

**LAY PASTOR DISFELLOWSHIPPED**

NEWS • ANALYSIS • OPINION

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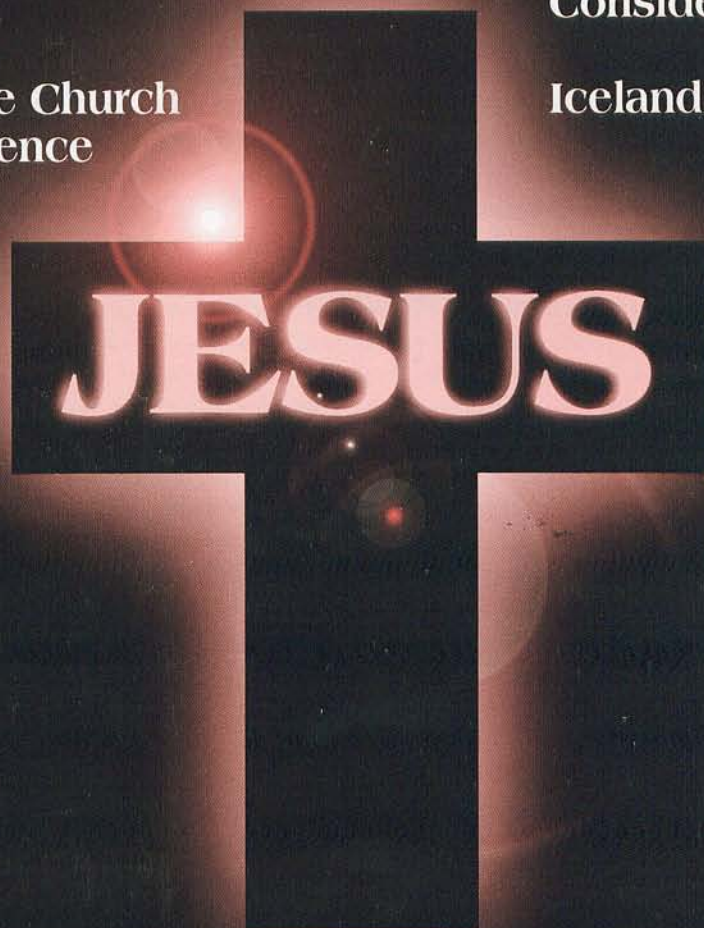
JULY • AUGUST 1998

**Southern California  
Conference One of  
the Neediest**

**Spectrum and  
Adventist Today  
Consider Cooperation**

**Seeker Sensitive Church  
Loyal to Conference**

**Icelandic Pastor Fired**



## Unity Through Doctrine or Grace?

**Dealing with the Hartlanders**



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## How Can We Be One With Them?

I felt my stomach tighten. It was Tuesday night, and we were sitting in our living room with our neighbors as we had every week for the past six months, studying the Bible. My husband Richard and I were third generation Adventists. They were conservative fundamentalists. They didn't trust the government, higher education, or formal schools. They had home-schooled their daughters through grade 12, and they believed in the literal interpretation of scripture. We had begun our weekly meetings not to convert them but simply to study the Bible together.

"The Bible clearly says that women are not to teach men," Ron intoned, crossing his legs and putting his fingertips together. "It's right here in the Word. Women are not to be in authority over men."

His wife Melanie pushed her long hair behind her ear and looked up at him, silent and approving.

"But what if a woman feels God calling her to be a pastor?" I asked, mustering my courage. "Many women won't talk to men pastors about their problems, and I know women pastors who fill a great need for other women."

"Well..." Ron hesitated for just a moment. "I can see that women might need to talk to women. But it's not biblical for women to be pastors. If a woman believes she hears God calling her to be a pastor, then she is listening to the wrong spirit. God would never give a woman such a call!"

The words hit me like a fist. I had never heard anyone say so brashly that if a woman felt the call of God, she was hearing the wrong voice.

"How can I keep studying with these people?" I wondered as I watched Ron's confident arrogance and Melanie's unquestioning agreement.

But we continued to meet. As the months went by we disagreed on many issues: dispensationalism, pre-tribulation rapture, whether or not the Lord's Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount were for the disciples alone or for all Christians, and the role of the Holy Spirit.

Often as we discussed Bible verses I longed for our Sabbath School class. There the members had similar backgrounds, similar education, similar experiences, similar questions. In spite of our differences we understood each other.

Then something strange began to happen. A bond began to form between the neighbors and us. We began sharing stories about our lives, about work, about our struggles and fears. Ron even asked us to lay our hands on him and pray for him as he wrestled with a serious problem.

And we continued to read the Bible. Insights from our study began to affect our lives. We began to experience the love of Jesus in new and more personal ways. Ron began to soften; a new humility began to color his speech and demeanor. Melanie began to talk more. Richard and I began to see how arrogant and superior we had acted because we had believed that we had more "truth," more "mature" perceptions and understanding.

Something even more unexpected happened; we began to feel unity with Ron and Melanie. We still disagreed about many doctrinal issues. They still believed that women should never be pastors or bosses over men in the workplace. We still believed that the Sermon on the Mount is for us today. But as we studied the Bible together and talked about Jesus and his gift of the Holy Spirit, we began to embrace the love and freedom that are Jesus' legacy to us.

As we embraced Jesus, we embraced each other. We began to feel loyal to our neighbors in a deep and fundamental way. Our differences no longer defined us. Our relationship became something significant and lasting: Ron and Melanie became one with us in Christ.

I discovered something I'd never understood: shared doctrine does not unify us. It doesn't create an emotional bond. As we follow the Holy Spirit toward truth, it's not shared background, shared understanding, or shared beliefs that unite us. Rather, it is Jesus who brings us into communion with each other.

Jesus does not ask us to rally around our understanding of doctrines. He asks us to rally around him. And when we do, we will have community with people we could never imagine tolerating.

We become one with him.

Colleen Moore Tinker, *Managing Editor*





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Doctrine or the gospel of Christ: which unifies? Which divides? "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." John 12:32 (NIV)

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Telephone: (800) 236-3641  
Fax: (909) 884-3391  
E-mail: AToday@aol.com

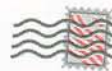
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# FIRST CLASS

AT Reader  
777 My Home St.  
Hamletville, CA



Letters to the Editor  
Adventist Today  
P.O. Box 8026  
Riverside, CA 92575-8026

## The Cultic Doctrine

As one who has carefully studied Ratzlaff's book, I find it astounding that Bruce Heinrich and Theodore Lewis would consider Ratzlaff's views biblical in contrast with those of historic Adventism. The most basic difference between historic Adventism and evangelical Protestantism is that the historic Adventist uses Scripture comprehensively while the evangelical uses it selectively. Adventists have historically based their teachings on the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments, while evangelicals focus primarily on certain segments of Paul's writings, ignoring not only the Old Testament but much of the New as well. This selective use of Scripture is fundamentally responsible not only for the evangelical's dispute with Adventists over salvation, but also for their disputes with us over the Sabbath, the state of man in death, and other issues...

When the Bible condemns salvation by works (Rom. 3:20,28; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9), it is not referring to sanctification and the Spirit's work in and through believers. Scripture is clear that these are the means, not merely the fruits, of our salvation (Phil. 2:12-13; II Thess. 2:13; Titus 3:5). Doing the law is the condition of justification (Rom. 2:13; James 2:24), but it must be a law-keeping produced by faith, as was Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (James 2:21) as well as his role in Isaac's birth (Rom. 4:19-22). But if we seek to obey in our own strength, as Abraham did in taking Hagar and producing Ishmael (Gal. 4:23), we cannot be justified.

When all the Bible evidence is put together, it is not Ellen White's theology that is found wanting, but that of Dale Ratzlaff.

Kevin D. Paulson  
Redding, California

## Cultic Doctrine and Judgment

"The gospel, indeed, brings better news to me than does the investigative judgment." Page 13, *Adventist Today* March-April, 1998.

"In *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day-Adventists* Dale Ratzlaff makes a powerful point—that the historic Adventist doctrine of the investigative judgment undermines the gospel." Page 14, *Adventist Today* March-April, 1998.

Apparently two of your writers disagree with Paul as to what is included

**The meetings  
were recorded,  
but the G.C. will  
never make the  
transcripts  
public...**

in the gospel. Paul's gospel included the judgment, according to Romans 2:13, 16.

In other words, Paul's "good message" embraced the entire process of salvation. The good news of the judgment is that all who obey the law and have faith in Jesus will be justified, declared righteous. We need not fear because of a sinful past. Jesus was raised to life to become our advocate and to procure our justification. Now and in the judgment. Ain't that the Good News?

Stewart I. Bauer  
Redding, California

## NPUC Critics of Ratzlaff Answered

In the current issue of *Adventist Today* (March-April 1998) on pages 6 and 9 Drs. Rodriguez, Davidson, and Gane inquire why Dale Ratzlaff seemed to ignore the arguments set forth in General Conference publications after Glacier View. Perhaps some light can be thrown on the situation.

The books mentioned sprang from the Daniel and Revelation committee established to reply to the questions I had raised on Dan. 8:14 and our Investigative Judgment teaching. One member of the committee whom I regard as one of the best scholars in the church said to me: "On this committee those who know most say least, and those who know least say most." I understood this because the situation was identical in the pre-Glacier View committee which was appointed by the church to meet with me for many hours. The meetings were recorded, but the G.C. will never make the transcripts public because of this feature. Another scholar in his college office waved his hands at the seven books and said to me, "Don't read them! Simply awful!" Apparently he viewed them as a 'snow job'. I agree. I know of no Adventist scholar who would dare to write or say the arguments found therein to any group of non-Adventist scholars.

Let me illustrate. In volume three of the series, *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus*, and the *Nature of Prophecy*, the article by Gerhard Hasel admits that "the actual wording of the command of Artaxerxes I of 457 BC makes no explicit mention of any order to rebuild the city of Jerusalem." "...the validity of applying the 457 BC decree depends upon an uncertain interpretation of Ezra 4:7-23." (p.51) In the Ferch article



"Commencement Date for the Seventy-Week Prophecy" (pp. 64-74) we find these apologies.

"Unfortunately, no explicit proclamation is known....Interpreters, therefore, have been obliged to deduce..." (p. 65).

"Ezra 7 mentions a third decree, issued this time by the Persian king Artaxerxes.... Assuming that this king is Artaxerxes I...." (p. 68).

Key words in the Ferch argument are 'presumably', 'seem', 'suggests', and 'implied'. See pages 70 and 74. His whole case is guesswork about the dating of Ezra 4, whereas most modern scholars agree with the Jerome Biblical Commentary that confesses: "We must leave as an insoluble enigma the date of chapter 4" (p. 388).

This uncertainty makes the conclusions of Hasel and Ferch invalid and quite unacceptable to scholars not dedicated to propping up crumbling traditions. No outside press would dream of publishing the materials found in these seven volumes.

However, at least these books are consistent with the church paper. In the *Adventist Review* (Vol. 158, No. 31, "Special Issue on Bible Doctrines," 1981, pp. 26-27) we find the following language as it labors to support the Investigative Judgment: "it seems clear," "assuming," "suggests," "The Scriptures do not offer a detailed explanation of the work that was to begin in heaven in 1844," "it is reasonable to assume," "the term 'investigative judgment' is not found in the Bible."

