

NEWS

ANALYSIS

OPINION

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Examining Toronto 2000 Are we Almost Home?



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from the editor

What did it all mean?

John McLarty

A personal review of the 57th session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

First some facts about my observational status: I attended the meetings in the SkyDome on both Sabbath mornings and most evening meetings. I heard very little of the floor debate of the Session because I spent nearly all day every day, except Sabbath, at the Adventist Today booth in the exhibit hall.

The Music

It was wonderful. Nearly every piece of music I heard, whether on the main stage in the SkyDome or on the Global Mission or Adventist Book Center stages in the exhibit hall, was performed with verve and virtuosity. Styles ranged from classical to folk to "world music." The sound of drums was constant. The music from East Africa, especially, included not only drums but "movement." Those who believe drums and dance have no place in worship would have been left with a difficult choice: either Adventists in Africa and India have fallen into very deep apostasy or much of what we label as morality in music is, in fact, cultural.

One seminary professor told me of his grave reservations about the music. And Samuele Bacchiocchi, self-appointed guardian of Adventist standards, did more than privately disapprove. At one point he interrupted a young group named Valor who were performing on a stage at the Adventist Book Center. He grabbed one of their mikes and began a tirade against "this rock music." The ABC manager had to come out and retrieve the microphone.

The Preaching

In contrast to the music, the preaching was quite forgettable. With the exception of the final weekend I heard very few positive comments about the preaching. The sermon on the first Friday night included awkward references to Jews and Moslems which members of the respective groups would have found offensive. The next morning's sermon featured rhetorically clever attacks on every possible kind of sinner,

but failed to mention that Jesus was a friend to sinners. Church members were exhorted to go out and evangelize sinners, but there was not even a hint of grace or mercy for any sinners who might be inside the church or inside the SkyDome that morning. Fortunately, the second weekend was much better.

The music had been carefully selected from audition tapes from Adventist musicians around the world. We were hearing the best of the best. It appeared to me that the preachers were selected on the basis of political concerns associated with their official positions rather than their ability to preach. Hence the unevenness of quality.

Left or Right?

Did this session give any indication about the future trajectory of the church? Are we moving to the left or the right? In my opinion, this session demonstrated a surprising resistance to moving either direction.

Early in the session there was a motion to refine the language in the baptismal vow that speaks of the "remnant church." Not one delegate rose to speak in favor of the motion. I was amazed and dismayed. Could the delegates be that out of touch? Then a proposed revision of the church Manual section dealing with divorce and remarriage was vigorously opposed and ultimately referred back to committee, effectively killing any prospect for change for at least five years. I thought that progressive Adventism had been buried. But then came the stunning reversal on Thursday morning when the divorce and remarriage document was brought back onto the floor and passed. (I estimate the measure was approved by eighty percent of those voting.)

Another indication of our curious connections with the concerns of both progressives and conservatives was the role of women. Ordination was not on the agenda at this session, but women were promi-

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Creation Seminar

Regarding your issue on creation: Why, in this day and age, is there any need to concede any ground on the issue of the SDA belief on creation? And what on earth is a creation theologian who is a prominent evolutionist? An oxymoron if there ever was one. I challenge the pastor of the LLU church to read some Phillip Johnson and Michael Behe. Stephen J. Gould may be an entertaining author, but if Madeleine Murray O'Hare or Ayn Rand writes well should a pastor fill his mind with it?

In the interest of fairness you owe it to those who attended the meetings in October at LLU church an opportunity to hear the other side. Jason Tan especially, and others like him, need to be aware of reasons they can believe in creation with their heads held high.... Equal time please!

Charles Utt | Via the Internet

Creation

After reading your issue of AT on Creation, I must agree with Ervin Taylor, who states in his article, that "future dialogue must center on Biblical Hermeneutics." I have chosen to take the stance that my only hope of believing 'truth' is to take a literal reading of the Bible. I find that applying the latest scientific discovery or contemporary philosophy to help interpret the Bible is like throwing darts into a postmodern abyss in hopes of hitting a moving bullseye.

Seems to me, those taking a critical reading of the Bible (read, Old Earth Creationists), are wanting to put God in a box that they can understand in terms of the known world. Then as that known world expands, so does the box they allow God to occupy.

At least with a literal reading of the Bible one can plant one's feet firmly on the ground and mold science and philosophy to fit God's Word. If the literal reading turns out to be the true reading, I certainly have a better chance of hitting the target (truth), than those

taking a critical reading.

I try to follow the issue of creation from a fairly scientific standpoint, and I really haven't lost any sleep over guilt from suppressing my intellect.

Jonathan Freed | Via the Internet

Pillars of the Church

In ... the Nov.-Dec. 1999 issue, you have in a subtle manner assaulted every major belief pillar of the SDA Church

except the Sabbath ... You pull the theological rug out from under the reasons for the existence of this Church, and you do

it in a reasoned, scholarly, intellectual way. I have this hunch that those who buy into the thinking of AT will at some point find it a rather simple step to jettison the whole SDA package. The reason being because this special Church, this prophetically ordained people, this divinely denominated movement will have been carefully, and systematically reduced to "one other church."

Philip W. Dunham

Christ-Centered Perspective

It seems that Babcock's article "Mandate for the ... Christ-centered Perspective" (AT Jan-Feb 2000) takes the position that a Christ-centered perspective is of necessity theologically conservative. I don't believe this is true. Consider Jesus' life and the problems He had with the theological conservatives of His day. At a minimum the article reveals the difficulty of defining "theological conservative." I was more comfortable with Daily's article. He emphasized our need for commitment to core Christian values, tolerance for others and the need to live as a priesthood of all believers.

Jim Edwards | College Place, WA

Catholic Bashing

In the May-June, 2000 issue Alan Reinach commented briefly on the bad press conservative Protestants receive when they attack the Roman Catholic Church. But conservatives have themselves to blame for handling criticism of the Roman Catholic Church poorly and unimaginatively.

Attacks on the Pope are not a Protestant invention but rather have a long and respectable medieval heritage. For

Why, in this day and age, is there any need to concede any ground on the issue of the SDA belief on creation? And what on earth is a creation theologian who is a prominent evolutionist?

instance, near the end of Dante's *Purgatorio* (What self-respecting Adventist would read, much less quote a book called "*Purgatono*"?) Dante portrays the office of the pope as a prostitute riding a seven-headed, ten-horned beast, which is the church (cf. Rev 18). He dates the decline of the church and Papacy to Constantine and the union of church and state. All of this is in a classic work used devotionally by many Catholics. A creative conservative (hopefully not an oxymoron) could make good use of this in presenting the classic Protestant critique of the Catholic Church.

In the Augsburg Confession the longest article condemns clerical celibacy as dangerous and unenforceable. A few months ago two groups of sociologists, some Catholic, confirmed this verdict. Are our conservatives making good use of this news? Are we wedded to 19th century arguments and unable to adapt and grow?

In general I find conservatives in our church to be a bit calcified. They want the privilege of not having to work out new and enlightened defenses of our viewpoint. Instead they depend on work done over a century ago. And when they do enter modern polemics they usually have stars in their eyes,

stars like Dr. Laura and James Dobson. Heads-up. You can respond to the issues of today if you don't mind some creativity.

Jim Miller | Madison, WI

Made to Think

I am always interested in the letters from your readers, even the agitated ones. It reminded me of Mrs. White's words in CW 40:3; "Agitate, Agitate, Agitate." We do not have to agree with all of your articles, but if the articles can make us think, then I thank God for them. God tried to shake up the Israelites so that they would see their mistakes, but they never could, even warning after warning, because they were God's chosen people. The priest and the ruler in Jesus wanted everything to remain status quo, so they complained that Jesus disturbed the people. Please continue to disturb us and make us think! Keep up the good work.

Georgia Hart | Smithville, TN

New E-zine

After I had edited and published Larry Downing's article, "Asking for Forgiveness," as an editorial in my on-line magazine, *Adventist Perspective*, he let me know that you were also interested in publishing it. Of course he had my permission to submit it to you, and I am delighted that the article received the wider circulation it deserved. Larry Downing also has an article in our inaugural edition. Check it out.

www.adventistperspective.com. Keep up the good and necessary work.

**Andrew Hanson, Editor |
Adventist Perspective**

To the staff at Adventist Today:

The question has been asked (AT, March/April, 2000) why "the only man on the panel [of the Divine Creation Sabbath Seminar] supporting the historical view of the Bible story did not have anything published in AT. The answer is be-

cause at the time it was technically too difficult. I was asked to submit a written copy of my remarks to be published in *Adventist Today*. I did not have one, and asked the person contacting me to simply transcribe my remarks at the time from the video. The staff at *Adventist Today* did not publish my remarks, possibly because they did not have time, or possibly because they did not feel comfortable publishing unpolished material. I did not have access to a video until after the relevant issue of *Adventist Today* was published. So the material did not get published then. As a correction to that situation, here are some of my remarks. [Editors note: This letter was shortened because of space constraints].

I was asked to serve on this panel and then later found out what the title was. "What are Adventists to make of evolu-

tionary biology?" I'm not sure that I would have given it [the panel discussion] this title. The reason why is because I think that evo-

lutionary biology is a red herring. For example, all the creationists that I know, and I know quite a few of them, and have read a few more, accept what you might call microevolution. I don't know of any creationists, that are around today at least, who would argue that the wolf, and the dog, and the coyote, and probably the fox, were not all descended from the same set of animals, and probably only one pair would have come over on the Ark. That's quite a bit of evolutionary biology, and it would have happened within the last (depending on whose version you believe) four to twenty thousand years. Evolutionists in general, [and] progressive creationists in general, most I think would accept these [this] same set of facts. And so, from the standpoint of what you might call microcreationists and the evolutionists on that score. Maybe we are talking about macroevolution, the grand sweep

of theory that says that God, if He exists (or She exists), does not interfere with the day-to-day operation of the Universe; in fact, if God interfered at all, there was only one place, and that was at the very beginning; and the pure form will reject God's intervention there too. But I suspect that most of us on the panel, certainly the Adventists on the panel, would be in agreement that that kind of evolution is false; that is, that some time in the sweep of history, God came down and created life. And in fact, if you look at the facts of the record, there is very little that anybody can say to argue otherwise than [that] God created life at that point. I will not go into that at this point, because that is a long subject, but I will just say that the spontaneous generation of life on earth does not have the scientific support that it is sometimes believed that it has. And so

The priest and the ruler in Jesus day wanted everything to remain status quo, so they complained that Jesus disturbed the people. Please continue to disturb us and make us think! Keep us the good work.

