct their hiring/firing as they see fit."

Judge Turner dismissed the breach of contract charge because he saw no repre-

sentation of any contractual obligation of the General Conference to Dennis. The judge wanted more facts before also dismissing the defamation claim.

### Defamation Claim Basis of February trial.

In its reply to the Dennis suit, the General Conference claims that the court lacks judgment in an internal affairs case such as this and that the complaint "fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted." The General Conference also denies that it fired Dennis because of his whistle-blowing or that it published "defamatory and injurious statements" about Dennis. The General Conference "further denies the implication of alleged corruption in the General Conference," or that Dennis "ever attempted to audit and control alleged expenditures made by and for the benefit of Defendant Folkenberg, members of Defendant Folkenberg's family, or anyone else, including the alleged 'political cronies' of Defendant Folkenberg."

The General Conference reply to Dennis's suit refers to Dennis's December 20, 1994, statement to the General Conference executive committee: "At no

time during his statement did Plaintiff ever suggest that he was being wrongly accused of sexual misconduct because of his alleged efforts to expose corruption in the church."

"This action intrudes into matters protected by the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, and the Court cannot adjudicate plaintiff's claims without violating these provisions of the First Amendment," Folkenberg's answer states. It was filed separately from the General Conference response. Replies filed by Kenneth Mittleider and Walter Carson make the same claim.

"Religious doctrine is not an issue here," says the Dennis opposition to the motion for summary judgment. "This Court should not permit Defendants to hide behind the First Amendment's protection of religious expression to avoid liability for their very secular civil wrongs."

In the meantime, both sides are now going through the discovery phase. The attorney for Dennis did not return calls asking for details of any audits allegedly exposing corruption in the church.

## Key dates in the Dennis vs. Folkenberg lawsuit

- 1976 ..... David Dennis becomes director of the General Conference Auditing Service
- 1990 ..... Robert Folkenberg, in one of his first acts as General Conference president, allegedly attempted to keep the Nominating Committee from reelecting Dennis.
- Mid-1994 ..... An Ohio woman told General Conference authorities of alleged sexual harassment of her by Dennis. The General Conference Administrative Committee appointed a five-member panel to investigate.
- December 19, 1994... Administrative Committee recommended termination of Dennis and withdrawing his ministerial credentials. Dennis chose not to appear before this committee
- December 20, 1994... General Conference Committee voted to terminate Dennis, to make a final settlement with him and to withdraw his ministerial credentials
- December 29, 1994... Dennis employment termination effective
- January 6, 1995..... Dennis declined to present additional information or evidence in writing to committee
- February 22, 1995.... Dennis filed a lawsuit against the General Conference in Circuit Court for Montgomery County, Maryland
- April 14, 1995..... General Conference filed a Motion to Dismiss the Complaint
- July 27, 1995..... The Maryland Court dismissed the wrongful discharge and breach of contract counts but retained the defamation complaint
- February, 1998 ..... THE CASE SET FOR TRIAL



# Walla Walla Alumni Support Religion Faculty

JIM WALTERS

**W**alla Walla College's beleaguered School of Theology faculty received a welcome show of support over the alumni homecoming weekend in late April.

A gift of \$25,000 was presented during the alumni banquet to the school as a sign of moral support, and alumnus Bruce Hamm, who led the collection, called the amount merely "the tip of the iceberg of support." After W.G. Nelson, college president, gave an address to the alumni later in the weekend, they passed a unanimous vote to go on record expressing confidence in and appreciation for the theology department of Walla Walla College. The vote also included an amendment showing full support for the college administration. Further, several hundred students had already signed a campus petition which officially went into circulation in early May.

In accepting the unrestricted \$25,000 gift, Douglas Clark, head of the theology department, said, "Professors are supposed to be able to craft words and sentences, but I can't find the words to express the gratitude that I have for this donation." Clark called the gift "tremendously significant." He suggested that the money would be used to benefit WWC students.

After Nelson's address on Sunday, a lively discussion about the theology faculty ensued. One alumnus suggested the need for clarification, asking if there was a "problem between conservatism and liberalism."

## Committed to Present Truth

"That might be the quick and dirty explanation," said Nelson. "We take scripture seriously at this institution. No one has come forward to say so much as that [the religion faculty is] outside the 27 [denominational fundamental beliefs]." Nelson stated that the religion faculty is committed to the concept of "present truth." Nelson acknowledged

that there has been official secrecy about the discussions between church administrators and religion faculty, but he predicted that it will end soon. (The school paper, *The Collegian*, ran a front-page story in April citing the popularity of the January/February issue of *Adventist Today* in the library, because it contained information on the topic not available on campus.)

## Polarities Greater Now

Nelson discounted rumors that a General Conference official had said that two members of the department would be fired at the end of this academic year. "There are rumors that theology members are going to be fired or that decisions have already been made. That is not the case."

Nelson acknowledged that "polarities are greater than in the past, and there is a greater rigidity than we have seen previ-

ously." Referring to Adventist church history, Nelson affirmed that, "We have never been fundamentalists in this church; we are not fundamentalists. And there is presently a wave of fundamentalism in the church and in this country that scares me." Still Nelson said that current discussion is moving toward more positive relations between the college and church administrators. However, Jere Patzer, North Pacific Union president and chairman of the college board, declined an invitation to attend the weekend meeting with the alumni.

The college board recently set up a nine-member committee to assess the questions that have been raised about the School of Theology. The committee includes the North Pacific Union secretary and two conference presidents, and knowledgeable people perceive it to be comprised of a representative mix of persons. The committee is expected to do its study this summer and make recommendations in the fall.

THIS STORY IS BASED PRIMARILY ON TWO ARTICLES IN THE MAY 1, 1997, ISSUE OF THE COLLEGIAN.

# E-MALE Newsletter Online

**A**n electronic newsletter for Adventist men has just begun. Its objective is to affirm, encourage, and challenge

Christian men as leaders at church, community and home. Founder and editor Dick Duerksen, director of communication for the Columbia Union, chose the name E-MALE from contest submissions.

"We are in no way a response to the women's ministry movement; rather, we're meeting a perceived need for men," says Duerksen. "We want men to feel good about themselves."

This means E-MALE has not taken a stand regarding ordination of women and has nothing to do with the new journal *Women of Spirit*. It also has no political agenda and will run no denominational news.

"We will deal only with subjects relating to men," Duerksen says. "Our goal is to help make life fun as well as inspiring for men, to give them something to chuckle at as well

as to supply them with information on resources. For that reason I announced a tractor pull in Ohio as well as a schedule of men's religious retreats."

In the first three issues, E-MALE ran sermonettes, calendars of events, lists of books, golfing, health and marital tips, and inspirational stories and quotes.