To return to the D & R committee whose works are recommended to us, we are forced to wonder how the committee can be so certain of 1844 when they admit repeatedly that the starting date is uncertain.

Men involved in trying to preserve the Investigative Judgment must be lonely men. Most scholars in Adventism gave up the task long ago and thus they never write or preach about it.

The consensus statement of Glacier View (since buried by the church when read more closely) made the following admissions:

1. It is the little horn, and not the sins of the saints, which defiles the sanctuary.

2. The cleansing of Daniel 8:14 has to do with restoring the damage done not by the saints but by the little horn.

3. The meaning of the key verb in Daniel 8:14 is not basically "cleanse," but "justify, vindicate, and restore."

4. There is no obvious verbal link between Daniel 8 and Leviticus 16.

5. The year-day principle is not explicit in scripture.

## **This uncertainty makes the conclusions of Hasel and Ferch invalid and quite unacceptable to scholars not dedicated to propping up crumbling traditions.**

6. Hebrews 9 does draw on the Day of Atonement to illustrate that which Christ did by his sacrifice.

7. "Within the veil" applies to the second veil, not the first, and points to access to the Most Holy Place immediately after the Cross.

8. Hebrews does not teach a two-apartment ministry (or two phases).

9. Christ, not the Father, is the great Judge in the final judgment.

10. We should not speak of our Lord's heavenly ministry in terms of apartments.

11. The New Testament viewed the second advent as imminent in its day (and thus had no cognizance of 1844).

12. Sacrificial blood purifies rather than defiles.

One is forced to ask: "What would the three good doctors (named on p. 8 of AT) say to an unsophisticated believer who asked them for the New Testament verses on the Investigative Judgment?" Furthermore, what would be their answer if someone more learned referred to the Bible principle, seven times set forth, that "in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established," and applied it to 1844? There isn't even one verse, one witness, that proves 1844. Both Testaments are silent. Neither years nor days are mentioned in Dan. 8:14, though days are mentioned elsewhere in the book. The Hebrew expression 'ereb boqer' (evening morning) is but a reference to the daily (tamid) service with its continual offering before sunset and after dawn.

The brethren quoted in AT insist that the purpose of the Investigative Judgment is to vindicate God. That is not our traditional interpretation, as anyone who reads GC 428, 280, 482, 485 can see. Drs. Heppenstall and Maxwell introduced the view these good men are claiming as original Adventism.

When Dr. Rodriguez claims that there is no reason for Adventism to exist if wrong on the IJ he is saying something that is appalling. If I considered him correct I would leave Adventism this very day. Is not our task to present "the everlasting gospel" of Rev. 14:6 mirrored in that physical rest every seventh day which testifies to our constant rest of conscience through faith in the finished work of Christ?

It's time for the church to be honest, to come clean. How can anyone with intelligence read Hebrews nine and ten in modern translations (which ARE linguistically correct) and hold to the baggage we invented to mask our disap-



pointment over 1844? It is not necessary for a church to be infallible for God to use it, but it is necessary to be honest.

I should confess that I too for years did my labored best to defend the IJ and only surrendered as continued study proved that the evidence contrary to the traditional view was overwhelming.

Desmond Ford  
Auburn, CA

### Ellen White and Truth Telling

In *Adventist Today*, vol. 6, no.2, the editor and authors have not introduced any new conflicts that have not been presented in the past. Historically the situations and doctrines have been carefully studied and established by the denomination. Could not our time now be better spent on developing spiritual growth? If we disagree with the basic doctrines and Ellen White, should we actively try to destroy an effective, flourishing organization?...

The article by an ethicist on E. G. White's Truth Telling is surprisingly unethical, being based on one disgruntled employee, which all organizations have, and some of whom have been terminated as was Fanny Bolton for not following instructions. Sister White did not hide the situation, and the supporting information is on the CD of E. G. White's writings for anyone to investigate. Many writers use literary assistants to check articles grammatically and eliminate repetition. Many authors have large libraries and from the amount of published information available, it takes wisdom to discern truth from fiction. Obviously since Ellen White's writings, taken in context, have withstood the test of time, she would have had to be inspired by God.

It is disappointing to have contemporary issues of disbelief in Adventism similar to the same issues that have been present for the past 150 years. It is my prayer that we can become once again a Seventh-day Adventist movement....

William D. Gish RPh, MPH  
Arlington, Washington

### More Ellen White and Truth

When I joined the church one of the first books I read was F. D. Nichol's *Ellen White and Her Critics*. There I learned about her copying and other issues of how she composed her works. This introduction to E. G. White stood me well when I came into contact with text-critical approaches to the New Testament, and later the Old Testament. Later as a seminary student in the early '80s I was not fazed by the revelations of Numbers and Rea, unlike many around me who never heard such things (and never read Nichol). To

It was not a white  
lie nor an intentional  
cover up, but  
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to reference.... She  
was not denying  
her copying...

Bruce Hienrich I would say, if you were to read some of the critical material on the Bible you would find it as disturbing as what you have read about E. G. White. If previously you were blissfully ignorant of the issues surrounding White's writings, perhaps you are now living in blissful ignorance of the issues surrounding the Bible. They are not much different.

Jim Miller  
Madison, Wisconsin

Thank you for the wonderful editorial by John McLarty. He hit it on the head...

In the mid 1800's there were scholarly writings which were footnoted, but the popular writings had extensive copying without giving credit. By the end of the century this practice ended....

Looking back we see that the Whites were wrong in choosing to follow the popular writing style of the day, or at least not to give it up when everyone else did. But at the start they were in a hurry to get the information out, and when the practice stopped in the general population, she was set in her ways. By the time Mrs. White was finally convinced to change the style, she was so old, and had written so many thousands of pages, and had read so many hundreds, if not thousands of books and articles, that it was too late to pinpoint all the sources. It was not a white lie nor an intentional cover up, but an impossible task to reference.... She is not denying her copying, but these apparent denials were part of her attacks on Fundamentalism.... Dr. Walters missed the true issue involved.

Kevin Hellerud  
Redlands, California

### Unbiased Approach

We enjoy your honest, unbiased approach to relevant issues in the church.

Carolyn McGill, Treasurer  
Vallejo Drive Seventh-day Adventist Church,  
Glendale, California

### Open Approach

I appreciate your open approach to facts.

Jack Williams  
Dayton, Tennessee

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Adventist Today, P.O. Box 8026  
Riverside, CA 92515-8026  
E-mail: atoday@aol.com



# Southern California Conference One of the Neediest

ALBERT DITTES

**T**he Southern California Conference (SCC) is the second-largest conference in the North American Division, with a membership of 49,000. It turned in the third-highest amount of tithe in 1997—\$22 million. Yet the financial report presented at the conference 1997 year-end meeting shows it to be one of the neediest.

In 1996 the North American Division appropriated \$717,486 to the Southern California Conference. Only two Southern Union black conferences received more financial aid. SCC's tithe per capita (tithe per person) is the lowest of all the white conferences, almost as low as the per capita of some black conferences.

"Southern California used to have the highest or second-highest tithe per capita in North America, but they were formerly a Caucasian conference," says George M. Crumley, treasurer of the North American Division (NAD). "The Afro-Americans, Asians, and Hispanics are as faithful as the Caucasians but [are] not as high-income." Crumley added that Asians and Hispanics are the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the Pacific Union, and blacks have 25,000 members. He says, "Asians are first-generation Adventists and thus [evangelistically] aggressive."

Also in 1996, the Southeastern California Conference—also qualifying for a subsidy because of a low tithe per capita, even though it is the largest and traditionally the wealthiest conference in the division—received \$205,647 in assistance.

So what has happened to Southern California Adventists? Are they rich or are they poor? According to conference officers, the rich members have abandoned the region to lower-income minorities, qualifying it for "assistance on the basis of tithe per capita," as listed in the financial report.

Are there any factors that affect the size of subsidy the NAD gives a conference other than the tithe per capita? What if the tithe per capita is over-inflated by a higher-than-normal number of deaths and apostasies? Suppose in 1998 the XYZ Conference has a total tithe of \$2,000,000 and its total membership is 2,000 members. Then the per capita annual tithe is \$1,000. But suppose that each year normally about 340 of these 2000 members die and about 330 apostatize, thus leaving only about two thirds of the group to be counted. Then the tithe

tized but then stopped coming to church and then were left on the church books year after year. This higher-than-real number of members [like low D&As] would pad the membership rolls, giving the false impression of a lower-than-actual tithe per capita. As a hedge against such irregularities, if the tithe per capita in a given conference falls abnormally low, the NAD limits the conference's subsidy.

Less than a year ago, Larry Caviness became president of the Southern California Conference. As president he has found what he describes as "not only fantastic opportunities, but monumental challenges. One of these challenges is financial." Caviness continues:

"This conference used to be the most monetarily wealthy region in North America. Over the last 20 years, howev-

**"Southern California used to have the highest or second-highest tithe per capita in North America, but they were formerly a Caucasian conference."**

per capita would be about \$1,500 [assuming none had been contributed by those counted out]. Conversely, if there were fewer deaths and apostasies, with more people remaining to be counted in, the per capita figure would be lower.

Crumley said, "We [NAD] limit subsidies if the deaths and apostasies [D&As] are below normal, so [the D&As] won't lower their [the conferences'] tithe per capita and [thus cause a conference to] qualify for more [i.e., excess] assistance." Crumley said that Southern California qualifies for financial aid because of its well-below-average tithe per capita and its "special situation."

A conference that does not encourage its churches to keep their church membership records up to date could abuse the subsidy system, if people were bap-

er, much has changed. The most significant area of change is demographic. A good share of high-income Adventist members who used to live here have retired and moved to be with their children. Others have left our conference for other reasons. Some find their livelihood in Los Angeles and vicinity but live outside the conference boundaries. Ethnically, this conference is still one of the richest in North America. Though we celebrate this wealth in diversity, it does bring challenges. Many of our people groups are recent immigrants and are trapped in earning little more than minimum wage. So although many are faithful in tithing, the per capita amount is low because of their economic status."

Citing one of Southern California's most prominent churches as an example



of the changes brought by ethnic diversity, Caviness says:

"(The Los Angeles) White Memorial (Church), once a largely professional church, is now an ethnically diverse church in a largely Hispanic area. We are currently in the process of applying to the North American Division for resources so we can hire an extra pastor to minister to English-speaking Hispanics there."

**"The conference president is just a puppet in many ways," he says. "The [five] regional portions [each] have budgets to hire pastors."**

Caviness says the financial toll of these "financial challenges" is evident in the conference pastoral staff, which now serves 146 churches: it has been reduced from 180 people to 138 in just the past few years—a 24-percent cut. The Conference Committee also has eliminated several departments. The youth department once had three or four directors; now it has only one.

Doug Schultz, head elder of the Glendale City Church, agrees that the demographic change has altered the conference financial structure considerably. He knows of 34 nationalities in the conference, many of them living at a lower-than-average socioeconomic level. "We really have five conferences within a conference," Schultz says. "There are lots of Spanish churches, a Filipino church, and many regional churches. Each ethnic group has a vice president in charge, so we have many segregated systems."