Adventists really don't have that much trouble in that regard either. I would rather frame the question in two places [areas]. First, is the Universe a closed system? And the second, how long did it take? For me, the major theological difficulties with the current scientific worldview did not start with Darwin; they started with Hutton. I will address this from a short-age perspective. Another question is, what is the proper relationship between science and religion? As I see it, religion must listen to science. Religion failed to do that once, or at least part of religion, during the days of Galileo, and suffered for it, and is still in some ways suffering for it. On the

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other hand, science sometimes should be listening to religion. Let's say 40 years ago the concept of a God who started the Universe was not in favor, and I think [that] today it probably is close to a majority view, certainly a respected view within science. And that is a position that religion pointed towards. But the relationship between religion and history may be instructive to the relationship between religion and science. Back in the 1950's there was a fellow by the name of Edwin Thiele who was presented with a problem that had seemed to be insoluble for years, decades, literally millennia, and that is how to fit the numbers of the Hebrew kings together with themselves harmoniously, and with secular history. He managed to solve this. He didn't manage to solve completely all of the Biblical problems, but he came close; there were only about three texts that he had to acknowledge were probably later scribal additions or scribal errors. But what was most striking was, that out of 5 secular events in history, he challenged 4 of them, and his challenge has stood the test of time. And the most

In today's climate of candor and fairness is it not high time we reversed this situation? There would be few honest members, who having listened to Dr. Ford just once would not say, "why is this man not within our ranks?"

striking one is when Samaria was supposed to be destroyed by Sargon, and Thiele said no, Sargon did not destroy Samaria; and Sargon was a liar. And when you call the monuments liars and you win, you've done pretty well. The one thing I would say is that I don't think that the current scientific consensus is necessarily determinative for our view of evolutionary biology. I think that there are reasons to argue for a short age of life on earth. Thank you.

Paul Giem | Loma Linda, CA

Letter to the Church President Regarding Desmond Ford

The following is an open letter addressed to the Jan Paulsen, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, from Kevin Ferris, an Adventist layman in Wishart, Queensland, Australia, dated February 20, 2000:

Dear Elder Paulsen,

I have just come from a service at the Brisbane City Baptist Church where I listened to the most outstanding preacher I have ever heard. His name is Dr. Desmond Ford.

The Baptist Church here in Brisbane has adopted Dr. Ford, and tonight's talk was the culmination of a weekend seminar. Next week a group of Baptist officials and a finance trader have arranged a meeting to plan the establishment of a million dollar trust to be used for the promotion of Dr. Ford at future public meetings.

How my heart burned as I thought of how our church rejected one of the

most valuable assets we ever had. How can we forgive ourselves?

In today's climate of candor and fairness is it not high time we reversed this situation? There would be few

honest members, who having listened to Dr. Ford just once would not say, "why is this man not within our ranks?" Particularly since our current Fundamental Beliefs supports him in the matter of the sufficiency of Calvary atonement, and even more particularly that the Glacier View Consensus Statement both supported him and was agreed to by himself (a fact of which our members are unaware). So by continuing to quarantine him we are perpetrating the lie

that what he preaches (including the gospel as the church understands it) is heresy, when this is not the case.

It is surely time a committee was formed to re-examine his position in view of current theological thought. And indeed for a reappraisal of those forces leading to his demise in the form of those groups whose views are now discredited. We continually subscribe to this dark legacy of events to our shame. As a loyal member of our church I am embarrassed by those events, and always will be until they are reversed.

The reversal process has begun in a small way here in Australia. Dr. Ford has preached in one of our major churches, and will do so again shortly. He has taken Sabbath School lesson classes by invitation. It will happen more and more as honest people see what should be done and do it. We should now make this access acceptable across the board in order to benefit from the message he can most capably deliver at this time.

If we were to come across a non Adventist preacher who powerfully defends the Sabbath, vividly proclaims the gospel, brilliantly champions Adventist doctrine to the extent of most of our ministers, and incisively communicates any Bible topic, we would go out of our way to see that person into the fold. Unless his name was Desmond Ford! Does this tell us something about ourselves?

Dr. Ford is also one of the finest Christian gentlemen one can meet. How appropriate it would be if our arms of love and acceptance were equally as expansive. It would be relatively easy to gather a few thousand signatures of support for extending those arms. But why should that be necessary?

I plead for your most prayerful, courageous and urgent consideration of this matter.

**Yours sincerely,
Kevin Ferris**

The General Conference from A to Z:

Observations of the session

John McLarty

Women in the Programming

Women are conspicuously present in the public programming of this General Conference (GC) Session. They offer prayer, present scripture readings. A woman evangelist was featured in the Euro-Asia Division report. In nearly every instance when male leaders were presented, their wives were by their side on the platform and at the pulpit. Listening to talk in the corridors, some are reading this high visibility of women in the ceremonies of the session as indicating that church leaders are seeking to work the church slowly toward full official recognition of women in ministry.

Marion Chung Lee was featured in the Northern Asia-Pacific report. She cares for orphans and has led many to join the SDA Church. A conversion story in this same report featured a woman convert and a woman pastor.

President Paulsen Affirms Openness

Yesterday, I was told that twice delegates on the floor asked to see documentation associated with a proposed revision of the church manual statement on divorce and remarriage that would be discussed today. And both times they were refused. Some of the delegates were quite upset.

This morning before the session officially opened, President Jan Paulsen spoke to the delegates. He said that the documentation that had been requested yesterday was available to any delegate that wanted it. He hoped the delegates wouldn't ignore the conclusions of the working group and try to construct a statement from scratch, but he affirmed, the supporting documentation would be freely available to any delegate who wished to have it.

Paulsen's remarks appeared to dissipate the tension created by the earlier refusal to allow access to the documentation.

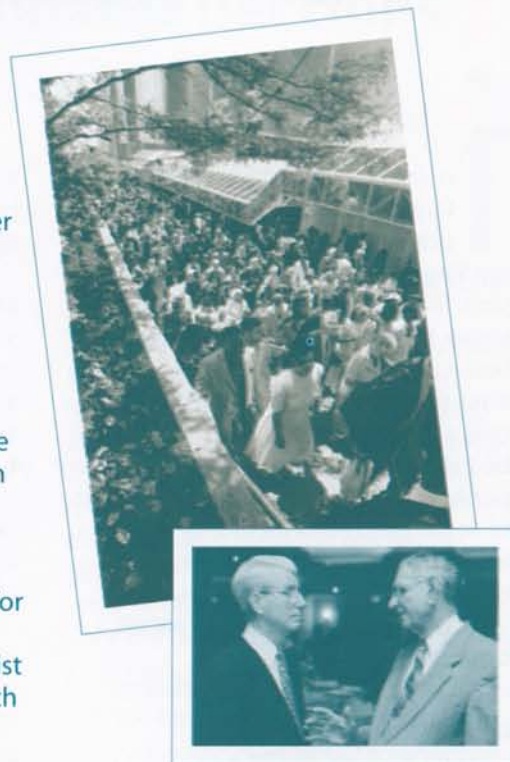
The Remnant Church in the Baptismal Vow

Yesterday, a motion was presented from the floor to amend the language of the baptismal vow so that a person would not be required to affirm their conviction "that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant church of Bible prophecy" to qualify for baptism. The proposal was that it would read "the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a part of the remnant church ..." Many delegates spoke strongly against any softening of the present wording. Not one single delegate rose to speak in favor of the motion and it was soundly defeated. Then someone else proposed changing it to read "that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the visible remnant church ..." This proposal, too, was defeated.

The utter lack of support for this amendment surprised me. As a pastor I have had more than a few people object to this wording and accept baptism only when they were informed that many Adventists do not accept a simple equation of the Adventist denomination with the church of God. It's important to note that the baptismal vows do not include all of our doctrines, so the exclusion of this particular point from the vows would not be the same as changing a doctrinal statement. There are thirteen points in the baptismal vows and twenty-seven points in our doctrinal statement.

A Report From Africa

The numbers that come from Africa are amazing. The Eastern Africa Division includes countries from Ethiopia to Zimbabwe to Kenya and Uganda. In



the last five years they have baptized 850,000. Their membership is just shy of two million, a number they expect to surpass by December of this year. In tonight's report from Africa, every piece of music included movement that could only be called dancing, some of it quite flamboyant. If people from North America did anything involving remotely as much movement there would be a huge outcry.

The audience seemed to especially enjoy the children's choir. Every time they launched into one of their signature moves, slowly working themselves around in three sixties, there was quick and loud applause from the audience.

Movement to music was characteristic of most of the African performances on the General Conference stage, as well as the music pictured in the division's video of church life throughout its territory. I couldn't help joking with my seatmate that if North Americans can tolerate dancing in worship, people from outside North America should be able to tolerate the ordination of women. ■

George Knight plays devil's advocate

Dennis Hokama

July 3, 2000 Skydome, Toronto

In the next five days, there will be five presentations and workshops under the title of what President Jan Paulsen calls "Windows on Mission." Based on the format followed today, the delegates will be asked to break up into small discussion groups after the presentation. Using the lecture as a springboard, each group will be asked to compose and then present publicly a list of their group's answers to some questions based on that lecture. The two questions each discussion group had to address were:

1. I believe the church's greatest opportunities are:

2. I believe the church's greatest challenges or threats are:

Dr. George Knight of Andrews University addressed the topic "The Church Thinking Strategically." The format he chose was to play the devil's advocate. What follows is a reconstruction of the

essence of his presentation.