The magazine is free by E-mail only, although Duerksen says subscribers are welcome to print and distribute copies. Though the magazine is prepared for the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Duerksen says he has heard from people all over the world—South Africa, Singapore, China—wherever E-mail can go.

To subscribe, send your E-mail address to [duerkssen@bigfoot.com](mailto:duerkssen@bigfoot.com), an address to be posted on the North American Division Web Page starting in July. Adventist men are also welcome to forward it to their friends.



# Finding the Grace Place

RAYMOND COTTRELL

*"The ultimate issue is whether a church, a conference and ultimately Adventism can make the necessary transitions to be relevant to thinking, searching Adventists...the fate of Adventism [hangs on] its ability to meet the challenges of our modern society...to venture towards making Adventism relevant for the next century."*

—Steve Charbonneau, member, Grace Place

**P**astor Clayton Peck and his "burned, bored, and bypassed" parishioners at Grace Place in Berthoud, beside the northern Front Range of Colorado, are experimenting with what they hope will prove to be the best way in which to resolve the issue of Adventist relevance.

Involved are such matters as the relationship of the local congregation to the conference, the Sabbath morning wor-

less peripheral. Vital questions indeed!

Pastor Peck and those associated with him insist that they are committed

## ANALYSIS

Adventists and that Grace Place must remain an integral congregation of the Rocky Mountain Conference. It is an experimental "company" under the jurisdiction of the Conference Executive Committee. It began operating on September 14, 1996.

### Former Adventists Attend

Most of the five hundred or so who attend the two worship services each Sabbath are former or inactive Adventists. Attracted by the warm-hearted fellowship they encounter and a worship service planned with them in mind, many non-Adventists also attend. The two Sabbath morning services are "very contemporary." The sermon focuses on the gospel and a living relation-

the sisterhood of churches, and this action must be taken soon."

"It is not Adventist enough," others complain.

As might be expected, there is some basis for these complaints. A majority of the members are "disenfranchised members" from area churches. According to one observer, "some of the brightest and most venturesome" members of nearby churches "have migrated" to Grace Place, along with their tithes and offerings.

In a letter to conference president James Brauer, another comments that "area churches have suffered significantly from the 'intrusion' of Grace Place into their 'space.'"

Some want to shut it down for theological reasons, others for more pragmatic, self-serving reasons. "There just isn't any Adventist church meeting the needs of inquisitive Adventists or youth within so many miles that it frightens you," says a member.

### Most Important Crisis

According to Aldo Ramos of Grace Place, "This debate is not about Grace Place, but about the denomination as a whole." It is "the most important crisis Adventism is facing," and "we here at Grace Place just have the privilege of being the visible focal point of this debate."

Calvin Tininenko, also of Grace Place, writes, "It is becoming more and more apparent that the real issue is the role of the local church" and that "many of the tensions" are "related to church structure, more specifically church finance and power," which need to be "overhauled." We need to eliminate ineffective programs, and some of the levels of our self-perpetuating bureaucracy, which is "fraught with inefficiency and ineffectiveness."

"Is a top-down organization biblical?" asks Grace Place member Paul Foss.

Pastor Clay, as he is known to his parishioners, prefers what he calls "attraction evangelism." His major objective is to make the services at Grace Place "seeker-sensitive" and designs them with these guests in mind. Typically, he says, we Adventists

**"It is not a true Adventist church," he protests, and "is deeply flawed." It "must be rejected from the sisterhood of churches, and this action must be taken soon."**

ship format, whether evangelism should emphasize distinctive Adventist doctrine or focus first on leading people into a saving relationship to Jesus Christ, how tithes and offerings should be divided between the donor church and the conference, and whether all doctrines are more or less of equal importance or whether a distinction should be made between essential core doctrines and others that are more or

ship with Jesus Christ.

Inevitably, any departure from traditional ways of doing things attracts criticism and sometimes determined opposition. Grace Place is no exception. Victor Issa, a local elder and Sabbath School teacher in the nearby Champion Academy church, has been one of its most vocal critics. "It is not a true Adventist church," he protests, and "is deeply flawed." It "must be rejected from



"...have put more energy into persuading other Christians to join us than into reaching totally lost people with the gospel. Our typical style of evangelism has been to hide away from the world with a fortress mentality.

### Primary Goal: Introduce Christ

"Sometimes we have placed larger emphasis on getting names on our books than on getting their bodies in the pews." His primary goal, he says, "...is to introduce people to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and then help them grow as Christians."

This approach has resulted in many becoming Adventists. Others identify with Grace Place as their home church without becoming Adventists. The church should be "...a place for sinners to come and find unconditional love and acceptance; a place where people can come just as they are and begin to consider the relevancy of Christianity, the claims of Christ, the offer of salvation, and the call to discipleship," Peck says. It should be "a place where people can grow at their own pace without anyone judging them. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. We intend to reverse the traditional evangelistic formula and emphasize fellowship first, rather than doctrinal understanding and assent."

One day Pastor Peck's mail included a letter that said, "I recently attended Grace Place. I have never been in a church that made me feel so comfortable, so accepted—and I was born and raised as an SDA."

In a letter to Conference President James Brauer, Grace Place member Aldo Ramos wrote, "Grace Place, thanks in part to Clay, is preaching the gospel as I've never seen or heard it in an Adventist setting. Grace Place is not just an experiment; it is a success story. It is evidence that God can work wonders, if we only drop our traditional baggage, and let Him work unfettered through us. Adventists used to speak, longingly, of the latter rain. Well, put on your swimming trunks, 'cause It's Here Now. The Kingdom of God is at hand."

## First Women's Resource Center Opens at La Sierra

RAYMOND COTTRELL

**I**t's new. It's a first for Seventh-day Adventists. It's the Women's Resource Center at La Sierra University in Riverside, California.

The idea originated with Madelyn Haldeman, professor of New Testament studies at the university, who with Sandra Hodge and Ginger Harwood developed a proposal that was formally voted by the university board in September 1996. A search committee proceeded to look for someone qualified to direct WRC, and in January of this year Kit Watts, for the past ten years an assistant editor of the *Adventist Review*, accepted the university's invitation to be Founding Director of the Center. She appeared on the campus early in May.

Having served the church in various capacities for nearly thirty years, Kit Watts is uniquely qualified for her new assignment. The locale of her service had included the Communication Department of the General Conference, the book editorial department of the *Review and Herald* Publishing Association, the pastoral staff of the Sligo church in Takoma Park, Maryland, the James White Memorial Library at Andrews University, and a return to the General Conference as assistant editor of the *Review*.

### Twenty-five Years' Experience

Participation in numerous General Conference conferences relating to the role of women in the church over the past twenty-five years equips Watts with a broad background of information and expertise. First was the historic Mohaven Conference in 1973, where a consensus developed that women could make a far greater contribution to the life and mission of the church than at present. A slight majority at a series of three similar conferences with representatives from the world field during the late 1980's concluded that qualified women should be eligible for ordination to the gospel ministry. It became evident, however, that the church in developing countries is

not ready, yet, to ordain women.