At this time the Southern California Conference is divided into five regions: Los Angeles Metro, West, Asian-Pacific, African American, and Hispanic.

Schultz feels this segregation into regional systems has added expense and made the conference more difficult to administer. "The conference president is just a puppet in many ways," he says. "The [five] regional portions [each] have budgets to hire pastors."

The churches are becoming congregational, cumbersome, and expensive."

Schultz cites his own church—Glendale City—as an example. It is one of the wealthiest and most supportive in the conference, but, he says, it is "very congregational." 45 percent of the money coming in to the local church stays there. Schultz said that many high-income members and fringe Adventists financially support the local church, but

many of them give only to specific projects or equipment or programs.

However, Schultz believes the present church finance problem is primarily cultural. He says the Vallejo Drive Church in Glendale—once the home church of the Voice of Prophecy—is one half Filipino. He says, "Vallejo Drive is still big, but many older, wealthy physicians from there now live in Palm Springs and are dying off, and young physicians are not coming in." Some of the more afflu-

ent White Memorial Church members are now attending the (nearby) Glendale City Church, Shultz says, but many of the White Memorial Church members feel they should merge with the Spanish work, because they have only 1/3 as many members as the Spanish-American Church just a block away on the same campus.

According to Schultz, although Davenport and Rea never were issues in the Southern California Conference, conference credibility is down because in the past the conference administration made unwise decisions, in the view of those Glendale City Church members whose giving patterns are now funneled more toward the local church than toward the broader programs supported by the conference and world church headquarters.

Schultz's final comment may reflect the problem many churches now face: "It's just hard to know how to maintain our sense of mission and stay relevant."

In the midst of great challenges, Caviness sums up the Southern California situation by focusing on the positive. "The children of this diverse conference are our best investment," he says. "If properly taught principles of science, faith, and stewardship, these young people will build a strong base of leadership and financial support in the near future."

## Icelandic Pastor Fired

**S**teinthor Thordarson was fired in March, 1998, from his employment as a pastor in Iceland. According to email he sent to Don Ashlock of the Evangelical Sabbath Association this May, there was no doctrinal disagreement with the conference and no moral lapse.

"The conference leaders simply did not like my ways of doing things, such as thinking independently and reaching out to the public in new and innovative ways," he said.

He has already established an independent ministry, and the ministry of

church and legal affairs in Iceland has granted him and his congregation of about 60 people full legal status as an independent church which they call BODUNARKIRKJAN (The Church of Proclamation).

In a recent visit to Damascus Road Community Church in Damascus, Maryland, Pastor Thordarson told Bob Fournier, associate pastor at DRCC, that his church's goal is to reach all of Iceland (population approximately 270,000) with a radio and television ministry. They plan to begin production of video tapes for broadcasting this fall.



# Seeker-Sensitive Church Loyal to Conference

COLLEEN MOORE TINKER

**B**y all accounts the Mountain View Seventh-day Adventist Church in Las Vegas, Nevada, is unique. Most obviously, it's a contemporary church with programs deliberately designed to be attractive to the unchurched. Less obviously, it's a completely conference-loyal church returning increasing amounts of tithes and offerings to the Nevada-Utah Conference.

Most surprising, perhaps, is the fact that Mountain View is not a new church. Established in 1933, it has been the "mother church" to four other churches in Las Vegas which swarmed from Mountain View and started new congregations. In spite of its establishment, however, its format has changed drastically.

During the past ten to twelve years the members of Mountain View have gradually changed their worship services. One by one certain traditions began to disappear. First they stopped ushering the worshipers out, allowing them instead to leave the sanctuary when they wished. Then they instituted a small praise service at the beginning of church. Eventually no elders sat in front during the service.

Seven years ago the church was ready for a completely new format. With the help of Darrold Retzer, then the president of the Nevada-Utah Conference, they began a search for a new pastor who could help them become a contemporary, dedicated congregation with a burden for the unchurched community. More than a year later they found the answer to their prayers in the person of David Gemmell.

Dave had most recently been with Kay Kuzma's Family Matters in Georgia. At the time Mountain View contacted him, he was also considering taking a church in Asheville, NC. He chose Las Vegas partly because the demographics were ideal for building the kind of church which he and the congregation envisioned. Las Vegas is a city of change. Many new people move into the area, a fact that keeps the community from becoming stagnant.

Before he arrived, Gemmell asked for the church to send him the names of the seven most influential members of the congregation, which then numbered about 430 with an attendance of 150. After he received the names, Gemmell contacted each one and asked if he or she would be willing to give one hour per week for ministry. Those seven became the pastoral advisors.

"We have no decision-making power," says David Sandquist, one of the seven, "but each week we meet with the pastor to pray for the needs of the congregation and to keep each other accountable." For the first three years, those seven replaced the board of elders. This year, however,

**He acknowledges that he can see how local giving versus conference giving could become a divisive issue in seeker-sensitive churches.**

the church reinstated a board of elders.

During the first year and a half after Gemmell's arrival, the church worked on refining its mission statement. The result, "Transforming the unchurched into mature disciples of Jesus Christ," became the standard by which the members evaluate every prospective program and outreach opportunity.

Several of the congregational leaders have attended Willow Creek leadership seminars, and the church services are shaped by many of the ideas these people have brought back with them. Mountain View currently has two church services every Sabbath. The first service, called "Vintage," meets at 9:00 A.M. and is more traditional than the 11:30 A.M. service. For example, the worship team leads

praise singing at both services, but at 9:00 they do not use percussion. Similarly, they do not do drama at the first service.

"New Wine" is the name of the second service. It features praise singers and a band, drama and other special presentations, and occasionally a Garden of Prayer. It is growing so fast that the church is considering having a third service.

The church now has about 650 members with about 500 attending each week. Every week about one-third of the congregation is composed of "seekers," unchurched people who are looking for spiritual significance. Gemmell structures his sermons so that they center on either Jesus or the love of God.

"The services are designed so that any week a seeker could visit and could find God," Sandquist says.

The Mountain View Church produced its own Net '96 and '97 instead of using the satellite transmission. This year it will

use the satellite downlink of Net '98, but the staff will show it in the multi-purpose room instead of in the sanctuary.

When seekers want to be baptized, they study the beliefs of Adventism. They are baptized into Christ and into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In answer to the question, "How do you stay in the good graces of the conference?", Sandquist replied that the church is intentional about staying within the denominational structure. Baptisms are up, tithe is up, offerings are up, and Gemmell is on the conference executive committee. These facts are sweet to the small Nevada-Utah Conference.

"The conference hasn't looked twice because their tithe is up," Sandquist quipped.



He acknowledges that he can see how local giving versus conference giving could become a divisive issue in seeker-sensitive churches. He says the Mountain View church has a great local need that the church's budget cannot meet.

"We need more staff," he says, "but there's no conference budget for more. Volunteers pick up some of the slack, but it's not enough. We raise half of one pastor's salary, but that's all we've been able to manage. We have bought lights and sound equipment, but we have many growing needs without the money to fund them."

Sandquist admits that changing from a traditional format to a contemporary one probably could not happen in many places. He also states that Mountain View is perhaps one of only a few Adventist churches that have changed from a traditional to a contemporary format without starting a separate service or a whole new congregation. During the transition, he admits, several members did move to other churches in town. But

the majority stayed, and there have been enough new people moving in to keep the attendance up.

"Las Vegas is a great seeker town," he says; "many people are moving in; we have good demographics to try this."

Mountain View is not the only church benefiting from the Las Vegas demographics. Two other churches in town—Central Christian and its daughter church, Canyon Ridge—offer Willow Creek-modeled worship services. Central Christian, founded in 1962, is non-denominational and has undergone transformation since its senior pastor Gene Appel arrived in 1985. Today it has five services per weekend, two on Saturday night and three on Sunday, with a total of 3,500 people attending each week. Canyon Ridge migrated from Central Christian five years ago. Today it has a membership of approximately 785. Every Sunday it has four services, three in the morning and one at night, and between 2,200 to 2,500 people attend every weekend.

Mountain View offers regular "seeker events" such as an annual Christmas cantata; it also offers small groups and various ministry outlets, including helping to produce the weekly services.

The staff and ministry leaders have developed a ten-year growth plan, and a seven-step program structures the members' involvement in the church. The seven steps are: 1. Building a relationship and sharing a witness; 2. Attending a seeker event; 3. Making a decision for the Lord; 4. Structuring a "believer service"—a service in which fellow believers can participate as opposed to a "seeker service" which is less interactive and offers more anonymity; 5. Joining a small group; 6. Discovering your niche—getting involved in ministry; 7. Stewardship.

"We're committed to providing a place where people can find God," Sandquist says. Even though their style and methods may be controversial to some, however, the church is also committed to one other thing. As Sandquist puts it, "We want to be Adventist."

## Spectrum and Adventist Today Consider Cooperation

**L**ong-time editor of *Spectrum*, Roy Branson, has formally resigned. *Spectrum*, a journal of progressive Adventism that began in 1969, has dragged the church into recognition of its relationship to larger intellectual and social issues. For example, *Spectrum* led the discussion nearly 30 years ago of Ellen White's literary dependency.

"Although some of us who have written for *Spectrum* have sometimes questioned Roy's liberal use of the blue pencil, I think that history will show a huge denominational debt to Roy Branson and his associates at *Spectrum*," says Jim Walters, publisher of *Adventist Today*.

Branson suffered two heart attacks during the last year, and he has decided that he wants to spend time doing some academic pursuits besides editing. He will continue his involvement with the Washington

Institute, and he'll also teach on the religion faculty at Columbia Union College.

The Association of Adventist Forums (AAF) has not yet named a successor to Branson, but an announcement is likely to be imminent.

Six years ago when *Adventist Today* was forming, its founders contacted *Spectrum* leaders about publishing the two magazines under the aegis of *Spectrum's* Association of Adventist Forums. After involved discussions, both parties decided that any close association would not well serve either publication.

Recently Douglas Schultz, *Adventist Today's* board chair, and Les Pitton, Association of Adventist Forum's board chair, have renewed discussions about possible cooperation.

"We have been entertaining discussions regarding cooperative efforts between *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today*," says Schultz, "but it's premature to comment on what form that cooperation may take. So far nothing has been decided, but we are anxious to be supportive to *Spectrum* in any way we can."

### Coming Next Issue...

- Report on Science and Faith Conference at AU
- The Ashfall Fossil Beds in Nebraska
- How Constituency Meetings Work



## Scientific Theology

by Paul A. Giam

REVIEWED BY ERVIN TAYLOR

**T**he author, who holds both an M.D. and an M.A. in religion from Loma Linda University, defines "Scientific Theology" as a "theology that uses the method of science" (p. 15). Later in the book he states that he is not really advocating the use of the scientific method in theology "so much as advocating the use of a method honed on the study of reproducible events [science] in the study of non-reproducible [supernatural] events" (p. 31, footnote 29). He does admit that the "supernatural is somewhat more difficult to study than nature" (p. 63).