If I were the devil, I would:

1. ...discourage the youth

of the church by having older members impose their own tastes, style, methods and perspectives on the youth as if they are the essentials of being an Adventist.

2. ...get the church to think small by accepting extremely modest achievements as the most that can be expected.

3. ...get people to believe that there is only one way to do things, and then enforce that conviction by making

everyone to do things the same way. He used worship service as an example.

While claiming to know nothing about "celebration" services, Knight said that in some churches, he could fall asleep just before the doxology and awaken just after the benediction, and yet know everything that has happened while he was asleep.

4. ...downplay the importance of new technology in finishing the church's work.

5. ...make pastors and administrators do all the planning and executing rather than allowing them to empower and enable the laymen to plan and execute the work of the church.

6. ...undermine the importance of the local congregation and take them for granted while focusing on more abstract and distant objectives.

7. ...create more administrative levels and more administrators. I would take the most effective pastors away from their congregations and put them behind a desk.

The Adventist Church has more levels of administration than any other church in the world ... including the Roman Catholic Church. Adventists have four levels of administration, Knight says, whereas the openly hierarchical Catholic church has only two.

8. ...make Adventists afraid of the Holy Spirit.

9. ...encourage the church to keep playing the numbers game. Spend money strictly on the basis of where

the most baptisms can be reaped for the fewest dollars invested. Neglect, therefore, North America and Caucasians.

10. ...get Adventists to forget or de-emphasize their apocalyptic heritage.

11. ...get Adventists to maintain that all of their traditional beliefs are of equal importance and therefore equally nonnegotiable.

12. ...get Adventists fighting each

If I were the devil, I would encourage the church to keep playing the numbers game. Spend money strictly on the basis of where the most baptisms can be reaped for the fewest dollars invested. Neglect, therefore, North America and Caucasians.

other.

13. ...get Adventists to think tribally, nationally, or racially.

14. ...to look miserable on the Sabbath; make them think and act as if the Sabbath is the cost of belonging to God's church; make them look forward to Saturday night more than Friday night.

After making the above points, Knight closed by saying that if he were God, he would encourage the church to expend its energy in thinking, planning, and acting to defeat the Devil's plan.

Many of Knight's points were received very enthusiastically with applause and even shouts of "Bravo!" especially from the press box and the stands, whereas the delegates seated on the playing field seemed decidedly less expressive. ■



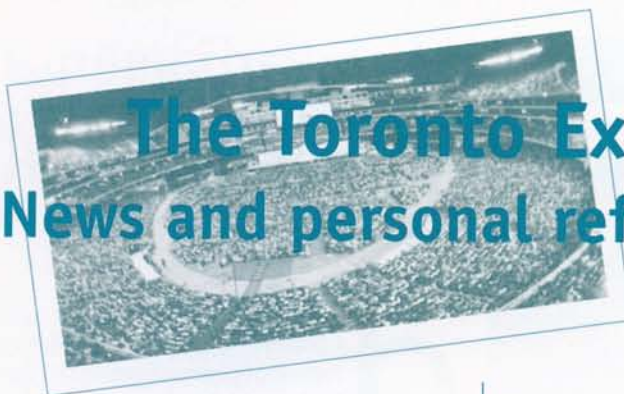
Unity in Diversity

John McLarty

One of the most obvious features of the Seventh-day Adventist Church highlighted by this General Conference Session is its diversity. There is the obvious diversity of race, ethnicity and language. Prayers were heard in Korean and an unfamiliar African language, music with Slavic words and other languages. But the diversity went far beyond mere internationalism. From the platform speakers exhibited sophistication and rough, country piety. There was bluegrass music and classical music performed by men's choruses and orchestras. The public ceremonies of the session dramatically highlighted the cultural varieties of Adventism rooted in ethnic variety.

Dennis Hokama, AT's news editor, attended a news conference on Friday afternoon with Jan Paulsen. In this press conference most of the questions centered around how he would manage the ideological and ethnic diversity of the church and avoid fracturing along ideological or regional lines. He did not outline a program, but simply affirmed an awareness of the challenge and his commitment to maintain the "pillars" of the church while allowing diversity in matters of lesser importance. ■

The Toronto Experience: News and personal reflections



Dennis Hokama

the Missing Rwandan Delegation

None of the Rwandan delegation made it to Toronto. I have spent considerable time trying to find out why. There were supposed to be 29 delegates, according to several delegates in the African Indian Ocean delegation, but only seven were granted visas by Canadian immigration, and those seven did not include the president or the secretary. The story is that the seven delegates chose to remain behind in an act of solidarity. The reason why a visa is denied is confidential information, and nobody from the Division will say anything more specific.

The Internationalization of Adventism

The internationalization of Adventism is obvious everywhere. It seems that more than half of the prayers in the SkyDome are offered in a foreign language with no translation. No count is made, but my impression is that the number of women and ethnic speakers is very high. On the floor during the business session, foreigners come to the mike with regularity, and translation is provided, though most can speak English. I am impressed by the confidence with the foreigners come to the microphone, and with the respect that is shown to everyone.

Paulsen's Closing Address

Paulsen stressed that Mission must always be the driving force and justification for church. Quality of life and unity were the other two issues that needed to be kept in mind. The church must be seen as a safe and caring place to be. As such, there was no

place for racism, sexism, etc. The statement was cheered.

As he has done on many other occasions, he again urged churches to forgo local interests for world unity, and denounced congregationalism as completely alien to the spirit of the movement. Nobody should undo elements that hold the church together, he said, and congregations were to hold ministers accountable if they did not abide by these principles.

Collegiality

From beginning to end, there has been an incredible spirit of openness and camaraderie among the media people that I found surprising and delightful.

Bettina Krause, Ray Dabrowski and all the other GC media staff have been as helpful and cooperative as they can be. There are phones with free local calls, and two computers with Internet connection and printer are available for our use. A radio reporter from ARN named Jerry Wood went out of his way to bring me a CD of an interview that I wanted. Does this mean AT has gone soft and become part of the establishment?

Toronto Breaks attendance records

As many expected, the last Sabbath of the 57th General Conference session set a new all time record for attendance. I spoke to Linda de Leon, event manager, just after the morning church service had finished. Attendance in the SkyDome alone was estimated at between 60-62,000. Various other services may have added a few thousand to these figures. The figures were not hers, de Leon stressed, but were provided to her by SkyDome security. ■

Back to the future with marriage and divorce

Dennis Hokama

In the first few minutes of the Friday morning business session, there was a stunning reversal on a matter that many, including this writer, assumed had already been settled until the next GC session in St. Louis. The same body that had wrangled endlessly with each other for two days over each phrase in the marriage and family amendments to the Church Manual, voted to reverse itself on its decision to refer the document to the Manual Committee, and then voted to approve the whole package, without allowing any further debate. After the deed had been done, a bewildered Samuel Pipim rose to protest.

The groundwork for this reversal had been laid on Thursday when Garry Hodgkin of the South Pacific Division announced to the chair that he would make a motion on Friday to bring back the Marriage and Divorce Amendment and ask that it be voted up or down as a package.

Garry Hodgkin promptly moved to rescind the motion to refer the divorce and remarriage amendment to the Church Manual Committee with the intent of having the entire section voted upon up or down as a whole.

Phil Follett, chairman for the morning session, explained to the delegates that because of the previous notice given of motion to rescind, only a simple majority would be required.

Clyde Morgan and Thaine Creitz spoke against the motion. James Dick supported it. G. Alexander Bryant then questioned whether there was a time requirement for advance notice of motions to rescind. Follett replied that parliamentary rules did not stipulate a minimum time for advance notice.

Marion Shields spoke in favor of the motion and moved to stop debate. Her motion was supported and the vote to rescind passed easily with little visible opposition.

Follett then called for the vote to accept the marriage and divorce package as a whole, which included the amendments, that had been made during the first day. The vote passed overwhelmingly. ■

"The Parliamentary Maneuver" as coup d'état. An interview with Samuel Koranteng-Pipim

Dennis Hokama

dr. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, a native of Ghana, seemed to be in the middle of every potential conservative-liberal debate during the entire 57th GC conference session. His cries for "theological integrity!" reverberated through the SkyDome on more than one occasion. More than others, Pipim represented the loyal opposition to the recommended divorce and remarriage amendment that was passed in a surprise parliamentary maneuver on Friday morning, July 7, 2000.

Pipim, although now living and working in the United States, was a delegate of the African Indian Ocean Division, as he has been for every general conference session going back to New Orleans in 1985. He is currently employed by the Michigan Conference, serving as the Director of Public Campus Ministries, whose office is presently located on the campus of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

AT: Dr. Pipim, your voice echoed several times in the Toronto SkyDome. Were there any specific issues that were of particular concern to you?

SKP: Every issue was important to me, but I was particularly interested in theological issues, since they concern the message and mission of the church. Moreover, just as the accountants and treasurers spoke forcefully on the auditing procedures in the church, you should expect a systematic theologian to show keen interest in doctrinal proposals suggested for inclusion in the church manual. The auditors were seeking to preserve the financial integrity of the church. I was arguing for the theological integrity of the church.

AT: You were obviously keenly interested in the matter that was passed this morning. Will you tell me what your thoughts are concerning what happened?

SKP: Certainly! First of all, I want to make it clear that the General Conference spoke this morning, and I therefore accept that decision and will respect it as

such. But I'm confident that when the issue is sufficiently explored, it will be reconsidered at a future GC session. My concern is that as a church, we are slowly legitimizing a process which I describe as "legislate now, find biblical answers later." And to make matters worse, the divorce and remarriage decision is now going to be enshrined in the Church Manual! But as I said, the decision this morning is now the church's official position. I will respect it as such, though I reserve the right to question its theological legitimacy.