One important result of this protracted study by the General Conference is that more than a thousand women are serving the churches of North America as ordained local elders. Also, women in ministry now enjoy equality with their unordained male counterparts with respect to officiating at baptisms and weddings. They also enjoy equality of remuneration.

It is appropriate for the Women's Research Center to be located within the Southeastern California Conference, which employs sixteen women as ministers. Four of them have been ordained to the gospel ministry in appreciation for their dedicated ministry to the churches they serve.

### Women Evangelists

Extensive historical research by Watts has revealed that during the first century of Adventism women had a far more important role in the life and mission of the church than in more recent decades. Some

## ...women had a far more important role...

of them proved to be effective evangelists, and others distinguished themselves in administrative roles.

Until such a time as funding for the Women's Research Center makes a full-time budget possible, Watts will also serve two days a week as assistant for communications to President Lynn Mallory of the Southeastern California Conference.

Kit Watts has stated that she fully respects differing opinions in the church with respect to the role of women. "We must be willing to listen to one another and to respect one another. We must look for common ground. We must be sincere and honest with one another in spite of our differences. We must also respect cultural and theological differences, but what is essential in Adventism transcends all of these differences. We need to work together in all areas that are essential."



# Adventist Historian Reflects on Work at Spielberg's Holocaust Foundation

DOUG KASISCHKE, M.A. in History from University of Chicago

*In the wake of the acclaimed "Schindler's List," director Steven Spielberg launched a huge, \$60 million project to capture the eyewitness testimony of some 50,000 aging Holocaust survivors and to create an archival database using multiple media. — Editors*

**I** work at the Survivors of the Shoah Foundation for Visual History. Each day I use a computer to view and index videotaped testimonies with Holocaust survivors. This is rewarding work. It allows me to participate in the preservation of a vital part of recent history and at the same time encounter fascinating perspectives on the world around me. These testimonies are inspiring accounts of people who struggled with and triumphed over adversity. They also give compelling insights into a troubling period in modern history.

The spectrum of themes rendered by the stories in these interviews gives me food for thought daily. In the future, when the interviews are made available to the public, I hope they will have a similar effect on others. The following is a reflection on some of the insights these interviews can yield.

## Evil, Not Psychotic

In their stories the survivors often recount the seduction of many Europeans by Hitler's fascist regime. These stories remind the viewer of the pervasiveness of evil and how susceptible people are to the dark side of human nature. The Nazis, and those who helped them, were evil. They were also normal. Often people create fancy linguistic

diversions when talking about evil and call evil people sick or crazy. Yet in the stories of these survivors, the viewer is confronted with the terrifying normality of evil. Many survivors relate how previously congenial non-Jews would suddenly and viciously turn on their Jewish neighbors. Others express their bewilderment as they discovered how well-dressed, impeccably mannered men and women could be monsters. Though there were certainly psychos among the Nazis and their allies, the vast majority were not operating under a psychosis or any other mental malady. They were quite sane, and yet they became monsters. They were evil. And through these sto-

There are other aspects of the survivors that are not so admirable and which challenge the sensibilities of the viewer. Yet the compelling nature of all the stories forces us to conclude that what happened to them was unjust. Each story illustrates the truth that, saintly or not, all people deserve to be protected from senseless violence and persecution.

## Goodness Lights the Dark

Finally, most survivor interviews reveal the persistence of goodness in spite of the most horrible conditions. Almost every survivor has at least one account of someone rising above their lot in life to help others. They almost came to expect evil from all non-Jews during this period, yet some gentiles resisted the temptation and saved the lives of people they had no legal or cultural reason to help. In a moral world where good was bad and bad was good, behavior such as this was extraordinary. Within the darkness of the Holocaust, the light of goodness shone brightly. These interviews with Holocaust survivors confront us with truths that should not be forgotten.

This is why the Holocaust and its survivors deserve our attention. It warns us of our capacity for evil and reminds us of the basic value of each life, despite individual differences. It can lift our attention out of the mire and show us the hope of rising above our all-too-human condition.

**They were quite sane, and yet they became monsters. They were evil.**

ries, the viewer may come to realize that there, but for the grace of God, go we.

## Survivors Not Simply Good

In revealing their humanity, the stories of Holocaust survivors also serve as a reminder of the value of human life. Their lives are laid relatively bare in front of the camera. They speak of their sorrows and joys, failures and achievements, regrets about the past and hopes for the future. As a result, the survivors, like anyone, resist sentimentalization and simple categories like good or bad. There are aspects of each survivor that are quite admirable, standing in sharp contrast to their detestable captors.

## Coming next issue...

### A Look From the Inside

- The 1888 Message
- The Charismatic Movement
- Living the Adventist Lifestyle



# When the Earth Was Flatter Than It Is Today

MAX GORDON PHILLIPS

**B**ible writers thought the earth was flat," I confidently told my new acquaintance across the Sabbath dinner table.

"Oh? And how do you know that?" He was a bright, educated young man recently hired as a science technician at Lawrence Livermore Laboratories in California.

I quoted from Exodus 20: "...anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."

"And what does that prove?"

"It shows that the world is like a house with three floors. The top floor is the 'heaven above.' The ground floor is the 'earth beneath.' And the basement is the 'water under the earth.' All three are flat. That's the way the world looked to them, so that's the way they described it."

"Doesn't prove it," he said, quoting from Isaiah 40:22: "He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth. . . ." He

said that showed they knew the earth was curved.

"But a circle is flat." I protested. "It has only two dimensions. Earth's surface is curved into the third dimension. Isaiah was just describing the horizon. When you follow the horizon the full 360 degrees with your eyes, you seem to be standing in the center of a flat circle."

But instead of being convinced, my new acquaintance only became angry. I was reminded of the saying, "a man convinced against his will. . ."

That conversation took place many years ago. And I've learned some hard lessons since. Here are three of them.

## **Lesson No. 1: Nurturing relationships is as important as understanding physical reality.**

Many Christians identify their worldview inseparably with their faith. If you tamper with their worldview, you threaten their faith, and that is a relationship offense. Jesus did say, after all, that it's better to have a millstone hanged about one's neck and be drowned in the sea than to offend one of the "little ones" who believe in him.

## **Lesson No. 2: Worldviews do change, but only under extreme duress over a long period of time.**

And maybe only with a change of generations, the children managing to entertain the new concept, but their parents passing on to their eternal rest, essentially "... of the same opinion still."

Time was, for instance, when nearly all Christians held to a literal reading of Ecclesiastes 1:5: "The Sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteneth to his place where he arose."