He considers a breathtaking diversity of topics—chapter titles such as: "Nature", "Inspiration and Revelation", "The Bible", "The Pentateuch and Joshua", "God, Freedom and Time", "The Trinity", "Sin", "Salvation", and "Life After Death". What are all of these topics doing in the same volume?

It takes quite a bit of digging to uncover the main point. It appears to go something like this: "Science and theology both approximate [the same] truth, and therefore [they] must fit together harmoniously where they overlap" (p. 12). He says that he does not believe in Biblical inerrancy (p. 85). This claim seems puzzling since he seems to spend most of the book supporting the Bible's accuracy. He says, for example, that "...there are some historical, scientific, and/or philosophical ideas which are so in conflict with Biblical authority that they can't both be right, and at this point I believe that the Bible has more authority in those areas of conflict" (p. 86). He thus must argue that "the entire Old Testament is [historically and scientifically] reliable..." (p. 97). Later, he states that the "...entire Bible is [historically and scientifically] reliable..." (p. 120). With this view, he can then defend, in quite sophisticated ways, the conventional Adventist understanding of the historicity of Genesis, such as a

short age (<10,000 years) creationism, a worldwide flood, the historicity of the book of Daniel, and so on.

Although he accepts the reality of a very, very old universe (19 billion years—p. 37), he does, after an extensive and well-informed discussion, reject all of the geochronological methods of dating that indicate very old organic life on earth. He appears to accept the validity of Gentry's arguments about pleochroic halos (p. 168-169) and suspects any tree ring date older than 5,000 years (p. 188,

es that conclusion. The fact that he says "almost...mathematically," however, leaves the possibility that he might abandon his basic thesis when AMS-based radiocarbon dates in excess of 60,000 years become available. (See his section on radiocarbon dating on pages 175-190 and his comment on page 269.)

This book might have made an interesting contribution to the science/religion dialogue from the late 18th century to the middle of the 19th century. At the end of the 20th century, however, it

*He says that he does not believe in Biblical inerrancy (p. 85). This claim seems puzzling since he seems to spend most of the book supporting the Bible's accuracy.*

footnote 158). His evaluation of radiocarbon dating is that it "almost mathematically eliminates the evolutionary time scale and almost mandates some kind of creationist [short] time scale" (p. 175). He does not explain how he reach-

is difficult to know how to classify it. It is certainly a unique, scientifically literate approach to Adventist apologetics. But in spite of the book's title, theology is not scientific and cannot be studied scientifically.

## How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible

by Hans LaRondelle

REVIEWED BY DESMOND FORD

**H**ans LaRondelle's volume is chiefly a commentary on the book of Revelation, but it includes significant discussions of Matt. 24 and 2 Thess. 2. It is a scholarly work worthy of its author and is a mine of exegetical diamonds.

In particular we have in this study a competent rebuttal of Dispensationalism. For example, the author points out that both Christ and Paul took the Old Testament promises made to literal Israel and applied them globally. (Compare Ps.

37:11, 29 with Matt. 5:5, and Gen. 13:15 with Rom. 4:13.) Then we have this excellent summary:

The underlying principle is clear. Christ removes all ethnic restrictions in the new-covenant people and therefore also the geographic Middle East center for Christ's church. Wherever Christ is, there is the holy place! This is an essential part of the gospel hermeneutic. For the Shekinah holiness of the old temple, the New Testament substitutes the holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Giving evidence of wide research, LaRondelle has skillfully attempted a difficult task—blending positions taken by non-Adventist exegetes with several Adventist distinctives. To this end some of the traditional positions taken by Uriah Smith and even Ellen White are discarded. He points out that a number of features found in Revelation 11 were



not fulfilled in the French Revolution. Similarly, the USA does not satisfy the characteristics of the two-horned beast of Rev. 13. He repudiates August 11, 1840, as a fulfillment of Rev. 9:15. On the other hand, the author still follows historicist patterns and speaks in denominational categories, seeing both the Papacy and an end-time remnant of Sabbath-

Uriah Smith in seeing the captivity of the Pope in 1798 as the "deadly wound" of Rev. 13:3. I find this surprising, as the symbolism of this verse reflects that of Gen. 3:15 and is clearly commentary on Messiah's victory depicted in the previous chapter. LaRondelle is aware of this position but rejects it on inadequate grounds, and clings to an Adventist tra-

Adventist positions thereby. Thus there is appropriately a great gulf fixed between the author's views and those presented in the typical Revelation seminar. The same is true of Dr. Roy Naden's excellent work, *The Lamb Among Beasts* recently published by the Review and Herald. When I first wrote along such lines in 1979 I told my wife that I might be sacked in consequence. Now such divergence is acceptable.

Particularly to be commended here is the clear-cut stand taken by LaRondelle against the Adventist tendency to use Ellen G. White as another Bible. He goes out of his way in pages 491-497 to show that we have misused Rev 19:10. And happily he invokes Ellen White in support of his position.

This work is not a devotional commentary, and neither does it set forth the gospel of grace as the chief key to the apocalypse. But it remains a learned and valuable text which can bring great profit to every reader. It towers above popular works like *The Late Great Planet Earth* as the Empire State Building does above a single story Woolworth's!

**Wherever Christ is, there is the holy place! This is an essential part of the gospel hermeneutic.**

keepers within the prophet's purview. The year-day principle is retained, despite the fact that nearly all Adventist scholars trained in apocalypics have rejected it. Dr. Kai Arasola's *The End of Historicism* clearly shows that since 1844 most major exegetes have forsaken the morass of date-seeking within this era.

Typical of the author's choice to retain historicism despite its almost universal rejection today is his following

dition which, so far as I know, no non-Adventist scholar of note would dare follow. Who among the first-century Christians would ever have guessed it?

As with almost all detailed studies on Revelation by Adventists since 1980, this work tends in the same direction as my own commentary (*Crisis!*) in its exposition of the seals, trumpets, Rev. 10 and 11 and other passages, despite the marked departure from long-held

## God of the Desert

MAX GORDON PHILLIPS

### I

On the burning sand I walked  
toward the cool oasis.  
I had a map.

So when God came by and offered  
me his, I laughed and said,  
"I don't need it."

But he wouldn't stop bothering me.  
Every time I looked around  
he was following.

When I stopped among the rocks  
to look for water once

He caught up.

### II

Holding out a canteen of water,  
he said, "If you drink this,  
you will never thirst."

Knowing this was not rational,  
I said, "Over the hill  
is a spring."

But the water I found was noxious;  
around it human bones were  
bleaching in the sun.

Exhausted I fell beside the pool,  
defiant, trying to rest.  
I couldn't.

### III

When God caught up, he said,  
"If you want shelter,  
I have a tent."

"I don't need it," I lied;  
he ignored my lie,  
said nothing.

Suddenly leaping to my feet,  
I raced across the sand,  
my eyes fixed.

I threw away my map—  
there it was!  
The oasis!

### IV

Tired, bleeding, but triumphant,  
I looked over my shoulder;  
he was running after.

He ran with a pack on his back:  
water, medicine, bandages—  
I scorned them.

"Leave me alone, God!"  
He slowed, then  
stopped.

Far in the distance the oasis  
was shining in the sun!  
I would show him!

### V

But I stumbled on a long, long time  
before I knew the oasis  
was a mirage.

All around the night turned black.  
I was thirsty, bleeding, tired.  
The desert was cold.

I stopped and sat down on a rock,  
my head in my hands.  
I was lost.

But I heard a sound behind me,  
and when I looked around,  
there was God.



# ADVENTIST FUNDAMENTALISM:

# THE CHARLOTTESVILLE STORY

Hartlanders controlled the church board, Sabbath School, even church potlucks and socials.

ALTON D. JOHNSON

**S**hortly after I began pastoring the Charlottesville, Virginia, Adventist Church, I learned that over a dozen of my members were staff and students from a nearby self-supporting Adventist college I'd never heard of, Hartland Institute. It adjoined my church district, so I toured the campus and met the president, Colin Standish, and other staff members. At that time Hartland, though unaccredited, had an enrollment of about 100 Adventist students from around the world. It offered classes in religion, business, education, and other basics.

I was impressed with the earnestness of both staff and students and invited Dr. Standish, a former president of Columbia Union College and West Indies College, to preach in Charlottesville. I looked forward to working together with Hartland students in community outreach.

Unfortunately, my dreams never became reality. I began to

hear strange and disturbing stories and discovered the morale of my members was low. They saw the Hartlanders as "carpet baggers" from out of town who imposed their standards of morality on the church. Hartlanders controlled the church board, Sabbath School, even church potlucks and socials. Some of my members complained that Hartland students and staff were "running the church" and "driving people away" with their sincere yet judgmental confrontations of members and visitors regarding jewelry, dress, make-up, etc. Others told of a young student from Hartland who, on one or two occasions just before I arrived, had, from the pulpit, enlightened the members regarding his ongoing battle with "secret sin." The members and I found the spirit of many Hartlanders divisive and detrimental to a spirit of love and unity in our local church family.

For example, in my absence, my head elder, who was on the staff at Hartland, preached sermons about the "trend in the Adventist church toward worldliness and apostasy." He cited "a west coast Adventist pastor who practiced mass hypnotism on his congregation;" a conference in the Pacific Northwest that "held a ceremony to burn E. G. White books;" and other such wild allegations, as "evidences" of the Adventist church's condition. During my tenure, the elder left and was later "ordained" as an Adventist minister by Steps to Life, an independent Adventist fundamentalist ministry in Kansas.

Comparing notes with other pastors, I discovered that



**Alton Johnson** has been a pastor and chaplain in the USA and has been a "dark county" evangelist in Canada, where he and his wife established two churches. They live in Southern California.



Hartlanders were generating controversy not only in my church but in all the local Adventist churches they were attending. (The staff and students did not attend a Hartland church on Sabbaths; they dispersed into the Adventist churches in the region.) As I read Hartland literature, particularly articles by Standish in *Our Firm Foundation*, it soon became apparent that not only was Hartland's spirit exclusive and intolerant, but its theology was outside the Adventist mainstream.

#### **Adventist Fundamentalists: more fit for heaven, or just fitting a profile?**

As I continued my study and observation of the practices and teachings of the Hartland staff and students, a fundamentalist profile began to take form. This profile characterizes not only Hartland and others in the right wing of Adventism but also the

*As I read Hartland literature, particularly articles by Standish in "Our Firm Foundation," it soon became apparent that not only was Hartland's spirit exclusive and intolerant, but its theology was outside the Adventist mainstream.*

"religious right" and the "political right." This syndrome includes:

1. A strong individualism, which can lead to spiritual isolationism (or political nationalism) and do-it-yourself-ism. This fosters a "saving oneself" mentality—a dependence on one's own good works to make one good enough to be saved. Such individualism can lead to paranoia, legalism, and literalism.

2. Paranoid tendencies—"we are the righteous few against the big corrupt Government or Denomination."

3. An unbalanced emphasis on "law and order": To the fundamentalist, the "law" is the "ultimate standard." It becomes the main inspiration for a person to become one's own Saviour: "If I can obey this standard perfectly enough, then I will be saved." The focus of the fundamentalist is also on resisting temptation, the punishment of sinners, and God's retribution and vengeance, rather than on deepening a relationship with Jesus, which will, of course, lead to the fruit of love, obedience, and other fruit of the spirit. Similarly political fundamentalists are fixated on law and order, a strong national defense, the death penalty, etc.