AT: Do you accept parliamentary procedure as valid rules under which to conduct church business?

SKP: Oh, yes. I want to emphasize that what they did, procedurally or legally, was O.K. When a church business meeting is called, if you are there, you are there; if not, it is still a valid meeting. Some are questioning whether the decision was valid, given the fact that a quorum was not there. But it is possible for things to be legal, while still violating the spirit of fairness. Those who are really pushing this new view of divorce and remarriage—most of them from these industrialized countries such as North America, Australia, and Europe regions that constitute less than 10% of the world Adventist membership—came in and staged their theological coup d'état by utilizing parliamentary procedures to rescind the previous action, cut off all debate and overturn a prior decision taken by an overwhelming majority of delegates.

I say it was a coup d'état, because the proponents decided to do so when the overwhelming majority of delegates from Africa, Inter-America, South America, the Pacific Islands, etc., were not there. Only about 150 people (about 7 or 8% of GC delegates) were present.

AT: I know you object to certain elements in it, but as a package, what do you think of it?

SKP: As a whole, I think there is much to like. There is no doubt that it appears

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Behind the scenes of "The Parliamentary Maneuver"

An interview with Garry Hodgkin

Dennis Hokama

On July 18 Garry Hodgkin was at the epicenter of the most electrifying moments of the 2000 GC session. He was the architect of the dramatic reversal of the decision to refer the divorce and remarriage amendment to St. Louis. Although the specific issue over which this dispute took place was divorce and remarriage, perhaps this incident, more than any other, symbolized the tensions that exist between the East and West, between the Liberals and Conservatives, and between the developing countries and the developed countries in the Seventh-day Adventist church of the year 2000.

Much to the chagrin of many NAD delegates, the decision of whether to adopt the Divorce and Remarriage amendments to the Church Manual had been deferred for another five years on Wednesday afternoon of July 5. The GC Bulletin for July 5 trumpeted this decision under the heading "Meet Me in St. Louis: Divorce and Remarriage Document Referred".

But during the business session on the afternoon of July 6, Hodgkin announced from the floor that he would make a motion to rescind that action and give delegates a chance to vote that entire document up or down. It was an announcement that was evidently noticed by very few of those who had been most vocal in their opposition to it.

Hodgkin was the second person to the mike after the business session began on the morning of July 7. His motion to rescind passed with little opposition. His subsequent motion to pass the document was swiftly followed by another motion to cut off all debate, even as another delegate stood at another mike ready to propose an amendment to it. Both motions passed with little opposition. A document that had been left for dead after two days of intense wrangling had been resurrected and passed in about ten minutes.

On Sabbath afternoon, July 8, AT spoke with Garry Hodgkin about his role in that dramatic event of the previous morning.

Elder Garry Hodgkin is the President of the South New Zealand Conference in the South Pacific Division.

AT: Elder Hodgkin, your actions on the floor during the business sessions of Thursday and Friday (July 6 and 7) have had a dramatic impact on this session, and possibly on the world church. Your actions were obviously well planned, because the groundwork for your motion on Friday morning was laid down on Thursday afternoon. As we watched events unfolding from the press box, we could not help but wonder just how much planning went into this, and what you were expecting to accomplish.

Samuel Pipim characterized the series of events as a "slick parliamentary move" from the floor a few minutes after the Divorce and Remarriage amendments had been passed due to your actions.

GH: Well, the issue of divorce and remarriage is one I have had to deal with continually throughout my ministry. It is an issue that cuts across all cultural, racial, and geographic lines. I felt it was crucial that we made progress on our biblical understanding as well as the practical ministerial procedures of dealing with this issue.

I was extremely disappointed that the chairman of Wednesday morning's session chose to prevent delegates from making any further amendments. I know he had good intentions but it had the effect of suppressing discussion that needed that needed to take place. I was unhappy about that and complained about it on the floor. I had to miss the afternoon session and was very disappointed to learn that the whole thing had been sent to St. Louis without any kind of a vote.

AT: Do you think that the document could have been finished if they had continued to proceed through it the way they started under Kloosterhuis the day before? It was going quite slowly.

GH: Yes I do. Of course there was a lot of disagreement, but as I saw it, almost all of the opposition revolved around just two sticking points: First, I

Corinthians 7:10-15 which refers to abandonment by a nonbeliever as a basis for divorce, and second, concern by some that the document lacked an understanding of role differentiation in marriage.

If we had just dealt with those two issues head on, rather than trying to evade them or suppress discussion, I think the rest would have been fairly easy. I was certainly ready to accept the church body's decision on those two issues either way.

AT: So you return after the Wednesday afternoon business session only to discover that the matter has been tabled until St. Louis. What happened next? Did anyone contact you from the North American Division?

GH: No.

AT: Do you know anybody on the divorce and remarriage commission?

GH: No. Nobody contacted me about it. I had a burden for this issue, and wanted to return home feeling as if I had done my job as a delegate. Leaving a matter as important as this unresolved for another five years without even giving the delegates a chance to vote on it was, in my opinion, unacceptable. So I drafted a motion of what I thought needed to be said. Then I consulted with Laurie Evans, my Division President as to the wording. Finally I consulted with Athal Tolhurst, the secretary of the Constitution and Bylaws committee to make sure that I was on sound parliamentary grounds. I spoke with nobody else. There were two parts to my announcement on Thursday afternoon.

First, I announced my intention to make a motion to rescind the action taken on Wednesday afternoon to refer the proposed Divorce and Remarriage amendment to the Manual committee. If that motion passed, it would put that document on the floor in the condition it was prior to its referral. Secondly, I announced my intent to call for a vote to approve that document in its entirety.

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Samuel Koranteng-Pipim interview

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more redemptive than what it replaces. Among its strengths is that, instead of the old Church Manual which began with a statement on "divorce and remarriage," the amended document begins with a positive statement on marriage. That chapter in the Church Manual now is titled, "Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage." I think that is positive.

Another positive aspect of the document was the attempt to make it a little more "user-friendly." For example, instead of talking about "disfellowshipping," it talks about "removal from membership." These were positive changes that I think they brought together, and I am happy about that.

AT: Now tell me about the problems you see in it.

Role Distinctions in Marriage

SKP: Let's start with the issue of role differentiation in marriage. For the first time, this document sets forth a new view of marriage, which I would describe as an "egalitarian" form of marriage. Some call it a "partnership" form of marriage.

AT: But you are not saying that there is something wrong with the idea that both partners in a marriage relationship are in principle equal, are you?

SKP: Of course not. The equality of men and a women is not an issue, though liberals and feminists try to portray it that way. God created Adam and Eve as equals with neither superior to the other. They were created as equal but complementary spiritual beings with different roles for male and female to govern the home and the first church. Role distinctions do not imply inequality.

The document that was initially submitted to the delegates for consideration suggested that male-headship and female submission began at the Fall, instead of its inception at the creation. The subtle implication here is that male-headship may have been done away with at the cross.

By taking away role distinctions at creation, the document set a theological foundation for not only women's ordination,

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North American Division

Nominating Committee process

John McLarty

On Tuesday afternoon, July 4, during the General Conference Session, I began hearing rumors of discontent among the North American (NAD) delegation in connection with election of the new NAD president. I heard nothing but approval of the person chosen, Don Schneider, formerly president of the Lake Union Conference, but there were questions about the process.

The process began with a caucus of the North American Division delegates. In this caucus, delegates were invited to speak about qualifications they wanted to see in the new president, but they were not to discuss specific persons. Discussion of individuals was to be limited to the nominating committee. Names could be suggested to the chairman or members of the nominating committee, but there could be no discussion of those names in the meeting of the caucus.

According to what I heard, the rationale for restricting discussion of specific names in the meeting of the NAD was consistency throughout the church. In local churches specific names are discussed the nominating committee. However, it is my opinion that in those situations the members of the nominating committee are in much more intimate contact with both the church body and potential candidates for any office. But in the case of the elections at the division level there is much less shared knowledge and broad-ranging discussion in the caucus would enable the nominating committee to function with a better understanding of the interests and concerns of the church as a whole.

I also heard questions in the hallways about the role of the GC president in the election of the NAD president. Some said that the GC president had chosen the NAD president. I took these questions to Phil Follett, chairman of the NAD nominating committee caucus, about these matters and other rumors I had heard in the corridors. He responded in detail:

"The GC policy clearly states that the

division presidents' nominations must be acceptable to the GC president. The wording of the GC policy is that the nominee must be mutually agreed upon by the division nominating committee members and the general conference president. "The rationale is that the division presidents are also GC vice presidents, and the GC president must be able to work closely with his vice presidents. I think this is obvious and should be honored. The GC Rules of Order require that

'all nominations for elective office ...shall be made by the nominating committee. This precludes nominations from the floor or by any other body or person....Only one name shall be presented to the floor for each position to be filled....The Nominating Committee shall meet in closed session. This does not mean that officers of higher church organizations cannot be invited to sit as counselors with the committee' (Page 6: GC Rules of Order).

"When I was asked by the NAD caucus (all the delegates from NAD) about the role of the GC president in the election of the NAD president, I clearly stated that his counsel would be sought, and then I said that it is required that the candidate be acceptable to the General Conference president. Elder Paulsen then spoke, saying that he expected to sit with the group and participate in the discussion. "The final vote was by members of the NAD nominating caucus, using an electronic voting machine."