For Christians of the 16th century this meant that the sun literally traveled around the earth. The planets, too. In fact, everything in the sky circled a

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motionless earth. It was part of their worldview. Known as the Ptolemaic system, this idea placed human beings at the center of the universe. It was an indispensable article of faith, a creed, a point of fundamental belief. Disbelieving it was heresy and could be a matter of life and death.

Case in point: Two Italian Christian academics, Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei.

• 1583. Galileo is studying medicine at the University of Pisa, while Bruno, an ordained minister, is hounded from his teaching position at Protestant Oxford University near London. Bruno's crime: teaching a new worldview, that of one

Campo di Fiori in Venice, tied to a stake and burned alive.

• 1632. Galileo publishes a book, "Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems." In it the new Copernican system devastates the traditional Ptolemaic. As author, Galileo himself does not take a personal stand.

• June 21, 1633. Galileo, in his own heresy trial, is found guilty of holding and teaching the Copernican heresy and ordered to recant. In response the 69-year-old scientist, now everywhere renowned, "abjures, curses and detests" his error. As a result he is permitted to live out the remaining (eight) years of his life on his own estate, but under house arrest.

on forming reasonable explanations of the geologic record instead of continuing to argue over the observations?" This question seems to imply that all existing creationist explanations of the geologic record are unreasonable. "Whether we believe in an old earth or a young earth, neither science nor the Bible is at fault," Hare writes, "but the interpretation or explanation of either or both is controversial."

This statement seems to imply that all existing creationist interpretations of either science or the Bible or both are in dispute and remain unsettled. But far from advocating adoption of evolution as a worldview, he seems merely to be calling for a more data-inclusive creationist worldview.

And indeed, as a worldview, scientific evolutionary theory is neutral. It just ignores both human spirituality and the hunger for divine creation. As spiritual beings rather than automatons or androids or servomechanisms or "human doings," we simply demand more. A more data-inclusive creationist worldview must encompass and marshal and ultimately command all the observations Hare has mentioned and more, much more. "I have only scratched the surface," he says. Here are two of his examples:

• Existing creationist concept: Most of the fossil animals and plants lived at the same time and were destroyed in the Flood. Hare: "This concept does not match the geologic record." "Human fossils are not found with the dinosaurs or trilobites."

• Existing creationist concept: Radiocarbon dating is unreliable. Hare: "Radiocarbon dates of artifacts and fossils showed ages much greater than 6,000-10,000 years." "I was interested in disproving radiocarbon methods." "I researched another dating method—protein analysis." "I found that the results of protein analyses agree with radiocarbon dates."

But "forming reasonable explanations of the geologic record" seems an impossible task if disproving scientific dating methods remains the *modus operandi* of choice. I believe a radically different approach is necessary. At the outset I would suggest that we:

• Stop fearing and/or worshipping sci-

## MANY CHRISTIANS identify their worldview inseparably with their faith. If you tamper with their worldview, you threaten their faith...

Nicolas Copernicus (1473-1543). An astronomer, Copernicus inferred that the earth and all the planets circle the sun. He wrote a book saying so, but he was savvy enough to wait until his deathbed to let it be published.

• 1593. Galileo is teaching mathematics and astounding the European scientific community with his experiments in physics at the University of Padua in Venice. Also in Venice, Bruno, in his mid-40's, is arrested and jailed for continuing to hold to the Copernican system.

• 1597. The 33-year-old Galileo writes to astronomer Johannes Kepler admitting that early in life he became convinced that the Copernican theory is true, but that he never says so openly for fear of ridicule. Meanwhile, Bruno's heresy trial continues apace.

• February 8, 1600. Bruno's seven-year trial ends in a conviction. After his sentence is read he tells the court: "Perhaps your fear in passing judgment on me is greater than mine in receiving it."

• February 17, 1600. Bruno, in his early 50's, his tongue in a gag, is escorted to the

• A generation later. The Copernican system, for all practical purposes, has won the worldview struggle.

### Lesson No. 3: Let there be light rather than heat.

Today yet another worldview struggle pits Christian against Christian. At issue: How old is the earth? Or more to the point: How old are its fossils? It is usually characterized as a conflict between "creationism" and "evolution." But I see it as more an effort to come to terms with scientific data without forgoing the essence of Christianity.

Geophysicist P. Edgar Hare apparently does also. In his article, "Geological and Geochemical Clocks: Time for a Reasonable Explanation" (AT, Sept/Oct., 1994), he lays out the problem. According to scientific conclusions drawn from the geologic record:

• The radiometric age of the earth is 4.5 billion years.

• Abundant fossils appear as early as 600 million years B.C.

"Is it not time," Dr. Hare asks, "to work



# Science and Our Understanding of God: A Response to Phillips

GREG BILLOCK

**S**peaking as a scientist who is also a Christian, I find myself in substantial agreement with Phillips. One thing I would expand on is his excellent point that we are all spiritual beings. For science, this means that spirituality cannot be “checked at the door” to facilitate the positivist dream of theory-free observation. Science must include the development and testing of theoretical frameworks. This inevitably has spiritual ramifications, simply because the metaphoric and poetic faculties of our brains call us to draw spiritual inspiration from our observations of nature. That is, science (as in so many of our pursuits) is intrinsically a spiritual process, with spiritual consequences. This is not something to be overcome, but to be embraced. One area of observation which brings me a wealth of spiritual insights is modern astrophysics, specifically the Big Bang theory.

## Spiritual Insights of Big Bang

Whatever the opinions of the Bible writers about the surface of the earth, we can be fairly confident that they did not believe, as I do, that the universe began in a compact state of unbelievably high energy which exploded into being some fifteen billion years ago. I think the Big Bang theory can offer us significant suggestions in construing our spiritual lives. There are many metaphoric and poetic properties of the theory that can be

tapped for spiritual insights. I'll explore here only a couple of the most salient.

The key poetic aspect is that in understanding the universe more correctly, we understand God more fully. This incorporates the idea of surprise: no one foresaw that we would come to believe that the universe began in the way we now think it did. The universe (and God) will continue to surprise

**I think the Big Bang theory can offer us significant suggestions in construing our spiritual lives.**

us, to overturn familiar pictures of reality. Since the Big Bang theory is a model of the origin of the universe, it can serve as an anchor point for the authority of the revelation of nature about God.

## Indescribable Power of God

One facet of the Big Bang that I find awe-inspiring is the peek at the almost indescribable power which we must ascribe to the nature of God. The force and power of the Big Bang are unimaginable; we try to describe them with numbers, but even these are too large to grasp. Energies are focused to such enormous proportions that they begin to affect the very laws which govern them. The fabric of space-time seems torn from its moorings. The spiritual implications of this revelation defy words but inspire reverence.