4. A literal interpretation of the Bible. Religious fundamentalists also believe in "verbal inspiration"—God inspired the words of Scripture rather than the prophets. Thus Standish thinks he has a biblical basis for saying that "leadership in the church has been

given by God to men but not to women," and "the appointment of women elders [local church elders] has brought great grief to God's church and terrible division" (*Keepers of the Faith*, pp. 191, 192).

Likewise, the political fundamentalist believes in a literal or strict ("constructionist") interpretation of the U.S. Constitution.

#### **Fundamentalism breeds legalism**

Fundamentalism, as its name implies, is concerned with fundamentals, or basics. Its thought tends to be concrete, black and white, literal-minded. To the fundamentalist, "relative" is a bad word. (It is "anathema" [*Keepers*, p. 75].) Fundamentalism gives undue weight to the Old Testament concept of "obey and live, disobey and die." Since Adventist fundamentalists believe that E. G. White is a true prophet, they would do well to heed her statement that:

"In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light which streams from the cross of Calvary" 5BC 1137. It is through this revelation that we must understand and interpret all that the Old (and New) Testament say about God, law, and obedience.

Adventist fundamentalists will select from E. G. White's writings a statement such as, "We have a heaven to win and a hell to shun." At the same time, they will minimize her statements that express unselfish love for God and others, a love inspired by His love for us.

Fundamentalists will virtually say we must love perfectly in order for God to save us. But apart from Jesus, we cannot love.

#### **Reviving the Charlottesville Church**

Much of the controversy Hartlanders were arousing in the churches they attended centered upon their insistence that "faith plus works equals salvation." I decided to preach a series on this subject, delineating the theological similarities between the apostle Paul, the reformers, and Ellen G. White on the one hand (salvation is by grace through faith alone) and, on the other, Hartland, *Our Firm Foundation*, and the Roman Catholic church (salvation is by faith plus works). By the end of the series, very few Hartlanders were still attending. They said I was preaching the "New Theology," shook the dust off their feet, and left to reform other churches. A new, peaceful, happy family spirit—a sense of relief—was now pervading the congregation. Members who had been displaced and sidelined were once again assuming responsibilities. The preoccupation of the church with lists of do's and don'ts (works and standards) as virtually the means or root of attaining heaven was changing to a grace orientation—a grateful spirit, thankful that Jesus is the Root of our eternal life. They saw that when He is in the heart and in the Church, then works of loving obedience are the natural fruit of salvation—but not the root of justification. All was well, until a scandal broke at the General Conference.

#### **Crisis at Colin Standish's Home Church: Orange, Virginia**

When the church at nearby Orange, Virginia, lost its pastor, a General Conference auditor had been receiving mileage to preach



and cover the Orange church on Sabbaths. When the auditor was fired by the General Conference for alleged misconduct, the Orange church was without a pastor.

The Potomac Conference annexed it to the Charlottesville church, a 30-minute drive away. Although Charlottesville members were willing to share their pastor with Orange, the feeling was not mutual. This action by the Conference created a major uproar among Hartlanders who attended the Orange church, including some who had attended Charlottesville until they heard my "heretical" series on justification by faith alone. As further fuel in the fire, a Hartland sympathizer had made a videotape (without permission) of a seminar I'd presented in another church on this subject. My emphasis was on Jesus and His grace—the Root of our salvation. The video was circulated among Hartland members and staff. Colin Standish and his followers were in a furor that this "new theology / saved-by-faith-alone" pastor might become their spiritual leader.

The Conference ministerial secretary informed me he would meet with the Orange church the next Wednesday evening and invited us to attend. When my wife and I arrived at the church, we were told to wait outside until we were called for, but we weren't called in.

Hartlanders spoke out at the Orange meeting. After the meeting, I was "traded" (against my wishes and the wishes of the Charlottesville members) with the pastor of another church—we swapped districts. This move pacified Colin Standish and the Hartland members, because their new pastor was young, undisciplined, with no theological training in either an Adventist college or seminary. Hartland must have therefore assumed he would not

be infected with the New Theology they believed is rampant in Adventist theology departments. One of the reasons Hartland was founded was to restore and teach the "pure" Adventist doctrines.

At first I could not understand why the Potomac Conference would allow the Orange congregation (the majority of whom were Dr. Standish and his followers) to have a controlling voice in determining who was to be or not to be their pastor, when it was contrary to the recommendation of the North American Division that Hartland not be allowed a controlling voice in local church decisions. Ultimately I assumed it was easier for them to transfer me out than to "transfer" Dr. Standish and his followers.

Disheartened and uprooted from Charlottesville, we moved to our new church assignment and began house hunting. However, a few months later, when my wife's old job as an editor at a university became available, she and I left the Potomac Conference. I am no longer pastoring.

Fundamentalism, religious or political, is a permanent segment of the spectrum of human thought and behavior. Of course, not all Adventist fundamentalists are sympathetic to Hope International or Hartland Institute. In many churches, the more moderate fundamentalists quietly endure what they consider to be the too-liberal ways of their church, patiently waiting for the final sifting of the tares from the wheat.

Wherever we may be on the spectrum—liberal, moderate, conservative, fundamentalist, or points in between—we should take to heart the E. G. White counsel from *Mind, Character, and Personality*: "We should love and respect one another, notwithstanding the faults and imperfections [too liberal, too strict] that we cannot help seeing" (vol. 2, p. 635).

## Oregon Lay Pastor Disfellowshipped

CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

The meetings began in February and ran until late March. Halversen and Russo spent many hours together doing visitation. The meetings were hugely successful. Tony's clear gospel preaching had paved the way for people to respond.

"This man [Russo] was being used of God to preach the gospel," says Richard Pelham, a Gateway member. "Souls were being saved. Fifty people were baptized at the end of this series. Nothing like that had ever happened here before." He believes that God brought people to Gateway during this time because they would continue to hear the gospel preached.

In a letter addressed to the Gateway church dated May 28, 1998, Halversen wrote, "...it was a great joy for me to work with Pastor Tony Russo...What I appreciated so much about Tony was his strong con-

viction concerning the doctrines and beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist church... I felt quite sorry for Tony during our first week of the meetings; he was so sick; he had a high fever and was so weak. I'm thankful through the Grace of Jesus Christ he recovered as soon as he did... I would highly recommend him to anyone as one of the best pastors I have had the privilege to work with during my many years in ministry."

According to Tony, one of the most powerful elders, Phil Stephens, as well as the head elder, had begun to circulate rumors about Tony during this time. Among other things they accused him of being opposed to the evangelistic series and of faking an illness during the evangelistic meetings, necessitating Halversen having to go and bring him back to the church.

Meanwhile, says Tony, these elders had begun having conversations with Livesay. They made certain that he heard their complaints about Russo, and they conferred about what kind of pastor to bring to Gateway.

In April Livesay presented the church with the names of potential pastors. One of them was the one he had first mentioned to Tony in a phone conversation the previous January. This man stood out; Livesay clearly favored his hiring, and he asked Tony to support him.

"It was clear from hearing the facts about this man," says Tony, "that this possible assignment was more of a political move than a call of God to Gateway."

Tony began to worry that the conference, with the help of two elders, was manipulating the church into hiring this pastor. Harry Fitzsimmons shared this concern. They had, said Harry, several tele-

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# Living with the Remnant

DEBRA LLOYD FOOTE

My husband actually  
heard a five-percenter  
ask one of the church  
elders who preached  
righteousness by faith,  
“Why are you always  
preaching about Jesus?”



Debra Lloyd Foote grew up in Rochester, New York. She graduated from Andrews University with a B.S. in elementary education and an M.A.T. in education. She and her physician husband David live in upstate New York and care for teenaged foster children.

A Johns Hopkins neurosurgeon—one of the most skilled in the country, one recommended by Dr. Ben Carson—had operated on our pastor’s brain tumor. But the malignancy had returned. We wept as he preached his last sermon. Now he lay dying.

It was the opportune time for the takeover to begin: for years the pastor had been fighting an offshoot. It had been planted by two couples who moved into the area and began attending a small church in the pastor’s district. During the long months that the pastor was sick, the two couples began visiting his main church and having potlucks with a small group. In their exclusive, righteousness-by-rules brand of religion, their beliefs and practices ensured their superiority. They called themselves the five-percenters. [The remnant.] Their religion spread. Included in their number were those who followed the teachings of Hartland (which publishes *Our Firm Foundation*) and of Hope International.

During the pastor’s illness, the elders took turns preaching until a new pastor was sent. The new pastor conducted a Revelation Seminar, and the public came. So did the five-percenters. One five-percenter argued with the pastor in front of the seminar guests. Another obtained the list of “interests” attending the seminar and anonymously send them an inflammatory book by Jan Marcussen because they said, the pastor was not telling them all they needed to do. The book offended two former Roman Catholics—they did not return to the seminars or to our church. Still, eight people were baptized, and three others expressed serious interest.

## Too Happy in Church

The week after the baptism, a five-percenter visited two of the newly baptized members and the three who were seriously interested. None of the five has ever been back. The five-percenters also visited oth-

ers in our congregation. When one member answered her door, the visitor told her he did not want his daughter to see her lipstick. Another five-percenter told this very cheerful woman, “You irk me.” It seems that she appeared “too happy” in church. Now she does not appear in church at all.

## “Animal Sacrifices” at AUC

During this fractious time, a five-percenter told me that Andrews University was teaching New Age theology to the freshmen and that “they” (she did not identify “who”) were doing animal sacrifices at Atlantic Union College. The same person told my husband that the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Breathe Free Plan to Stop Smoking was New Age.

The Church’s regional Conference headquarters decided to restructure our two-church district into four churches and to appoint a new pastor, one nearing retirement. In addition to the pastor, our church asked for a Bible worker and was willing to pay most of the salary. The conference advertised at the Adventist seminary. A woman with fine recommendations and a Master of Divinity degree applied and was hired. Now, for the cost of a Bible worker, we had a licensed minister who preached phenomenal sermons, sang like an angel, enjoyed hospital visitation, began a shut-in’s prayer group, and was great with the youth—even giving them baptismal classes and worships at school. But she was not a man, so she endured a very long year of undermining, attacks, and incredible rudeness. One five-percenter sat in church until she stood up to preach, then walked out. One Sabbath after she preached, a Firm Foundationer stood at the back of our church and, as each attendee filed out, handed out articles on why women should not be pastors.

I had been the youth leader for years. For the first several years things went smoothly. Eventually, though, whenever I was out of town and a substitute led the youth Sabbath School, I would return the following week



## Yet there is hope. Three elders, a new member, and a member who is the state delegate to the church's Union Executive Committee have begun an alternative worship service on Sabbaths.

to find our *Insight* magazines had mysteriously vanished—replaced by recent issues of Hartland's *The Last Generation*. This replacement was not the work of my substitute; someone not involved in the youth room would come in and make the switch. Even after this matter came before the church board three times, and even though the board voted that the children's literature should never be tampered with or replaced, the problem continued.