In order to ensure proper representation of the interest of the General Conference in the nomination of such a vice president [the one serving as a division president] as well as that of the division to which he will be assigned, the following shall be the procedure: Under the chairmanship of the newly elected General Conference president or his designee, the members of the Session Nominating Committee from each division shall suggest a mutually agreed upon name to the Nominating Committee for nomination in plenary session (General Conference Policy, B 15 10 Paragraph 2). ■

What was whispered: Nomination Process of NAD President Appears "Less Than Clean"

Adventist Today editors

It appears that some individuals may have tried to exercise influence behind the scenes at the General Conference Session in Toronto.

Seven different sources (all nominating committee members) told AT's one anonymous source that Jan Paulsen told the NAD nominating committee members when they were in caucus that if they nominated Chuck Sandefur for NAD president, a prominent member of the Adventist Laymen's Services and Industries (ASI) would oppose that nomination on the floor and present incriminating information regarding the partnership of the Adventist hospitals in Denver with Catholic hospitals.

According to AT's source, three nominating committee members indicated that Paulsen also implied "problems" of a similar nature with Tom Mostert. This made the NAD nominating committee members feel that Paulsen left them no choice but to go with the name Paulsen seemed to recommend, Don Schneider. In fairness, it appears that the votes were there to give Schneider a majority in any case.

Four individuals confirmed with AT's source that Phil Follett, the general Vice President of the GC who provided administrative oversight for communications and broadcasting, was not re-

elected because ASI and 3ABN leaders pressured Paulsen to make a change.

Paulsen met with each of the VPs months prior to the GC session to inquire about their intentions. Both Follett and Kloosterhuis told Paulsen they would like to continue to serve but would be happy to step aside if he wished since they are eligible for retirement. They asked to be informed of any change as early as possible so that they could prepare their families and make plans for the future.

Apparently, Follett and Kloosterhuis were not informed of any change until a few hours prior to the nominating committee report, which proposed different individuals for their jobs. The time frame for what appears to be a last-minute change on the part of Paulsen is contiguous with that of the time frame when conversations relative to NAD president were going on.

Three sources told AT's source that Follett has been involved in a series of conflicts with 3ABN over the past several years. These have mostly been situations in which 3ABN wanted to use programs which the denomination paid to produce under its own terms instead of the general guidelines under which those programs were available to all broadcasters.

According to the AT's sources, 3ABN has

repeatedly expressed an unwillingness to accept the editorials and production decisions of most denominational media organizations. For example, when Robert Folkenberg was GC president he attempted to negotiate an agreement with 3ABN in which 3ABN would be given direct access to all of the programming that it wanted from denominational TV ministries. 3ABN refused to sign this agreement because it did not want to release Faith for Today nor promise to continue to release Breath of Life after C.D. Brooks' retirement. Only It Is Written was entirely acceptable.

3ABN also wanted dominance of local church programming and broadcasting around North America. AT's sources suspect that pressure to block Follett's re-election came from issues of this kind. Two of them described Paulsen's agony over not wanting to be influenced by major donors but that he was feeling great pressure.

The GC officers used the provision in the GC bylaws permitting additional at-large delegates to be appointed by the GC committee to invite Danny Shelton, president of 3ABN, and others to come to the GC session as delegates even though they were not selected as delegates by the union conference where they reside ■

Garry Hodgkin interview

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That meant the document as it had been amended prior to the start of the business session on Wednesday morning.

AT: Did you think that your motions had a reasonable chance to pass?

GH: No, I didn't. I assumed they would be crushed. But I wanted to go home feeling I had done my job.

AT: At the time you made your announcement on Thursday, I understood the basic idea of what you intended, but I had no idea of its underlying parliamentary significance. That was very clever.

GH: (Hodgkin shakes his head in frustra-

tion) I must emphasize that this action was not intended as a "parliamentary tactic." I believe very strongly in open, fair, and complete debate. In the preamble to my "notice of intent" I observed that not all delegates were present, therefore I asked the chair for permission to provide notice to the session of my intended motion.

Providing notice is a "two edged sword." While it is true that a "notified" rescind vote requires a simple majority, [as opposed to 2/3 majority if "notice" is not provided]. The other side of the coin is that those who might oppose the proposition have opportunity to prepare their case and ensure delegates are

present. I believe this is fairer than moving an "un-notified" rescind motion.

AT: Judging from comments made by developing country delegates from the floor subsequent to that action, and the applause they get from the stands, it is apparent that they think they were snookered. So far I have heard at least three delegates, Pipim from African Indian Ocean, Louny Morales and Hector Hernandez of Inter-America, complain about what they feel was an unfair vote. I have heard both Hernandez and Pipim say that only about 150 delegates were present out of the 2,000, whereas there were at least 600 when it was referred to

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Adventist Hospitals: An Ailing System? Part II

René Alexenko Evans

the Colorado Catholics

While management at Boston Regional has been criticized for losing the hospital, management at PorterCare Adventist Health System in Denver, Colo., has been just as widely criticized for the steps it has taken to preserve itself.

Colorado is another hot managed care market, and in the mid 90s the three-hospital PorterCare system found itself in a situation not unlike that of Boston Regional's. But PorterCare responded in 1995 by forming a 30/70 joint operating agreement with the much larger Catholic Health Initiatives (CHI) to form Centura Health.

While the transaction has raised eyebrows among lay people in the denomination, hospital executives are quick to defend it. "That transaction makes sense

from a business perspective," said Werner, whose Adventist Health System recently signed a five year option to acquire PorterCare. "It makes sense for the

similar, more so than with a general community hospital."

During recent renegotiations of the joint operating agreement, the CHI position was that PorterCare's presence in the market is critical to Centura's success, but its current poor cash situation leaves it unable to expand services in key geographic locations. CHI wanted to either purchase the facilities outright or force PorterCare to produce a stronger corporate backer. The result was Adventist Health System's five year, \$10 million option to purchase. In return, while PorterCare remains the junior partner in a 30/70 deal, CHI agreed to 50/50 representation on Centura's board.

"We don't see that joint venture going away," said Werner. "If anything, we see it strengthening. The assets remain separately owned, and PorterCare has the option to withdraw if they ever see their mission being compromised."

Help From High Places

With assets approaching \$3 billion and about \$1 billion in the bank, Adventist Health System is emerging as the dominant force in Adventist hospital management. The system operates 32 hospital campuses, 26 long-term care facilities, plus more than 160 other health related businesses in 21 states. But today's success was not always certain. In 1986 the system lost more than \$11 million and was out of cash.

"It was a horrible crisis," recalls Mardian Blair, who retired as CEO of Adventist Health System at the end of 1999. "We weren't sure what was going to happen. We did everything humanely possible to minimize expenses, divested 10 unprofitable hospitals, cut the corporate staff by 40 percent. I feel the Lord blessed us, because I don't see how we would have gotten out of that without the Lord's blessing. After that, every year was a little better, until 1997, when we had an extraordinary year and made over \$100 million. That turnaround has given us some credibility."

In fact, that credibility has turned AHS into a big brother of sorts in the Adventist hospital arena. The assistance with the joint venture negotiations and now the option to purchase at PorterCare are just some in a string of bailouts the system has been requested to provide troubled facilities in recent years. In 1997 AHS acquired the hospitals in the Lake Union after retirements there left a void in top management. Also in 1997, AHS was asked to manage the church's hospital in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. And most recently, Adventist HealthCare in Rockville, Md., is the latest to turn to AHS for management assistance.

The Mess in Maryland

Adventist HealthCare's public problems began in October of 1999 when someone apparently tipped off *The Washington Post* about quality of care issues at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital.¹ A patient had died while left untreated in a corridor. Another patient had had the wrong hip operated on. After the initial reports, other complaints flowed in. The State of Maryland and JCAHO, the independent organization that accredits health care organizations, were called in to investigate. Shady Grove, which had been accredited with commendation less than a year before, suddenly found itself with preliminary non-accreditation, a step away from losing its Medicare funding. The *Post* further reported that quality of care issues at an AHC nursing home in Takoma Park had caused the facility to lose its Medicare and Medicaid funding for six weeks in 1999.

In short order, Adventist HealthCare CEO Cory Chambers was asked to resign and AHC CFO Harry Weis returned to Adventist Health in Roseville, Calif. Ron Wisbey, chairman of the board, announced his retirement and the AHC board turned to Adventist Health System for interim management assistance until new leadership could be found.



Adventist hospitals and Catholic hospitals in the Denver market to work together. It gives geographic coverage and allows them to share costs in a number of areas that are beneficial to both entities. If PorterCare wasn't partnered with them they'd have to be partnered with someone else, and at this point it's hard to see who else it would be.

"We have some differences in theology with the Catholic church, obviously, but the focus of our health care systems is very similar," continued Werner. "The way people are cared for and the focus on caring for the whole person are very

Adventist HealthCare appears to be in reasonable shape financially. Although the company basically broke even in 1997 after reporting a \$15 million profit in 1996, things seem to be better since then. AHC reported a \$5.7 million profit in 1998 and unaudited numbers show a profit of \$8.8 million for 1999. But at least until recently the system has operated according to a set of standards that are clearly outside of the norm for both Adventist Health and Adventist Health System.

At the time of his resignation, Cory Chambers served not only as the chief executive officer of the corporation, but as the CEO of both Shady Grove and Washington Adventist Hospitals, as well. The lack of a strong on-site management presence appears to have contributed to communication problems with physicians, who are widely believed to have initiated the original story in the *Post* after their concerns about Shady Grove went unheard or unaddressed.

"It wasn't the best structure," concedes Henderschedt, who served as interim CEO at Adventist HealthCare from January until April of this year under the management assistance agreement with Adventist Health System. "In an ideal world, good management and governance structures create strong organizations. Does that mean poor government and management structures allow problems to surface? We're probably playing somewhere in the middle. A more specific focus on these areas by senior management and the board probably would have prevented them."

Others are more willing to let the board off the hook for the operational issues at Shady Grove. "Ultimately a board only knows what the CEO presents," said an individual familiar with the situation. "Corporate boards don't generally get into operational issues at individual hospitals. Ultimately it comes down to competent leadership."