The inescapable metaphor of the Big Bang theory is birth. The image of God

birthing the universe in violence is very powerful and dramatic. Human cycles of birth, growth, and death are mirrored in the universe at the largest scale. The fine-tuning of the universe is reminiscent of the fine-tuning of the conditions in the womb. For reasons we do not fully understand, our universe is fine-tuned for prolonged existence (making life possible within it). The spiritual implica-

tions are that in this birth event of tremendous power and distance, the existence of creatures such as ourselves was being made possible.

Another aspect is the spiritual consequence of living in a universe with a finite past. Our universe is not in a steady state—it is still evolving and becoming. We can identify ourselves and our species as part of this cosmic process.

The central spiritual lesson I take from the Big Bang is the vision of human beings as microcosms of the grand processes that govern the cosmos on the largest scale. When I discovered the parallels between the very large cosmos and the life of humans, I felt I was on a key path to the discovery of God in nature. I was excited to see our own development reflected in the development of the universe. It is a miracle that we are able to comprehend so deep and rich a story.

ence and realize that it simply does not operate in the spiritual realm. In short, “Be still and know....” Accept scientific data strictly as such and not as spiritual data or worldview data or truth in the highest and best meaning of the word.

- Recognize the supremacy of spiritual over material concerns in human worldviews.

- Embrace creation—not “creationism”—as a spiritual reality that exists beyond the grasp of science and cannot even be addressed by it.

- Allow and encourage prophets—rather than scientists or theologians per se—to lead the way in creating (1) an expanded worldview and (2) a higher, broader, deeper concept of God that is no longer too small and too weak to encompass, marshal and command all the scientific evidence.

Tolerate, accept and even value a greater diversity of ideas in the meantime. Why diversity? Hear Paul:

- “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is nei-

ther male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28, RSV.

- “Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all.” Colossians 3:11, RSV.

For me this means, “Here there cannot be small-worldview Christian and large-worldview Christian. Neither can there be short-age creationist and long-age creationist. For we are all one in Christ Jesus, and Christ is all, and in all.”



# The road personally traveled:

a Christian's reflections on his spiritual journey.

DICK WINN

**W**e spoke across two bowls of soup at The Good Earth, our first conversation in two decades. Because we had been very close friends in high school, it unsettled me to learn that her life had been disquieting, even wrenching, since her college years.

"I set out to find meaning, a pattern of truth, that could stretch as a seamless whole from my most private reflections clear out to the cosmos." She spoke with a quiet passion that reminded me again why our teachers had regarded her as likely the brightest student to have attended our Adventist boarding academy. She never took life lightly.

"I read famous authors and studied leading scholars. I even joined an ashram for several years to absorb the full teachings of a noted guru. I looked for some authority who could tell me the truth. But through many painful experiences, I learned I could trust none of them. And only then did I discover"—and she

looked intently at me, the pastor—"that I could determine for myself what is so."

Though I had built a successful career that included warning people about the dangers of following other religious leaders, I was not ready to include my own religious tradition in that caveat. More precisely, I was not ready to

include myself. I had several graduate degrees in theology and knew Greek and Hebrew. Surely I was in some ways more qualified to define ultimate reality, to answer her questions, than she was for herself. If not, what of my career? The empowering of a self-defined, responsible person to pursue her own spiritual meaning-making surely could not take priority over the primacy of faith-community-as-authority.

## Church: Pathway to Achievement

In the sleep-robbed nights that followed our conversation, I began to allow that not all of us have experienced our church-of-origin in the same way. For some of us, it has been an early pathway for achievement, a reinforcement of early hopes, fears and attachments. It had focused youthful energies on worthy goals and lasting values. For those who found ease with religious terms and forms, it was certain, gold-plated affirmation, a recognized form of divine approval. It offered campus leadership and a promising career pathway. And especially for us young men, with our Alpha Male need for control, a religion built on cognitive truth-claims offered ample opportunities to Be Right.

For others, however, their faith community contained elements that were toxic, draining, confining. Especially for some women, it may have reinforced their self-image as the silent, submissive listener. Some had internalized the often-heard instructions to "distrust self," to be suspicious of one's feelings, intuitions, reasoning, and one's perception of data. They would see their faith community as a set of

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unchosen attachments, of unexamined fears and prejudices. With dismay, some came to realize that the only alternative to trusting themselves is to trust someone else, some definer of reality as truly finite as themselves.

My friend at The Good Earth had cautioned me that one cannot count a faith community as universally good—neither that it is often good for all people, nor even that it is always good for some people. The truth is that our faith tradition comes as a mixed bag. And for some, that mix as a composite whole is hard to defend.

A favorite Adventist activity (and certainly so among the readers of this journal) is to carefully define what one means when saying, “I am an Adventist.” We take careful pains to differentiate ourselves from those at the other end of the liberal/conservative spectrum, from those who voted otherwise on women’s ordination, from those whose fundamentalism is more explicit than our own. Indeed, we each claim a large scope of freedom to choose for ourselves how to appropriate our faith traditions.

A key step in being a spiritual adult is to own this fact. The foundations of personal spirituality require a new level of honesty and candor in admitting that we do in fact each decide for ourselves what is so. It means admitting that, even as we eschew those who have defined truth differently from the way we do, we are engaged in exactly the same process. Claiming allegiance to a faith community only narrows the options; it does not end the process. We must admit that every perception of the Divine has human fingerprints on it and can be held only tentatively. It means that even the most cognitive, doctrinally-grounded, key-text-based of religions are still a mixture of voices, and that no members are exempt from the need to select from among those voices. Those who do not admit this are targets for the next cult.

I am persuaded that it is a vulnerable spiritual infant who does not own the high right to set one’s own spiritual course. The forces which shape our spiritual values are multiple. They include other thoughtful people, caring parents and friends, great books, favorite songs, and enduring religious traditions. Personal spirituality begins when one accepts the individual need to assign each of these forces some weight, some priority, some relative power.

## **I’m Accountable For My Choices**

This focus on the individual’s right, the solitary soul’s necessity, to process truth for one’s self is not some easy liberalism. It is not an adolescent rebellion against the authority of the group. Indeed, this is the single most frightening aspect of adult spirituality: I am accountable! There is no one else to blame. No one else is my specialist. There is no voice more penetrating than my own. No one “gets” my questions as clearly as I do. No one has to live more fully with the consequences of bad choices (or the rewards of good choices) than do I.

Indeed, as Erich Fromm argued in *Escape*

ful in this actual, present world. These inner passions are far more personal than the “tinkering with ideas as with toys” that once flavored much of my religion. There is less concern about thinking a certain way so that a later life can be awarded. Instead, I am more absorbed with the majesty of life right now. And if living this life with fullness and relevance doesn’t matter to the gatekeepers of eternity, then I’ll take my chances elsewhere.