Another woman and I began a monthly youth church when a poll of the eleven junior-age young people showed that only three of them wanted to be Adventists when they grew up. I asked the juniors and youth what they wanted in "their church." Their immediate response? "No adults" and "no little kids." After participating in a full day's activities and observing the full room, the Conference president and youth director both said, "This is the best youth program in the Conference."

### Harassed

Because the parents who home-schooled their children were not allowed to attend the youth church (and "disrupt" it as they had disrupted the youth Sabbath School until the leader banned them), they charged us leaders with "being in a conspiracy to break up families and to take our children from us." Three times our youth-church bean-bag chairs were hidden. Some of the five-percenters would yell at me in church, on the phone, in the parking lot; but the worst harassment occurred when I had invited a woman Adventist minister to speak to the youth. A five-percenter took the matter to the church board to try to block her from speaking, but the Conference president intervened and told the pastor to remove their complaint from the agenda.

Finally one of the "true-remnant" told the nominating committee that I had been "screaming and yelling at the children." My shocked response was, "Go right now and call any junior, any youth in this church.

Ask them if this is true." Of course, no one did. When her accusation was taken to the grievance committee, the accuser claimed the whole problem had been just a miscommunication. After losing 10 pounds and getting an ulcer, I finally resigned all my church positions.

By now, chaos reigned. Our head elder attended Firm Foundation camp-meetings and gave permission for handing out offshoot literature in our church, and the Sabbath School superintendent distributed—in church—tapes by John Osborne.

My husband actually heard a five-percenter ask one of the church elders who preached righteousness by faith, "Why are you always preaching about Jesus?"

The "cold war" grew so cold that the Conference president, secretary, and treasurer all came and, in a special church business meeting, warned us about offshoots. Since an NAD policy states that no one who belongs to Hartland, or Hope International may hold a church office, the nominating committee approached seven people in our church who were very actively involved in the offshoot groups. The committee asked each one directly whether or not he or she was involved in such a group. Only one admitted loyalty. The other six declared that they were not a part of any offshoot.

Our youth wanted to do missionary outreach—to drive to New York city and help with the van ministry. The five adults they chose as chaperones did not include any home-schooling parents. So two of these excluded parents said if they weren't allowed to go, their children wouldn't go either. Still, the youth voted to take only their original slate of chaperones. So, while the leader was in another state taking care of her dying brother, the excluded mothers convened another meeting to call off the trip for everyone.


Where our church once had 180 members, it is now down to about 100 attending. The once very effective Caring for Marriage program, which came under

attack and was "deeply discounted" by the five-percenters, is now defunct. Our church school has cut one teacher from its 1998-99 school-year budget. The tithe from our church has fallen from fourth in the Conference to tenth.

Yet there is hope. Three elders, a new member, and a member who is the state delegate to the church's Union Executive Committee have begun an alternative worship service on Sabbaths. It has the approval of our church board and meets in the multipurpose room of our church school.

### Safe Place to Worship

Typically, an elder, member, or special guest delivers the sermon or presents a musical program. The service is very informal, beginning with praise songs and followed by a children's story. The children are then dismissed and are cared for by a sitter who has Bible games and Sabbath toys and videos for them. The emphasis of this church is on the gospel and on the reclamation of those who have been offended out of the church or who have drifted out or who have an aversion to a church focused on an endless list of rules and a litany of man-made traditions. A schedule is mailed each month, and members phone and invite their friends. People who have not been seen in years are returning. The conference president is in favor of the alternative church. He told the parent church and the new one that he hopes this budding church becomes a "church plant;" he understands that there needs to be a safe, protected place for people to worship God.

Our hope?—that the parent church will find creative ways to stop the war, stop the shooting. Our prayer?—that the offshooters will lay down their arms and fix their sights on a new Center, the gracious Jesus. On the cross his arms were open wide to unite us. He promises to write his law in our hearts—to fill us with his loving Spirit. Then we can love him most and open our arms to love each other as he loved us. 





ANITA STRAWN DE OJEDA

**I** teach in a public school, and there are days when I feel like an ostrich. My school is staffed with wonderful people, many of whom are dedicated Christians that attend other churches. There have been many times when I feel eight feet tall, three-hundred-and-twenty-pounds heavy, and certain that everyone is staring at my long skinny neck or two-toed feet.

"You're a vegetarian? Why? Does your church make you do that?"

"You go to church on Saturday? Are you Jewish?"

"Adventists. Hmmm. Aren't they the cult with missionaries that go from door to door in groups of two?"

In my insecurity, I react like an ostrich. I hunker down, lie low and try to fit in with the local flora and fauna. I try not to stand out too much without compromising my values. I try to

live my life among the zebras, lions and elephants without causing comment or alarm. The only problem with living like a frightened ostrich is that it puts a real crimp in my spiritual neck.

Reading Matthew 5:16 has really helped me. It says, "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

The antidote to ostrich-like behavior among Christians is to quit hunkering down and trying to blend in with the crowd. Letting our lights shine before men may make us uncomfortable; we may feel out of place, but true seekers of the light will recognize that we are only a poor reflection of the greater light, Jesus Christ. Our Father, not us, will get all of the praise and amazement.

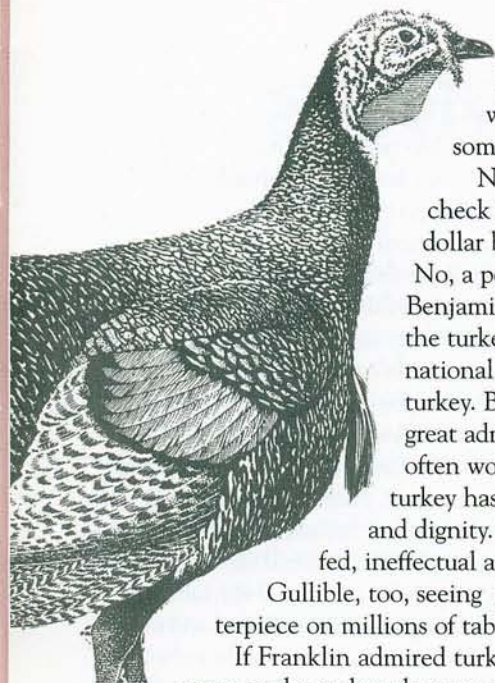
#### Perhaps a turkey?

What comes to mind when someone says the word, "turkey?" I immediately think of the foul-smelling, roasted bird that sat on our table last Thanksgiving for the benefit of our guests, then sat in our garage for three weeks because we didn't know what to do with the leftover meat and carcass. Another image that comes to mind is a person who is silly and perhaps slightly devious. "You turkey, you! What did you do that for?"



Anita Strawn de Ojeda is an elementary school teacher in Nevada. She is currently working on a master's degree in writing.





It's a phrase we use when we are vegetarianly mad at someone.

Next time you think of it, check the back of a quarter or a dollar bill. Will you find a turkey? No, a powerful eagle. But if Benjamin Franklin had had his way, the turkey would have been our national bird. That's right, the turkey. Benjamin Franklin was a great admirer of the turkey, and I've often wondered why. My concept of turkey has nothing to do with strength and dignity. I think of turkeys as well-fed, ineffectual and just a little self-satisfied.

Gullible, too, seeing how they end up as the centerpiece on millions of tables each Thanksgiving.

If Franklin admired turkeys so much, there must be more to the turkey than met the eye. Checking my facts, I realized that he was referring to the wild turkey. Turkeys are native to North and Central America and were first domesticated by the Indians of Central America. When the conquistadors returned to Spain, they carried with them treasure, gold, and turkeys. By the mid-1500s, turkeys were well established as a domesticated bird in Europe.

Meanwhile, back in North America, wild turkeys were living the, well, wild life. When settlers started flocking to the British colonies, they brought along their horses, cows, sheep, chickens and turkeys. That's when they discovered that turkeys already existed here in North America. Of course, the local turkeys weren't half as complacent as their domesticated counterparts about being shot and eaten.

From a turkey's point of view, living in domestication is a lot easier than roughing it in the wild. Someone feeds you twice a day; no hunting for the next meal. Sure, you're surrounded by a fence, but that just keeps the wild things out. Being a turkey is so easy. But turkeys don't think about what happens to their pen mates when they start disappearing one by one in November.

I challenge you to examine yourself on a regular basis to check your domestication level. Are you a wild turkey, out there hunting and searching for spiritual food? Or are you a more domesticated turkey, waiting in the pen for your next feeding?

### Are you a chicken?

Unfortunately, I find myself more often acting like a chicken than a Christian. I don't mean the "Oh, I'm so scared; I'm just a big chicken" kind of chicken. Our English language is full of negative allusions to chickens. The primary characteristic of a chicken that I most often emulate is the chicken's need to establish a pecking order.

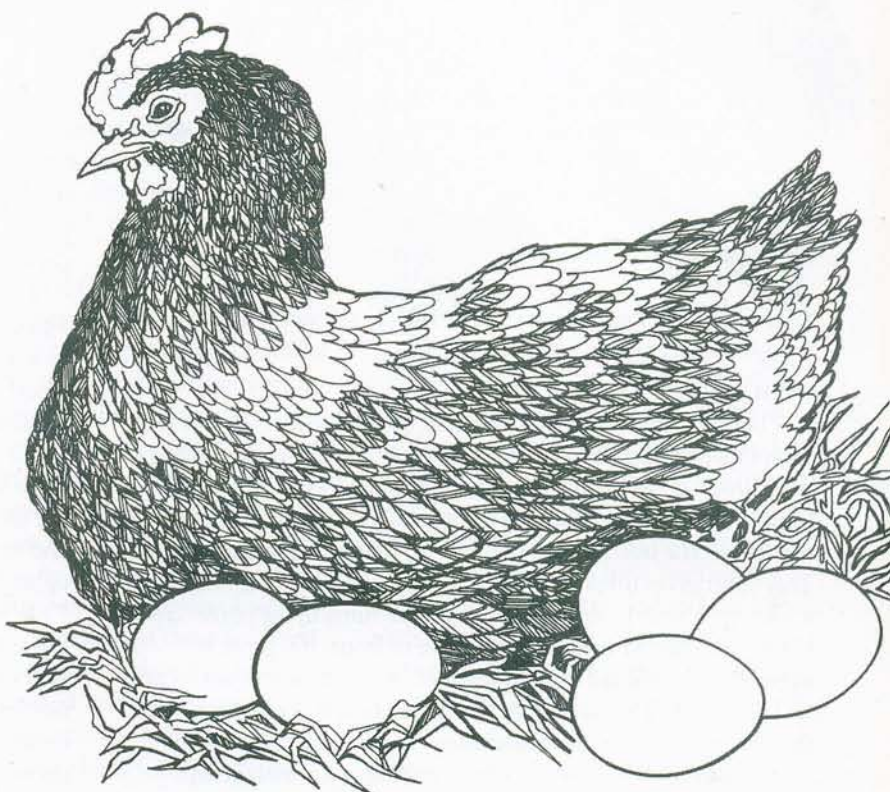
I know all about real-life chicken pecking orders. When I was a little tyke, we lived on a farm complete with goats, ponies, and chickens. The biggest, meanest chicken in the flock was a huge black-and-white rooster named Sampson.