But a weak organizational structure at AHC is not the only issue for which the board is being criticized. In the midst of these accreditation and quality of care issues, The *Washington Post* reported that former Adventist HealthCare CEO Bryan Breckenridge was paid a \$4.7 million severance package when he retired from the company in 1997, and Edmund Peters, AHC's CFO, left

with \$3.1 million soon thereafter. Ron Wisbey, who left his position as president of the Columbia Union to serve as chairman of the board of AHC in 1996, was reported to have earned \$364,000 in 1998, up from \$161,000 in 1996.²

The Columbia Union has done a heroic job trying to explain these numbers in terms of market pay, employee and employer-funded retirement accounts that were included in the totals, employment contracts and the like, going so far as to produce a ten page document of explanation.³ But officials at each of the two large systems, Adventist Health System and Adventist Health, are adamant that these salaries, severance agreements and other benefits are far out of line with what either system would extend to its executives.

"The idea that an executive walked away with \$4.7 million was unbelievable to us, particularly for a voluntary termination," said Roger Ashley, human resources director for Adventist Health in Roseville, Calif. And even considering the \$686,423 in retirement that Breckenridge funded himself and which was included in the \$4.7 million figure, there is still plenty to question in the way AHC compensated its executives.

For starters, the chairmen of the boards at both Adventist Health System and Adventist Health serve without compensation. Sources familiar with board structures point out that a paid chairman is more easily influenced by a CEO, and Wisbey, a lifelong church employee and administrator with little in-depth knowledge of the health care industry, is the only union president to have been hired by a system, at the time when Bryan Breckenridge served as CEO.

Also as part of the \$4.7 million package, the document itemizes \$648,769 in unused vacation and sick leave Breckenridge accumulated over his 25 year career with AHC, and more than \$1.5 million in cash, benefits and de-

ferred retirement benefits because Breckenridge retired with an "evergreen" contract that gave him three years of severance pay and benefits if he didn't accept a job with a competing organization. An "evergreen" contract is one that automatically renews every day, so at any point three years still remain on the contract.

Adventist Health's Ashley contends his corporation would "never" pay more than a half million dollars in unused vacation and sick time. Kurt Ganter, vice president of human resources and com-

Adventist HealthCare appears to be in reasonable shape financially. . . But at least until recently the system has operated according to a set of standards that are clearly outside of the norm for both Adventist Health and Adventist Health System.

munications for Adventist Health System, stated that while Adventist Health System executives are allowed to bank their unused paid days off into a deferred compensation account, they are required to take 144 hours a year, and after that there's not much left over. "We have had long-time executives bank their unused paid days off," said Ganter, "but none of them have gone into six figures."

The evergreen contract which sent Breckenridge on his way with three years of severance in the form of cash, benefits and deferred retirement is another point on which both Adventist Health and Adventist Health System differ with AHC.

"Adventist Health System bases severance on length of service, level in the organization, and other circumstances," said Ganter. "Six months to a year is normal. A year and a half of severance is reserved for a very rare set of circumstances, and our scale does not go up beyond a year and a half. Our employment contracts do not pre-set severance terms. Severance is considered when an executive leaves, usually involuntarily."

Ashley says Adventist Health has a more structured severance plan and that about 100 executives from the level of

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Adventist Hospitals: An Ailing System? Part II

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vice president at a hospital on up sign severance agreements at the time of employment. Severance at Adventist Health uses a chart that takes into account years of executive experience with Adventist Health and the position within the company. The chart begins at four months of severance, although Ashley declined to say where it topped out.

"But executives only receive severance if they are terminated for a layoff or for performance," stressed Ashley. "If they leave voluntarily, or are terminated for misconduct or violating church principles, they don't receive it."

Furthermore, all Adventist Health System and Adventist Health employees are employees at will, which means there are no time periods built into contracts and no assurances of employment.

Ashley also pointed out that the severance contract time frames and language attempt to stay on the conservative side of what other similar nonprofit religious organization offer, based on information from their compensation consultant.

The Question of Money

All this must be considered within a denomination framework that has seen a fair amount of subtle if not overt salary envy on the part of denominational employees. But in that respect, the Adventist systems are not alone.

"Daughters of Charity, the Mercy System, some of the Methodist Systems — they all face the same issues," said Mary Novak-Jandrey, managing director of HR Advantage, a Chicago-based compensation consulting firm that specializes in health care. "But if you want the best talent to run the hospitals, you have to look at paying a fair wage. If respect and justice are part of your mission, that should extend to the CEO. If you want to pay employees fairly, why not pay all employees fairly? Why should the CEO be any different?"

As former Adventist Health System CEO Blair sums it up, "If you want the

people, you have to pay them."

What's difficult for many church employees and members to grasp is that health care administration is a high-stress field, and accordingly, the pay is high. According to a 1999 executive compensation survey published by the American Hospital Association, the median base

salary for the CEO of a hospital with net revenues between \$50 and \$99 million was \$191,500. A hospital with net revenues in that range would be

considered a mid-sized hospital, with anywhere from about 150 - 300 beds, depending on the types of patients and amount of outpatient business the hospital sees. At larger facilities, the figure goes up. The median base salary for the CEO of a hospital with net revenues over \$200 million was \$293,300.⁴

Furthermore, many members are unaware that the denomination provides no financial support to its affiliated hospitals, other than the time its union and conference presidents spend serving on boards. All salaries for all employees at Adventist hospitals are paid from the revenues generated by those facilities. The church does not support the health systems.

While recognizing the pressure of market wages, both Adventist Health System and Adventist Health have attempted to comply with a 1989 General Conference action permitting the health systems to set the maximum pay for hospital executives at the 50th percentile of the pay of competing health care institutions in the area.

"We are still a mission-driven organization," said Adventist Health Systems Ganter, "so comparatively you're going to

find our levels of compensation to be a fraction of what you'll see outside. Most people who come into our system are going to be starting nearer the bottom of the scale. The overall idea is to stay around the 50th percentile, and the base salary for the Adventist Health System CEO is substantially below the 50th per-

The Columbia Union document defends the Breckenridge compensation and severance agreement by saying it was recommended by compensation consultants and voted by the compensation committee of the AHC board of directors.

centile."

But while Adventist Health and the Adventist Health System have managed to work within those parameters, Adventist HealthCare apparently did not. According to the Columbia Union document, in 1995 or earlier, the compensation committee of Adventist HealthCare unilaterally decided to set executive compensation at the 75th percentile.

In 1997, a year that AHC reported net revenue of \$348 million and a profit of only \$185,888, Breckenridge was paid a salary of \$326,251 and a bonus of \$103,853, or 32 percent. According to American Hospital Association figures, the median base salary in 1997 for the CEO of a non-profit system with revenues between \$200 and \$400 million was \$285,300, with a 26 percent bonus.⁵

The Columbia Union document defends the Breckenridge compensation and severance agreement by saying it was recommended by compensation consultants and voted by the compensation committee of the AHC board of directors—a committee on which the only paid board chairman in the entire denomination served.

In the end, however, this is all water

under the bridge, and changes are underway at AHC. Despite the wishes of some on the board, reportedly including the chairman, Columbia Union President Harold Lee, earlier this year the board voted against being acquired by Adventist Health System and instead decided to remain independent and proceed with the search for new top leadership.

In April the board named William G. Robertson the new president and CEO of AHC. Robertson previously served as CEO of Shawnee Mission Medical Center and has a resumé that stretches back to Adventist Health System facilities in Texas and Florida.

Robertson says his immediate plans are to stabilize the leadership of the organization and his first priority is to name a president and chief operating officer at Shady Grove, a position that has been filled on an interim basis since November 1999. Other key vacancies include the chief financial officer for the corporation and the chief nursing officer at Shady Grove.

Some have speculated that finding qualified leadership candidates will always be a challenge for a system like AHC. "Executives in both the Adventist Health System and Adventist Health are reluctant to leave a larger organizations with a more structured career path and the benefits and resources of a larger organization to go to a smaller system with a share of problems on its hands," said a source close to the situation. "And if they were to leave, there's no guarantee they could get back in."

"Interesting," is how Robertson characterized such speculation. "The pool of qualified people is shallow for all of our organizations at all times, but I'm very pleased with the group of candidates I'm working with and believe finding the right people is doable," he said. "Many of the candidates are not with an Adventist organization even though they are highly qualified Seventh-day Adventists."

And Robertson has other challenges on his hands. At the time of this writing Shady Grove's accreditation was still conditional and a follow-up visit by an accreditation team was expected within three months. AHC's finances appear stable for the time being, but Maryland hospitals are facing serious payment

challenges, and insiders report it is likely AHC may find its bonds downgraded in the near future.

The People Factor

Ultimately one factor emerges as crucial to Adventist hospitals as they head into the future, and that factor is people. "It doesn't take very many people to create a problem," said Mardian Blair, and the recent problems in Boston and Maryland would seem to bear that out. Yet competent, committed employees are in short order.

Rita Waterman, director of corporate communication at Adventist Health, cites national unemployment statistics when talking about the difficulty in finding Adventist employees at all levels of the organization, but particularly in nursing, at the department head level, and above. "It's unbelievably difficult to find Adventist candidates who are qualified, willing to work at this pay scale, and willing to move," she said.

Yet competent, experienced leadership makes all the difference in the way an organization is run and has a direct bearing on an institutions mission-mindedness and profitability, without which there is no mission.

"Maintaining a pool of qualified, committed Adventist leadership is a challenge, certainly at the department head level and in some mid-management positions,"

said Adventist Health Systems Werner.

And without the right people, it is difficult for the organization to fill its commission.

"We have two primary missions," said Werner. "One is to present an accurate picture of what God is like, and we do that through the services we provide, the way we treat people, the way we deal with employees—a whole range of things. If we do that well and it reflects positively on the image of God, I believe there will be souls in the kingdom. The reason we ultimately exist is to have folk in the kingdom who wouldn't otherwise be there."