It is not easy for me to admit that I had become a specialist at living other people’s lives. But now, I discover, I get to be a specialist at living my own life. I knew well what the community of faith expected of me.

Indeed, this is the single  
most frightening aspect of  
adult spirituality:  
I am accountable!

From *Freedom*, the dreadful accountability of individual freedom is so terrifying that most people will gladly hand it over to anyone who claims privileged access to the Divine. Many religions create a powerfully co-dependent blend of those who need certainty sitting at the feet of those who promise to deliver certainty. And neither side dares tamper with the formula.

But this is not spirituality.

## **A Personal Definition**

What, then, do I mean when I speak of spirituality? (Please recall that this is my personal narrative, not a mandate or directive for others.) For me, spirituality has to do with a process of personal growth and becoming. This is not some self-centered pop-psychology, but our awareness of the infinite value of life, of living, of fulfilling in the highest sense the meaning and purpose for being alive. It matters profoundly in the context of all life and all time. This longing we feel for wholeness leads us ultimately, therefore, to transcendent issues.

Spirituality is my recognition of an inner longing to be more authentic and more honest, more real and compassionate, more use-

I had left little room for defining my own self, casting my own directions. And while this discovery is not, in itself, a core piece of spirituality, there is clearly no true spirituality without it. For spirituality is either a self-directed, self-validated journey or it is not a journey at all. While this ownership of self-direction has not made me indifferent to my community of origin, it has lessened its ability to define my spiritual agenda. Some have regarded this as indifference on my part. And I understand that concern. Religious leaders (such as myself) have taught us that, whatever we may say about personal freedom of thought, in the end we must be loyal to the group. But even though we all seem endowed with a certain primordial longing for attachment and belonging, it is not automatic that this will always find expression in a church fellowship. Church-joining is not innate to spiritual life.

I have embraced something of a self-imposed discipline to see if I can discuss my spirituality without relying on the paradigms and terminology vested with meaning by usage within a church—any church. Can I challenge my students, for example, to embrace spiritual goals without their thinking I’m pushing a church-joining agenda, or



requiring allegiance to a Christian worldview? Is spirituality a universal human capacity that can be evoked without needing a prior catechism in doctrinal studies from any denomination or religion? Does the sacred in fact blend seamlessly with the whole of life? I believe that it does. And my private discipline has worked.

### Words Deliver Insight or Abuse

If, on the other hand, an appeal to familiar religious terminology and rituals adds power and insight to an individual's spiritual becoming, then I rejoice in their use. The story of Jesus will continue to call attentive hearers to new levels of acted love, justice and freedom from oppression—even though his story has often been exploited in the interests of preserving power.

I have become increasingly aware how some religious terminology has become a vehicle for abuse and oppression. Fundamentalists of almost every persuasion have evoked God's endorsements on their oppression of women, their stultifying of the scientific process, their disregard for the dignity of life, and their arrogance in presuming to speak directly on behalf of the Divine.

This rethinking of the locus of spiritual conversation, this shift away from "sacred language" toward a vocabulary more responsive to human experience, has led me to invest my energies toward more pragmatic goals. For example, I can stand in a pulpit and assert almost anything I wish about God, and no one will likely know whether or not I have spoken the truth. I can assert that God saved a certain person from a fatal illness, caused a certain calamity, predicted a certain event through prophecy, answered a prayer in this way, and so on. And no one can test my assertions.

On the other hand, I can say that children thrive when their parents listen to them with respect, free from judgment and anger, while still holding them accountable for their choices. And we can watch children benefit as a result. We can advocate that all humans have inherent value, regardless of gender or race, and see hostility cease as this truth is embraced. Much God-talk can be void of all mechanisms for validation. But I can be held directly accountable for the veracity of what I say on the human scene. As John said, "No one has ever seen God, but God himself is manifested among us when we love one

another. (I John 4:12). When I stepped back from being a professional theologian, I found myself being held to a more immediate standard of process.

The theological enterprise in the Christian tradition has, in my observation, become quite irrelevant, detached, even irresponsible. I am weary of the ideological food fights launched by those who believe they can merchandise in certainty. I am far more fascinated with the sense of mystery that transcends certainty. I am seldom inclined any longer to tell people what they should believe to be so. I am far more inclined to invite them to stand with me in awe of an unfolding awareness of life and the vast complexity of the universe.

### Ambiguity Embraces Mystery

I have learned that I can function quite well within ambiguity, to say with lightness and freedom, "I really don't know." I am continually surprised at how few things I really need to know for sure. It is far more honest for me to embrace the complexities of life, the unknowns in the face of mystery, than to create bumper-sticker-size truisms around which True Believers can rally.

For that same reason, I find it difficult to complete sentences that begin with, "I am a . . ." Most titles which name a group or ideology carry too much foreign cargo. They are like rubber gloves over my fingerprints, dulling my identity.

Similarly, I am not confident that ancient civilizations held more privileged access to the Divine than does our own. I doubt that pre-scientific understandings are better vehicles of faith than the post-rational vision of the universe available to us today. While an appropriate commitment to the scientific method of inquiry holds great threat to fundamentalist religion, it holds immense promise for one's spirituality, for it continually brings us against the mysterious upper limits of reality.

### The Community of Faith

None of us start a spiritual journey ex nihilo. Most of us have a specific history within a faith community that has shaped our vision and given definitions to our words about ultimate things. We can tell our stories to our church-based friends, and they recognize the feelings. They remember the same rituals, subscribe to the same patterns of delights and fears, appreciate the same heroes

of the faith, and retell the same founding stories. This is very basic stuff in all our lives. And we do well to celebrate its power.

As we take increasing ownership over the direction and depth of our spiritual journeys, we may not always find full congruence with the expectations of the faith community. We may conclude that some of what we learned about fear and guilt, about superiority and exclusivity, is groundless. But I doubt that this makes necessary a complete break from one's formative network. I have found it useful to supplement my need for community with what I regard as "boutique fellowships"—those serendipitous, one-of-a-kind encounters with a person of depth, when joy and honesty break forth in the unplanned moments of real life.

And I claim the right, indeed the necessity, to review what I have drawn from my faith community, setting aside that which does not nurture spirituality. Belonging to a church is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end. And that end has much to do with the spiritual depth and vitality of its members. Often, the same community that presses its members up against the boundaries of the eternal may also teach them about favoritism, judgment, and pettiness. These are dynamics that kill spirituality. They must be discerned and removed.

But then I come full circle. I cannot both take ownership of my spiritual health, and then blame my faith community for anything which stultifies spirituality. Accountability ends blaming and judgment of others. If I am free from asking my church's permission to embrace a new spiritual insight, I am also free from blaming it if that permission is not freely granted. I need never view the church as some sinister entity, bent on controlling my life; for it has no controls I have not granted it. And the implied social contract between myself and the church, often formed in my youth, can always be reviewed, recast.