It was my job to go to the hen house twice a day to collect eggs, a task I enjoyed since I loved playing with and watching the chickens. One day Sampson got the brilliant idea in his little chicken brain that I should be subordinate to him in the pecking order. I was somewhere between the ages of four and six; most definitely bigger than Sampson.

On this particular morning when I walked through the gate into the chicken pen, Sampson came rushing over to me, wings outstretched, squawking with indignation. When he got about three feet from me, he flew up into the air and planted his scrawny little chicken feet right in my chest. The force of his flight and surprise attack pushed me back on my little behind, screeching and crying.

I managed to escape Sampson that morning. After Sampson took on my brother and sisters and then even my dad, his luck changed. My grandpa, a fine Norwegian with a penchant for chicken and dumplings, took care of our Sampson problem the next Sunday.

Matthew 7:1-5 illustrates perfectly the chicken trap I fall into on a regular basis: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"



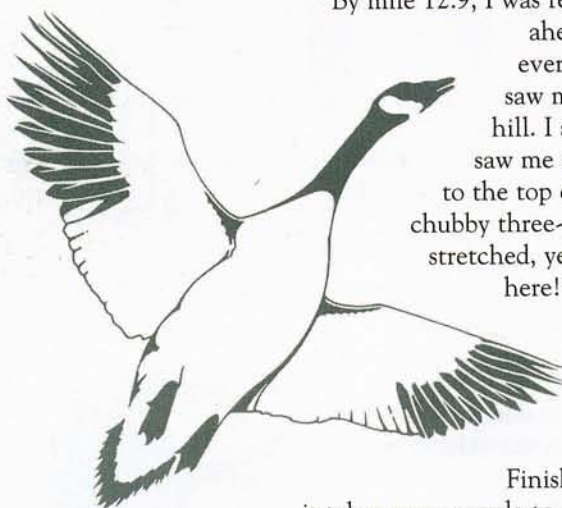


Have you ever walked into church and gotten the Sampson treatment: a well-meaning saint coming at you with arms outstretched, ready to plant a bony finger of rebuke in your chest? I've been on both ends of the pecking order phenomenon. In fact, I'm convinced that judging is the Adventist pastime. Here are some typical chicken thoughts:

"I saw George and Matilda walking out of WalMart at 7:03 last Saturday night. I checked my sunset table and sunset wasn't until 7:36." This said by someone who yells at his or her children and knocks them around now and then to keep them in line.

"You're not going to believe this, but I think Dr. Craig smokes. Yes, smokes! Shocking, isn't it? His breath smelled funny and then one day when he gave me a ride home from church I noticed a pack of cigarettes under the seat of the car." Said by someone who prefers channel surfing to honest exercise.

A chicken is a Christian who spends more time worrying about the pecking order of his fellow believers than he does working on his own relationship with God. The good news is, we're not condemned to a life in the chicken coop. If we find ourselves fluffing our feathers and strutting around the churchyard, we can pray that God will help us to remember the words of Micah 6:8, "He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."



## Be a goose!

The next time someone calls me a goose, I will choose to feel complimented. I'll assume, of course, that I am being compared to the Canada goose. You have probably seen a "V" formation of Canada geese. Scientists have discovered that when geese fly in formation, the leading bird provides an uplift for the birds behind. This uplift gives them at least 71 percent greater flying range than if each bird were to fly alone. Geese take turns flying point. Geese honk from behind to encourage those in front. If a goose is injured, two geese fall out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it. They stay with the goose until it is either able to fly again or until it is dead, and then they launch out on their own or with another formation to catch up with their group.

There are many lessons we can learn from the goose. Working together, we can accomplish a lot more than if we were to fly alone. We should share in leadership responsibilities. We should encourage each other, especially our leaders. We should stick with our wounded, not leave them to the world.

The members of my Sabbath School class are real geese. Their prayers and concern have helped me through many a rough week. At the beginning of the summer, I set a short-term goal for myself. A friend from work invited me to train with her and then run in a half-marathon with her at the end of summer. I foolishly accepted. I'm not a runner. The longest I'd ever run was six miles, back when I was sixteen and in shape. When I shared my goal with my friends here at church, one gave me a book on running. Another got up early with me on Tuesday mornings and ran with me while her daughter baby-sat my girls. Throughout the summer, these people encouraged and uplifted me.

On the day of the race, I got up early and started the race feeling fine. By mile 9, I told my training partner to take off without me. My knee hurt dreadfully and I was doing the shuffle rather than the kick. I knew somewhere ahead of me my husband and his brother and sister-in-law and my daughters were waiting for me.

By mile 12.9, I was really shuffling and there was a hill ahead. Just when I was giving up hope of ever finishing the race, I looked up and saw my cheering section at the top of the hill. I started waving, and before long they saw me and began to cheer. When I was almost to the top of the hill, Sarah came running down, chubby three-year-old legs pumping, arms outstretched, yelling, "Mommy! Mommy! You're here!" Laura was right behind her. They grabbed my hands and we jogged to the top of the hill. Barb, my running partner who had already finished, came back to run the last tenth of a mile with me.

Finishing a half-marathon in the time that it takes some people to run a whole one didn't matter. I'm proud of my accomplishment, but I know I never could have done it without all of the geese in my life.

I propose that our church should be full of geese. A church is a place where we can share our concerns about being an ostrich in a world full of zebras, lions, and elephants. A church is a place where we can hunt for spiritual understanding and the strength to kick the complacency out of the turkey. A church is a place where we can forgive each other our chickenness. A church is a place where we are all a flock of geese, working together toward our mutual goal. A church is a place where we know the goals and aspirations of our fellow geese so that we can encourage and uplift them in times of need.

When we reach our ultimate goal, I can just see Jesus running toward us, arms outstretched and tears streaming down his face, "My children! My children! You're here!" We will have made it, not by our own works or merit, but by the grace of God and the encouragement of those he calls his own. I want to be God's goose. How about you?



# Surviving in the Body of Christ

LYNN JOHNSON\*

**G**rowing up in a large Adventist center, I thought my home church represented typical Seventh-day Adventist Christianity. I grew up listening to a series of articulate pastors and countless others who intellectually fed me each week. Professional quality music was just part of the normal church service. I truly enjoyed attending church even through my tumultuous teen years.

In my early twenties, my husband and I relocated to a rural area of the country. Nothing in my Adventist upbringing had prepared me for the shock of a 40-member church in a conservative rural community. I clearly remember thinking to myself after my first Sabbath here, "I know I'm a Seventh-day Adventist, but what are these people?" I found the discussions over potluck dinners to be mind-boggling. Little time of trouble, big time of trouble, shakings and horns were not in my repertoire of typical Sabbath small talk. I listened in disbelief as the evils of "mixed swimming" (only children or adults of the same sex could swim together) and dairy products were expounded upon over dinner.

I found myself feeling critical and angry as I listened to sermons which seemed to completely overlook a God of love and joy. The repetitive focus was upon separatism and the need for purity. The extensive fixation upon Mrs. White's writings, to the exclusion of the Bible, was very troubling to me. Publications like *Our Firm Foundation* and institutions like Hartland were trusted. Institutions which I had grown up respecting like the General Conference and *The Review and Herald* were publicly questioned. Children were told that "*The Primary Treasure*, *Our Little Friend*, and *Junior Guide* don't have good stories for children in them," so these papers were banned (and remain so) in our church.

An actual quotation from a Sabbath School class (echoed by several "amens") kept me from returning to church for nearly a year. "Who cares about the backsliders going out the back door? I'm concerned

about the riffraff coming through the front door. At least the backsliders aren't here. These other folks are here like wolves in sheep's clothing." I began to realize firsthand the divisive forces at work within the NAD church.

Sixteen years ago my husband and I knew that we just couldn't connect to this group of people. So unwittingly we began our own spiritual journey, which led us from the comfort of spectator Christianity into the struggle to define what we really believed. During those years the Lord

*"Who cares about the backsliders going out the back door? I'm concerned about the riffraff coming through the front door."*

directed us to several other couples with an Adventist background who also felt the need for spiritual nurturing and exploration. Long before I knew what a "small group ministry" was, we were actively involved in our "Friday Night Discussion Group." Initially, we were a support group for the burned and dissatisfied Adventists in our area, of which there were an alarming number.

Our Friday night meetings developed into a Home Church group which has met now for ten years. Early on we had to make an effort to move beyond comparing notes about the latest unbelievable sermon or church handout. As long as we stayed focused on what was "wrong" with our local churches, we fed the anger and the hurt. Slowly we were able to focus upon what we really wanted—to develop a community which would nurture us as spiritual seekers.

Along the way many of those involved in Home Church have taken different paths. My husband and I have been attending our local church for about seven years now. Some of our Home Church group

have always actively attended their local churches. Others have no ties to a local congregation. We have made annual connections with others in nearby states by having a retreat weekend. These weekends have provided much-needed spiritual food for thought and Christian fellowship.

After we became parents, we wanted to take our children to Sabbath School. As we became more involved in our local church, we tried to overlook that which offended us. Yet, our church is not a place that we could comfortably bring a non-believer or a seeker from another denomination. You can still hear preaching from our pulpit about Russian tanks hidden in Michigan, the US government being run by Catholics, and the evils of dairy products. In districts where pastors travel between several churches and lay people are the most frequent speakers, personal opinion often masquerades as doctrine.

I have grown to love and respect many of the members of our church whom I first dismissed as "unbalanced." Some are truly unbalanced. Nonetheless, I have been blessed by my church involvement. My children are growing up in a church which allows them to be involved. They have been able to be actively involved in small group ministries. We attend Home Church monthly for our own nurturing. Over the years we have held Bible study groups regularly in our home for those in our community.

Life in our small church continues to be a struggle, but it has provided many opportunities for the Lord to help me develop patience. It has also sent me regularly to the Scriptures to reaffirm what I truly do believe. God has been able to take this destructive situation within our local church and use it to develop my commitment as a Christian. I have learned that only by trusting in Him and seeking Him each day can life be lived to the fullest, no matter where you live or where you go to church.

\*Lynn Johnson is a pseudonym



# Oregon Lay Pastor Disfellowshipped

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

phone conversations with this pastor before his visit. Tony reminded the church that they had agreed not to hire anyone without knowing he was committed to preaching the gospel.

The pastor came on a Friday to preach. The church found him to be pleasant, but many felt that he didn't preach the gospel clearly. "It's easy to verbalize the concept of salvation," Tony comments, "but understanding the concept is not the same as experiencing truth."

Livesay was pushing for a vote. The decisive business meeting convened during Sabbath hours on Memorial Day weekend. By this time, eleven months after Tony had begun to act as full-time pastor, member-

"Can't we meet in your home on Sabbath?" they implored. "If we can't hear the gospel preached on Sabbath, we'll go to Sunday churches to find it."

His wife said to him, "God has given you the gift of preaching the gospel. He's giving you the opportunity to preach to these people."