"Our second mission is to present an

accurate picture of what Seventh-day Adventists are like. There are all kinds of misunderstandings about who Adventists are, and we in the health system have an opportunity to present an accurate picture. If we do that properly and effectively, we'll see people choose to join the fellowship of the Adventist church.

"Those two focuses are not mutually exclusive, neither are they dependent on each other," continued Werner. "I believe there are going to be all kinds of people that we've assisted on the road to salvation who will never affiliate with the Adventist church."

The Road Ahead

In the end, the challenges that lie ahead are not much different from the challenges of the past. Reimbursement issues will continue to dominate business decisions. The search for competent mission-driven employees will go on. The goal of Adventist hospitals at the dawn of a new century is the same as it was at the dawn of the last century. All that remains to be seen is how that goal is met. ■

1. Goldstein, Avram, *The Washington Post*, October 17, 1999, pg. C1, "Shady Grove Doctors Warn of Hospital Lapses."

2. Goldstein, Avram, *The Washington Post*, December 1, 1999, pg. B1, "Shady Grove Gave Out Big Raises."

"Maintaining a pool of qualified, committed Adventist leadership is a challenge, certainly at the department head level and in some mid-management positions,"

3. Columbia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *A Report on Recent Developments at Adventist HealthCare and Shady Grove Adventist Hospital*.

4. 1999 Hay Hospital Compensation Survey as published in *Hospitals & Health Networks*, September 1, 1999; American Hospital Association Publishing: Chicago. (www.hhnmag.com)

5. Columbia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, pg. 7.

6. 1997 Hay Hospital Compensation Survey as published in *Hospitals & Health Networks*, September 5, 1997; American Hospital Association Publishing: Chicago. (www.hhnmag.com)

It's the Sociological thing, stupid!

Jack Stenger

Spend some time in a typical Adventist church and you're bound to hear someone ask, "Why are our young people leaving?" And not without reason. Adventist churches in most metropolitan areas have very few single, professional people who are younger than 35. The most common reason cited for the problem is

"We're not loving enough" or maybe "We're too legalistic." My experience in the church, however, runs counter to both these explanations.

On the whole, Adventists, like churchgoing folk in general, are more friendly than the unchurched. While legalism does raise its ugly head every now and then, it could be established that by now legalism and its adherents have largely been routed.

So why then are younger, single professional people such nonparticipants in our churches, particularly in majority Caucasian congregations? During the 1992 presidential election the phrase "It's The Economy, Stupid!" was meant to remind advisors that voters make decisions primarily as a result of how well the economy was doing.

To explain the seeds of frustration that lead to nonparticipation among Gen Xers and other succeeding post-Baby Boomer subsets, I offer the following retrofitted explanation: "It's The Sociological Thing, Stupid!"

It's sociological forces that are making college-educated Adventists scarce in our urban churches. Because these individuals are few in number and

have few peers, they often feel unconnected to the day-to-day life of the local church. If they do participate, they often do so in a lackadaisical fashion; empty pews indicate that many do not attend at all.

But I have a theory about their attitude toward the church. It's likely that they do not disagree with the faith of their upbringing and that these individuals give intellectual and spiritual assent to the "rightness" of Adventism. What's needed in our church, then, is an honest discussion about their decision to leave and the reasons behind it—reasons not altogether rooted in theology or doctrine.

Single Adventists under the age of 35 are not having an easy time of it in many of our churches. When the "best and brightest" graduate from our institutions of higher learning, they are on a trajectory for professional success that our agriculturally inclined pioneers could scarcely have imagined. Today, the sons and daughters of Adventist academia (and, increasingly of public colleges) become doctors, social workers, physical therapists and yuppies of every stripe. But with lofty occupational stations come heightened sociological needs.

These include the need for a group of professional peers, a social circle of kindred spirits and intellectual equals, and a pool of candidates for a suitable spouse. Yes, the local church can provide fellowship,

particularly in cities where Adventist institutions are not present and the Adventist population is negligible. The host of Adventist single dating services (including a burgeoning dating trade on the

With lofty occupational stations come heightened sociological needs. These include the need for a group of professional peers, a social circle of kindred spirits and intellectual equals, and a pool of candidates for a suitable spouse.

good preaching and a host of opportunities to "get involved." But if the above needs are not met, there is not much chance that socially marginalized people will long remain actively engaged church members.

Too often we believe that an evangelistic series with a different twist or more bells and whistles will attract spiritual seekers to our beautiful set of biblical truths. But if the home church is marked by declining numbers, older members, overly conservative worship mores and a near-total lack of social opportunities, younger adults will seek relationships and stimulation outside of it.

In most churches, these extra-ecclesiastical wanderings don't present as many problems. But because our church has a tightly defined subculture and attendant behavioral (read: conservative) expectations, a lonely church member sometimes is faced with the stiff choice of either "guarding the

truth" and remaining lonely, or "backsliding" and meeting basic sociological needs.

We could debate whether this approach to churchgoing is appropriate and we can criticize Gen Xers for being

self-centered. After all, it might be said, we attend church to worship God, not find sociological fulfillment. But as we debate these questions, younger members in North America continue to become inactive church members, if they don't wind up leaving the church altogether.

I confess I've not read of studies that track where younger members wind up when they leave our churches. If they do marry within their faith (everyone's ideal situation), the arrival of children usually creates a need for church attendance. But finding an Adventist spouse in churches outside of our collegiate institutions can be a difficult task,

Internet) seems to bear out the realities that it's increasingly hard out there, and not every urban, professional Adventist can make a career decision to live in Loma Linda or the Washington, D.C., area.

Perhaps an experience I had in an Adventist church in a major Midwestern city best illustrates how sociological challenges can drive younger members out of the church.

Arnold was a single, late-20-something church member whose faith impressed me. A near-total devotee of our health message, his appetite for freshly squeezed vegetable juices was only surpassed by his burden to witness about our Adventist faith and quote the Spirit of Prophecy.

I suspected, though, that this Christian soldier was lonely. The church where we were both members was nearly empty of any other people our age. Yes, members got together, and yes, everyone was loving and exceedingly friendly toward each other. But, by and large, the membership was married and older than 50. There were few opportunities to gather with peers, even fewer chances to date one.

Over time, Arnold's church attendance became sporadic, and after a while he was not seen at all. Church clerks and elders wondered as to his whereabouts. Concerned members were dispatched to find him and ascertain his reasons for not coming around. But one of Arnold's friends, a former roommate, gave me information that explained it.

"He found a girlfriend," the friend said. Basically, his need for companionship became greater than his need to associate exclusively with Adventists. This sociological reality, which I suspect is being repeated across North America, led him away.

I moved away from that Midwestern city, so I don't know whatever became of Arnold. But I do know and witness firsthand what's happening to younger single Adventists who become socially discouraged. Many of them, even with their intellectual and spiritual assent to our beliefs, leave the Adventist Church. Thus the challenge for local churches throughout the land is to focus more effort on making the church attractive to these younger adults and others like them in the community.

So the next time someone asks me why they do so, I will reply: "It's the Sociological Thing, Stupid!" ■

Jack Stenger writes from Riverside, California.



Why I'm still an Adventist

Judy Myers Laue

I grew up in a conservative Adventist family in the 1950s. By sundown on Friday night the house was clean, we had all taken our baths, and my hair was done up in pincurls. Mother made a light supper, usually soup, toast, and salad, and the next day's dinner was prepared and sitting on the top of the stove. We ate supper in our robes and pajamas. Then we had family worship and sang around the piano.

In our singing we always included our family hymn, "Seeking the Lost," number 532 in the old *Christ in Song* hymnbook.

Then my dad went off to his desk in the kitchen and began preparing to teach the Sabbath School lesson the next day. I climbed into bed with mother and talked to her until my dad came to bed and booted me out.

Occasionally we shortened the evening routine and drove five miles or so out to Lake Michigan on Friday night. We kids climbed on the breakwater in our robes and slippers while my parents watched us.

We were up early on Sabbath morning because it was a 35-minute drive to our church and we had to make it by 9:00 a.m. because Mother was Sabbath School superintendent and Dad had to make it to Teachers Meeting. Sabbath was the one day of the week when I was perfectly well dressed, and I loved it. For a time my mother would even bring me into church in my robe and put my dress on in the bath-

room so that I wouldn't get mussed. I loved Sabbath School and was particularly good at finding Bible verses quickly. Only Doug Lenhoff, the minister's son, gave me any competition.

During church, we sat a few rows from the front. We were not allowed to eat or chew gum in church. We never sat in the balcony. We could draw on our Primary Treasures or we could read them, but we never brought toys to church. After church my Uncle Milton always gave me a stick of gum. Sometimes he gave it to me before church, but when he did I had to put it in my pocket to save for later.

My father nearly always found someone at church that he wanted to bring home for dinner. He brought home people who were interesting, people who were visiting, people who looked lost in every sense of the term. In the car on the way home from church he told my mother how many people he had invited.

We ate Sabbath dinner at the dining room table

on a white cloth. The food was always wonderful. We spent the afternoon playing with the children of the people we had brought home for dinner. When the sun went down, we had worship. After worship we played a game similar to "Ring Around the Rosy." It was called "Oats, Peas, Beans and Barley Grows: and

The Sabbath is primarily experiential. We should choose the kinds of activities, which help us to experience the love of God more fully, or which show love to our neighbors.

So what did Jesus reveal about the Sabbath in his words and in his actions?

My father nearly always found someone at church that he wanted to bring home for dinner. He brought home people who were interesting, people who were visiting, people who looked lost in every sense of the term.

invariably my dad ended the game by collapsing on the sofa much to the delight of his children.