Spirituality feels like a perpetual thrust into new territory. There is less that is familiar about the journey than I often wish. So I have come to enjoy those people, those experiences, those aspects of my own religious heritage, which understand my sometimes bewildered gaze. I need people who will hold my sweaty hands, but never call me to retreat. And occasionally I find such fellow-travelers within my faith community!



# A Response to Winn's Reflections

DUANE COVRIG

**W**inn shouts out: "Take responsibility for your own spiritual life!" However, there is a social naivety in much of his arguments. The individual is left too alone, too isolated, too unconnected and too unnourished by spiritual community.

Sure, communities can hurt, but they are essential for healthy spiritual development. Winn's article itself is a testimony to this fact: it is a significant revision due to earlier feedback. Such is the nature of the dynamic relationship between self and community. Development is only possible in such a relationship. Winn fails to capture that dynamic relationship in this essay.

Winn and others seem to be shopping for what cannot be found—a romanticized self that is able to live in a simple spiritual purity, unruffled by social constraints. For such persons the unbridled natural self is seen as having a beauty and nobility that the community-constrained self can never achieve. Away with community constraints! Let the soul soar in its own natural discoveries! Away with authority which challenges the self! On to the utopia of individuality. I do not think such a utopia exists. However, if it does it must look more like hell than heaven. Even God operates under communal constraints. Such is the nature of the self.

## "Self" Must Have Society

George Herbert Mead appropriately contends that there is no self outside of society. True human identity, even the

experience of personal spirituality, is a complex creation which involves community as well as individual choice. Even personal spirituality is nurtured, understood and challenged by a community of others' experiences.

The "solitary soul's necessity" may dictate that "no one else is my specialist" or that no voice is "more penetrating than my own." It may also mean that

"no one 'gets' my questions as clearly as I do. No one has to live more fully with the consequences of bad choices (or the rewards of good choices) than do I." However, should we believe that such a solitary soul is a healthy spiritual self? Usually it isn't. In fact, the self that believes that the conse-

quences of a personal choice are mainly to be felt by the decider is more often than not the unhealthy self because it is no longer a responsive self.

## Spirituality Must Have Community

Yes, spirituality is about authenticity, love, acceptance, relevance, and responsiveness. But one does not achieve this spirituality alone. Is community life only an unhealthy step toward the compromise and constraint of the self? Are all inherited ways of knowing antagonistic to the authentic self?

I can almost glimpse my natural self, and see flashes of my pure identity, stripped of any community defined self. There I go, wandering alone in the world—unconnected, uncommitted, free-flowing, robustly individual,

liberated, owing no one anything, passionately free. But then I wake up and realize it is just a dream, and later, in the soberness of reason, I recognize it as a nightmare. The self must be created, and the community must help in that creation. It is a malnourished self which makes no commitments and has no community to which it is held accountable. Such a self leaves a job when it hurts, leaves a family when they become burdensome, and abandons friends when they are discovered to be imperfect. Winn does not want such a disengaged self.

## Communities Foster Growth

However, when Winn addresses community in his concluding comments, he does so after already situating the individual as beyond the community and even as functioning better off without it. Instead of positing the individual against the community, we should consider the types of communities which foster healthy development of personal spirituality. We need not select either self or community over the other. Winn has selected the individual, others have picked community. Exclusive focus on either misses the truth.

We get more healthy spiritual communities and individuals when we more openly discuss and appreciate the dynamic relationship between the two. I am sensitive to Winn's concern that ultimate spiritual experience is a personal, not a community, choice. However, I remain more optimistic about the role—indeed the necessity—of community.

**Duane Covrig** teaches ethics on the faculty of religion at Loma Linda University. He is completing a Ph.D. in education at University of California Riverside. He and his wife Lori have two children.



**It is a malnourished self which makes no commitments and has no community to which it is held accountable.**



## Sunnyside Church Pastor Fired

CONTINUED FROM BACK

Bretsch's attitude toward his dismissal was conciliatory. He asked the Sunnyside members "to be graceful with those who have worked diligently to make this day happen as well as our conference leaders whom you may disagree with." Bretsch was offered a paid 4-month

"open assignment" with the conference "for the purpose of seeking another suitable position in ministry outside the Oregon Conference," stated Birch. Instead of accepting this offer, the pastor requested and has received a severance package. Bretsch is

expected to be offered a pastoral post with the new congregation, but his interest is unknown.

On the first Sabbath of June associate pastor "Duff" Gorte preached the sermon at Sunnyside and therein told the congregation he was resigning. He was later approached by the new independent congregation, a group that contains several wealthy members, and invited to be their pastor. He is considering their offer.

## A Sunnyside Church Member Writes

**W**e have a real tragedy going on at our Sunnyside Church. Robert Bretsch came to us from the Union College Church five years ago. He has preached the pure gospel each week and given us such a wonderful picture of God as an accepting Father. He has brought progressive ideas and programs to our outreach, which have been the source of attracting additional members. His wife, Beverly, has a master's in counseling and has provided a much needed service in helping people solve their problems.

We have a formal, traditional style of service with classical music. When the celebration congregation led by Pastor David Snyder broke up a few years ago, many of those people joined Sunnyside. In an effort to accommodate their desire for a celebration style of worship, Bob instigated a Praise Service, which runs concurrently with the regular service. This was well attended and served the needs of a portion of our congregation.

About four years ago when Bob was doing a series on ways of praising God, he ran across a Messianic Jewish group and invited them to perform a traditional Jewish worship dance at the close of his sermon. The dance was beautiful and artfully done, and most of the audience loved it and were intrigued. This led to weekly worship dance classes at our church. It has been a wonderful fellowship, and we learned a meaningful new way to worship God. The group started small and soon grew to where there were about 50 people in attendance each week.

Bob also had a burden to reach the

unchurched. It was his idea to start a Saturday evening program with an informal structure, where people who were not used to attending a regular church would feel comfortable. There were about 30 unchurched people attending each week—people who would not be reached in more traditional services.

When the local conference could not fund the additional pastors that these ministries required, the Sunnyside members were willing to provide salaries for about three

**We can no longer give generously to support ministerial leadership that disregards their constituency's desires.**

pastors, which we paid for in addition to our regular tithe. There were also some members who were willing to supply the pastor with various pieces of equipment he needed, such as a copier and fax machine for his home.

The upshot of all this was that the conference finally fired Bob. The congregation was shocked. We love our pastor (at least most of us do). His ministry was very meaningful to us. And although he made a few mistakes, as we all do, he had asked forgiveness and offered to reform. The following Sabbath the worship service was spent with those in the congregation expressing their grief and disbelief in what had happened. We couldn't believe how the committee could have made that decision.