Tony agreed to meet with them. About 20 of the Gateway members began to meet in the Russo's home on Sabbath. One family that came had found Christ just months before as a result of hearing Tony preach. This family was facing a crisis: their husband and father was dying. His last request was that Tony preach his funeral at the Gateway church which, incidentally, was

Bible worker, and he positioned himself to be a pastor. When the church brought him in as pastor he showed his true colors." He went on to say that Russo baptized a few people, and he led them to believe he was a pastor, but no one really thought of him as a pastor.

"He wanted to be hired by the conference," Livesay continued, "but that wasn't going to happen. We saw too many red flags."

Livesay further stated that the Russo story isn't the same as the other pastoral firings or resignations in Oregon.

When *Adventist Today* contacted Phil Stephens for his perspective on the situation he responded, "I really wouldn't have any comment on that."

But Richard Pelham summarized this story. "Tony is not argumentative. He will walk away from arguments. I believe his starting a new church grew out of his necessity to preach the gospel. God led people to Gateway because Tony was preaching the gospel, and the Devil jumped in and messed [the situation] up. The Bible says you'll know them by their fruits, and even though I'm not part of his group, I can say unequivocally that I trust Tony. He exemplifies what Christ would do."

On July 21, 1998, the Gateway church disfellowshipped Tony. Two conference representatives were present, including Livesay.

Tony's congregation, the Church of the Blessed Hope 7th Day, now has about 50 members, several of whom are not from Gateway. They meet in a hall supplied by the city, and they are fully incorporated as a non-profit organization.

"The only test of fellowship is that a person believe in Jesus through faith. Ellen White will not be a test of fellowship. We have no church board, since we believe in the priesthood of all believers; and we should all be equal in decision-making," says Tony.

"Leadership is to have a servant role. The problem I see in Adventism is the leadership taking a more demanding role over the churches. The gospel is going to be preached by many or by few. God will have the last word, not the institution. I can only stand on the principle that the saving message of Christ is the only message worth presenting."

## Don Livesay replied that the conference had no theological issues with him.

ship had swelled to 210. Only 43 people attended the meeting to cast votes. They voted to hire the pastor.

Tony believes it was a mistake to hold the meeting on Sabbath and to push for a vote immediately after the man preached. "The church body should have been given time to think about this," he says.

A week before the vote, Tony resigned his position of Bible worker. (The church had asked that he stay on after the new pastor came.) His letter of resignation states his reason: "I have loved and enjoyed working with all of you. However, it is my conviction that I can no longer work in an atmosphere where I cannot effect a change with some of the leadership at Gateway... I believe that the foundation of any church body should be that of Christ and His message of salvation. There is some division in this church body as to what that gospel constitutes. This is an age-old problem and not one that is easily reconcilable..."

Tony planned to go back to work as an investigator for the county. But to his surprise several of his congregation approached him, begging him to continue to teach them.

being rented from a Baptist congregation.

The Baptist pastor gave Tony permission to use the church for the funeral. But, says Russo, Phil Stephens and the Gateway head elder heard about the request and convinced the Baptist pastor that he should not allow Tony to preach in their church. Instead, Tony requested and received permission to use another local Adventist church. According to Russo, one of the two Gateway elders called the conference with the news, and Livesay called one of the pastoral staff at that church and told him that he didn't want the memorial service to be conducted there.

The pastors of the church decided, however, that they needed to consider the feelings of the family, and they allowed Tony to preach the funeral in spite of the directive.

When questioned about Tony Russo, Don Livesay replied that the conference had no theological issues with him. "Why are you reporting this story?" he asked.

When told that *Adventist Today* was covering the event because Russo has an independent Sabbath-keeping congregation, he replied, "Oh. It was entirely an internal power play. He was hired to be a





# Reading About the Bible!

RANDY ROBERTS

I read somewhere that most people don't read famous authors, they just read about them. How many people, for example, have actually read Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, or Homer's *The Odyssey*? On the other hand, anyone who has had a college-level Intro to Psych course has read about Freud's theories of the conscious and the unconscious, among others. And anyone who has taken an elementary course in Greek mythology knows the story of the Trojan horse.

I wonder how many people have actually read the Bible. Not about it. Actually read it. I hadn't. Not for many years.

Oh, there was that one time that I decided to read it. I sat down with my trusty King James Version Bible and vowed that I was going to read it all the way through even if it killed me. It very nearly did. In starts and stops, lurches and stalls, I read. And read. It took me forever! Finally, though, I finished. (I think). That was the last time I attempted to read the Bible through for many years.

Don't misunderstand. I felt guilty for not spending more time with the Bible. (Especially when I preached that we should be doing that very thing.) But I read biblical things. I read spiritual books. I even read portions of the Bible—here a little, there a little, a line here and line there—you get the picture. Only problem was, I sensed that I wasn't getting the picture. At least not the full picture. I knew something was missing. It was as though I was reading snippets from great literature but missing out on the drama and tension of the overall plot.

Then one day I listened to a tape which had been a gift at my ordination service. It was an interview with H.M.S. Richards, entitled, "If I Were a Young Minister Again."

Among a number of things Richards said was this disturbing jewel: were he a young minister again, he would read the Bible more. H.M.S. Richards said that! He who read the Bible like the morning newspaper! He who read the entire Bible through in the first month of each year! (Where did that leave me?!) He also said that he had narrated the Bible on audiocassette, and that he had completed it in ninety hours. That set my wheels turning.

Richards was not known for his rapid delivery. Therefore, I figured, if he could read through the

**I wonder  
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ally read  
the Bible.**



Randy Roberts is an assistant professor on the Faculty of Religion at Loma Linda University and is senior pastor of the Corona Seventh-day Adventist church in Southern California. He and his wife Anita have a son, Austin, and a daughter, Miranda.

entire Bible, out loud, in ninety hours, I should certainly be able to read it to myself in, say, sixty.

So I made a vow to myself. Beginning that year, I would read the Bible through, from cover to cover, in the first two months of each year, by reading an hour a day. I set to work right away, in the New International Version. In almost exactly sixty days, I was done. In years that followed, I read the New Revised Standard Version, the NIV again, and more recently the New Living Translation. I even read through a Bible my father had given me, the Reina Valera Version. (This took me quite a bit longer, as my Spanish reading skills need sharpening.)

In reading the Bible through each year, my goal has not been to do an in-depth study of a selected book, or to do exegesis on any particular passage. It has been simply to read the Bible in order to get an overview of God's revelation. I have often written down questions, observations and comments, but mostly I have just prayed and read. (In the other ten months of the year, I study and exegete for depth.) That praying and reading has changed me in a variety of ways. I will mention three.

First, it has changed my perspective on Scripture. With each passing year I am increasingly aware of its grandeur. Reading through the Bible in a short space gives one a sense of its twists and turns, its heights and depths, its song and its sorrow. It also moves one from "proof-texting" to reading passages within a larger, more authentic context.

Second, my familiarity with the Bible continues to deepen. As the years go by, it becomes more and more of an old friend. It is not unlike what trekking across the country once a year might be—there are scenes of which one never tires, but always anticipates; scenes which become part of the terrain of one's life.

It has had a third effect. I no longer just read about Job and Esther and Paul and the Psalms. I now read them firsthand. And in so doing, I find that I am forming my own Spirit-led impressions and understandings and ideas, not just reflecting those of someone else who read them.

If it is true that only those who read the authors themselves have earned the right to comment on them, then I am earning the right to have opinions about the Bible. And my first opinion is this:

Stop (merely) reading about the Bible. Instead, read the Bible!



# Oregon Lay Pastor Disfellowshipped

COLLEEN MOORE TINKER

Until 1993 Tony Russo was a private investigator working for private law firms in Central California. He had been an Adventist for many years, but in 1980 he left the church.

"I struggled hard to be a good Adventist," he says, "but I never had peace." He was out of the church for five years. In desperation he finally told God that he needed to understand what the gospel was all about or he would never come back to him.

"God directed me to 1 John, Galatians, and Romans 7," Tony remembers; "something wonderful happened; for the first time I experienced what it meant to have Christ living in me."

invitation, and Gateway agreed to pay his entire salary. He was not hired by the conference, although Gateway sent the money for his check to the conference which in turn issued payment to Tony. Nor was Tony paid a pastor's salary; he was officially a Bible worker, and he had no employee benefits.

At the time Tony began full-time ministry at Gateway, weekly attendance averaged between 80-85 people. As the months passed, that membership grew significantly. Tony's message of grace was unique among Adventist churches in that area, and as the word of his preaching spread, people from varied backgrounds began to attend. He did not renounce traditional Adventist teachings, but he did believe that Ellen White should not be a test of fellowship, nor should she be on the

Don Livesay, now assistant to the president of the Oregon Conference, called Tony. He had, he said, received a tape of a sermon Tony preached at the Rogue River church. In the sermon Tony commented that the Christian's only authority must come from Scripture and not from the laws or church manuals. That, Livesay told Russo, was a "red flag."

According to Tony, that comment wasn't the only red flag Livesay saw. In a phone conversation with Tony, Livesay outlined others, including a reported "independent spirit" and Gateway's surge in membership under Tony's leadership.

"I saw the biggest red flag of all," Tony said; "I felt the conference wanted me to be more loyal to the institution than to the gospel." About this time Tony told Livesay that he didn't want to be a conference pastor.

The conference began to search for a full-time pastor for Gateway. In January, Livesay first contacted Russo with the name of a specific pastor he had in mind for them. The church board had voted that they would not agree to bring in a pastor unless he preached the gospel, the clear gospel they had grown to love. According to Russo the board was willing to look at several prospective pastors and allow the members to decide which one they wanted.

The church did have a legitimate reason to take a firm stand on approving the hiring of a pastor, acknowledges Harry Fitzsimmons, one of the Gateway members. Some years ago a sister church had gotten a new pastor assigned to them, and the church had felt that the conference had pushed the pastor on them without their approval. They had, in fact, perceived the move to be political.

Meanwhile, Tony and the church prepared for an evangelistic series with union conference evangelist Richard Halversen.

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loyal to the institution than to the gospel."**

In 1993 Tony and his wife Marchelle moved to Cave Junction, Oregon, and Tony became active in the Cave Junction church. Soon he received invitations to speak in several of the area churches including Rogue River, Gateway Christian Fellowship, and Grants Pass Adventist church. All of these churches invited Tony to work for them as a pastoral assistant. Tony decided to work for Rogue River and Gateway. Each congregation raised half of his salary (which was about one-half of a pastor's salary), and he preached every other week at each church.

"Tony is excellent at preaching the gospel," says Richard Pelham, a member of the Gateway church. In fact, Tony's preaching began to attract people who hadn't attended for many years.

In June, 1997, the Gateway pastor was transferred, and Gateway asked Tony to be their full-time pastor. He accepted their

baptismal certificate. That requirement, he believed, was reminiscent of the Mormon's cultic belief in Joseph Smith. He focused on the gospel alone, and many people were baptized and joined the church.

By September he had the attention of the Oregon Conference. Clifton Walters, then assistant to Oregon president Alf Birch, called Tony and asked him and Marchelle to come to Portland for an interview. According to Tony, Walters said they were interested in hiring him as a conference employee. They went for the interview. No one reached a decision at that meeting, but the conference's interest was clear. But then the trouble began.