In discussing it with various members, we began to see the tithing issue must have been only the tip of the iceberg. The committee decision must have been based on

other, more deeply rooted items. There seems to be a fear from the conference administration that Bob was leading us toward "congregationalism."

It seems the real issue is control. The conference depends on faithful tithing, and it expects its pastors to be a strong example in this matter. Apparently they felt threatened when Sunnyside began paying its own pastors and funding equipment and supplies outside of the voted budget. When Robert Folkenberg spoke to our church in February,

we thought it strange that he should focus on the subject of tithing and stewardship. We would rather have had a report about the world church. Recently our Union Conference elected a very conservative president. He was present

when the executive committee made their vote. Their complaints about Bob Bretsch seem to be related to the current investigation of the theology department at Walla Walla College.

Many of the strongest leaders at Sunnyside are so disheartened. Several of the pastoral staff have resigned, and the rest wish they could. A group of prominent members have already formed a separate church organization. They don't seem to have a place in the Adventist organization anymore.

Many of us have lost confidence in conference leadership. The conference was hoping to fix a small problem, and have instead made a huge, unfixable problem. We can no longer give generously to support ministerial leadership that disregards their constituency's desires.

**Phyllis Hall**



# TRUTH

## A Parable

ROSALIE LYNN

**M**s. Fact, Ms. Faith, and Ms. Feeling are questing for Truth. Ms. Fact knows, absolutely, the way to Truth. Ms. Faith believes that Truth will be revealed, after searching, hard and long. And Ms. Feeling feels that she will recognize Truth upon an encounter. The three begin their pursuit.

### Looking for Truth

Ms. Fact moves out confidently, with Ms. Faith and Ms. Feeling trying desperately to keep up.

Ms. Feeling moves more slowly than the others. It takes time to feel her way.

Poor Ms. Faith; she doesn't know what to do! She feels happy and safe with Ms. Fact. She is drawn to Ms. Fact's self-assurance. Besides, how can she trust fickle Ms. Feeling? Yet, Ms. Feeling might sense something not recognized by Ms. Fact.

Among them, Ms. Faith is given the least consideration. Ms. Fact and Ms. Feeling show no respect when she makes suggestions or tries to explain her position.

### Still Searching

The search yields frustration and confusion. Perhaps, they fear, Truth

is only a shimmering mirage for the senses, a perennial myth for the mind, a flutter of hope for the heart. Reality's searing light is revealing only despair. Could this be a cosmic ploy for isolating and destroying them?

### Truth is Watching

Where will they find Truth? How can they be certain of Truth, once found? Will they dis-

**Could this be a cosmic ploy for isolating and destroying them?**

cover that Truth must find them? That Truth is watching their wanderings with eyes of love? Will they realize that to be found by Truth, they must be together? That each must contribute to this quest? That when Truth comes to them, they will know, believe, and feel it?



**Rosalie Lynn** teaches writing at La Sierra University. She has developed the curriculum for a class on biography as literature which she'll teach this summer.



## Sunnyside Church Pastor Fired

JIM WALTERS

**B**ob Bretsch, senior pastor of the 1,450-member Sunnyside Adventist church in Portland, Oregon, was fired by the Oregon Conference Executive Committee on May 30, after a conference investigation and considerable turmoil among local church leadership.

The congregation was stunned by the firing, and a group of dissenting members has laid the foundation for an independent Adventist congregation. While some established members are relieved, several hundred young, progressive members are strident in their criticism of the denomination. On the

ence. Earlier this year the conference knew that Bretsch had not changed his tithing practice, and when confronted with this fact Bretsch confessed to a general anger with the denomination.

Separate from the tithing issue, a "Group of 60" concerned Sunnyside members had been raising issues about the leadership of Bretsch. Their concerns centered on Bretsch's youth focus and his professional conduct.

In the last couple of years an estimated 200 young people had become involved in the congregation's ministries. The particular service that drew the youth was a Praise Service held at the 11:00 o'clock hour in the youth chapel. This service had been conven-

solve the conflict. However, one of the "60" secured an appointment with the president, and then brought along 6 other concerned members.

### Elders' Vote of Confidence

Despite some opposition in the congregation to Bretsch, however, he enjoyed great support. Knowing of mounting criticism of their pastor, the Sunnyside church board of elders recently took a vote of confidence, with 23 positive votes to 2 negative ones, with one abstention.

Why would the conference committee fire a progressive pastor of a growing congregation whose lay leaders strongly supported him? Knowledgeable insiders point to two reasons. First, the tithing issue was seen as the tip of an iceberg of obstinacy, even rebellion. Bretsch's failure to conform to routine tithing patterns was seen by the committee as indicating a deeper issue of disloyalty to the denomination. Also the committee reasoned that Bretsch's leadership capability had been weakened, and it questioned whether he could successfully mend the divisions at Sunnyside. Some Sunnyside leaders feel that the conference committee lacked a Sunnyside perspective on the congregation, since the committee had no Sunnyside representation.

Regardless, considerable tension exists between Sunnyside and the conference. This tension was even heightened when Birch appeared at a specially called church board meeting a day after the dismissal to explain the committee actions. Birch refused to give a clear explanation, saying he wanted to protect Bretsch and his prospects for further church employment. The next day when Bretsch heard of this, he immediately contacted Birch, withdrawing any claim to confidentiality. Later Birch sent a 2-page open letter to the Sunnyside membership giving considerable information.

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**...Bretsch had not changed his tithing practice, and when confronted with this fact Bretsch confessed to a general anger with the denomination.**

Sabbath following the announcement of Bretsch's firing, about 20 Sunnyside members met in a nearby Baptist church, and some believe that the independent congregation, the Bridge City Community Church, will begin with several hundred members.

### Tithe Paying in Question

The most obvious point at issue in the turmoil was Bretsch's tithe-paying. In 1994 and then again last year the pastor, for his own reasons, used his personal tithe funds to aid certain needy families in his congregation, and later he remitted tithe funds to the Montana Conference. Oregon Conference president Alf Birch became aware of this practice and counseled with Bretsch beginning 3 years ago. The pastor agreed to conform to the usual tithing practice of remitting funds to the local confer-

ing for some time, but a number of members became increasingly anxious when Bretsch presented the idea that this session be a third service in the main sanctuary. But the pastor's proposal was rejected by the church board. The pastoral philosophy as evidenced by the proposal added fuel to the Group of 60's cause.

Bretsch's professional demeanor and pastoral style bothered some members. For example, he once referred to "dancing with his wife out of excitement," and in one sermon he referred to God as a "party animal." Some critics cited the pastor as soft on doctrine, lacking loyalty to the denomination and giving inadequate attention to senior members.

Although the Group of 60 sought a meeting with conference president Birch, he refused, wanting the local church board to