This was the Sabbath I grew up with, and it is the reason I am still a Seventh-day Adventist. At various times over the years I have wrestled with the doctrine of the sanctuary, the literal six-day creation, the age of the earth, and the role of Ellen White. But I have never been in doubt about the Biblical basis of and the need for Sabbath. I love the Sabbath, and I cannot do without it.

The Bible, however, sends us conflicting messages about Sabbath, about its meaning and its observance. In Exodus 31 the Lord tells the Israelites that they should keep the Sabbath because it is holy. If an Israelite desecrates the Sabbath he or she is to be put to death. Anyone who works on Sabbath must be separated permanently from the rest of the Israelites. Paul, on the other hand, seems to free the early Christians from any specific Sabbath observance. In Colossians 2, he writes: "Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come, the reality, however, is found in Christ" (2:16-17).

Outside the Bible, Ellen White viewed the Sabbath as a test of faith. At the end of time, only those who kept the seventh day Sabbath would be fit for God's kingdom.

My principles for understanding the role of the Sabbath in the Christian life and create a healthy Adventist psyche are these:

What Jesus did and said about the Sabbath takes priority over any other interpretation of what the Sabbath is meant for and how it should be observed.

Sabbath-keeping is not a requirement for salvation, but like the other nine commandments its observance comes as a result of our love for God and our desire to show honor to Him.

How the Sabbath is observed will change over time, but any activity that the Christian engages in on that day should enhance his or her relationship with God or others and should be chosen carefully.

He actually said very little about the Sabbath, and what he did say must have sounded very strange to the Jews. When Jesus did talk about the Sabbath it was almost invariably in response to someone's criticism of His Sabbath-keeping. Jesus was criticized primarily when he healed people on the Sabbath.

Jesus did attend the synagogue, "as was his custom" (Luke 4:16). He participated in the service by reading the Scriptures (Luke 4:16). He preached on the Sabbath. He healed and picked grain on the Sabbath.

What was absent from any of Jesus' talk about the Sabbath? He never said, "This is how you have to keep the Sabbath in order to be saved." If God intended the Sabbath as a primary test of our loyalty, surely Jesus would have been very explicit as to its meaning and our observance of it while He was here on earth. He had ample opportunity to do so. When He was specifically asked which was the greatest commandment He could have said, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." He did not. He said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

The Sabbath is an experience. When determining what activities to engage in during the Sabbath hours we should think less of what is forbidden on Sabbath and more of what enhances its observance. What is worth doing on the Sabbath? Our Sabbath is part of our heritage—part of our psyche. It's part of our rhythm in life. It is a way of communing with God that I will hand down to my children and my children's children. For the past ten years my primary effort in my Sabbath-keeping has been discovering ways to make my children's experience of the Sabbath as rich and fulfilling as my own has been. ■

Judy Myers Laue is chair of the English Department at Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas. This article is an adaptation that was originally part of a panel presentation to the San Diego Chapter of the Association of Adventist Forums.

Garry Hogdkin interview

[Continued from page 13]

the Manual Committee.

GH: Yes, I know that some feel this way, however I must emphasize that this was not an attempt to “snooker” anyone. That was the opposite of my intention. However, I reject the number of 150. I believe the number to have been much closer to the 500-600 that appeared to be present at most of the business sessions.

AT: On Friday morning you made your motion as planned. Judging from the way Follett made his comments upon hearing your motion, (i.e. explaining confidently that the motion to repeal needed only a simple majority because it had been announced previously) he seemed to have been expecting it.

GH: I had provided a notice of intention to move such a motion, (the floor was expecting it) therefore I was not surprised that the chair was also “ready with his ruling”.

AT: When you went to the mike, did you already have someone prepared to second your motion?

GH: Yes. By then, some people in my division were ready to second my motion.

AT: So you were surprised that all debate on the issue was cut off after you made your motion to accept the Divorce and Remarriage document?

GH: Yes I was! When I came to the SkyDome that morning, I certainly expected more discussion than actually occurred.

As far as the conclusion of debate is concerned I am really looking forward to seeing written record of the dialogue in the *Adventist Review*. I am very interested in observing the process that leads to the finalization of this debate.

AT: The vote then was passed with little opposition. How did you feel then?

GH: I was very surprised. I had recognized that there were those who would not support my motion. I had not attempted to “enlist support” from any other division and had spoken to no more than 6 - 8 people in my own division, yet the motion passed. ■

Casebook and Codebook:

Alden Thompson speaks to Forum
retreat on inspiration

Proposing an incarnational approach to the study of Scripture, Dr. Alden Thompson, religion teacher at Walla Walla College, provided

stimulus for thinking among some 140 members of the Association of Adventist Forums spending the week-end of June 2-4 at a retreat held at Pine Springs Ranch in Southern California.

Following a suggestion made by Ellen White, Thompson presented an approach to Scripture which would, like Jesus himself, represent a blend of the human and divine. He quoted a passage from *The Great Controversy*: “The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth.”

Thompson had elaborated on this subject in his 1991 book *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers*. In it he had proposed that the Bible should be looked at as a casebook, not a codebook.

Those who regard it as a codebook tend to think only of applying what they read, rather than interpreting its principles; they believe it requires obedient compliance more than thoughtful reflection. They are likely to be bewildered by the laws dealing with slavery, polygamy, and blood vengeance. But those who take the casebook approach look for principles behind the statements that are addressed to particular cultures in time and place. He says, “A casebook describes a series of examples that reflect a variety of responses under varied circumstances. None of the cases may be fully definitive or prescriptive in other settings, but each is described in a manner that

could be helpful to someone facing similar circumstances” (p. 100).

This distinction, Thompson said, accounts in part for the fundamentalist view of the literal interpretation of words in the Bible. The *Adventist Encyclopedia* declares that our church is not fundamentalist; although at times it has taken on fundamentalistic tendencies. The casebook approach enables readers to see why early New Testament church councils could set aside the long-standing Old Testament prescriptions for circumcision and blood sacrifice, and why Jesus could disagree with traditions of divorce and parental support. What appear to be contradictions in the statements of various writers describing the same event may be seen as simply the result of the human element. Where a divine principle is represented, the reader may look for it without being disturbed by the discrepancies. This is also the basis for the debate over the ordination of women to the ministry. The codebook readers, like the Adventist Theological Society, see only proscriptions on the ministry of women in church settings, while the casebook readers see principles allowing both men and women the same freedom to exercise their talents and spiritual gifts.

The weekend retreat, the third one organized by the San Diego chapter of the Forums, was the best-attended of such gatherings. It was characterized by vigorous question and answer sessions following the presentations, and by continued discussions in the halls, dining room, and fireplace circle. One attender from the East Coast remarked that she was pleased to see in person people she had known only from their voices recorded on tape during question periods following presentations at the San Diego chapter of the Forum. ■

An interview Samuel Koranteng-Pipim

[Continued from page 12]

but by logical extension, the condoning of homosexuality and homosexual marriages. After all, if the roles of men and women in their relationship with each other are completely negotiable in God's view, then why not a homosexual relationship?

At Toronto, we succeeded in removing some of the most blatant statements endorsing this egalitarian view before we were prevented from making any further amendments to the document. But some of it's still there in some fuzzy and feminist language. For example, they refer to Paul's teaching on headship and submission (Ephesians 5:21-28) as though it is discussing male superiority and female inferiority.

Abandonment by an Unbelieving Partner

It also introduced another grounds for divorce, namely, "abandonment by an unbelieving partner." Historically, Adventists have insisted that the only ground for divorce is adultery and/or fornication. But the document which the Church Manual Committee presented before us introduces a new ground; they call it "abandonment by an unbelieving partner." Then they inserted 1 Corinthians 7:10-15 as their proof text that it is another ground for divorce! Now this is extremely problematic in terms of its hermeneutics, logic, internal coherence, as well as its application.

Hermeneutics

The Church Manual committee has injected a reference to 1 Corinthians 7:10-15 into their document, as if that text is talking about divorce. Does it really? By making that assertion, they have raised the issue of hermeneutics—how to interpret the Bible. Responsible scholars and commentators seem to be in agreement that the precise meaning of 1 Cor. 7:15 is not crystal clear. So why do we build a theological position on an obscure passage? We never got a chance to discuss it.

Internal Coherence

For those people who still believe that Ellen White is an inspired writer, the

Church Manual proposal also raises some troubling questions. Mrs. White states very clearly that the only ground for divorce is unfaithfulness to the marriage vow, understood by the church to mean adultery, fornication, and various forms of sexual immorality or perversion, including homosexuality and child abuse. (See *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 63).

Some of the speakers rightly argued, the "abandonment clause" raises a direct contradiction to this EGW statement already in the Church Manual. We cannot adopt the church manual proposal without a careful discussion of the all these concerns vis-à-vis the writings of Ellen White.

Application

Practically speaking, allowing the abandonment provision for divorce into the manual is like allowing the proverbial camel's head under the tent. The rest of the camel is bound to follow.

What constitutes "abandonment"? Is it ten years? Is it two years? Is it five weeks? The document is silent, but the camel will keep pushing. That's just the beginning. The second phase of the camel's invasion will be to argue for what could be termed "emotional abandonment." For example, I may not physically abandon my wife, but I or my wife (depending on which

one of us wants to divorce) can say, "you know, even though we live in the same house, he or she has emotionally abandoned me." Then there will be the push for recognition of what may be called "sexual abandonment," when one spouse's sexual needs are not met. This logical extension of the definition of abandonment will eventually create room for anyone for whatever reason, to seek divorce.

AT: Well, not quite. It has to be abandonment by "an unbelieving partner?"

SKP: That phrase is also a problem. Who or what constitutes an "unbelieving partner?" During the debate, they defined an unbelieving partner as "one who has not embraced the three angels' message?" In

other words, an unbelieving partner is a non-Adventist.

To summarize, the questionable vote on Friday regarding the marriage and divorce proposal was more than a "change of wording." I therefore reject the "spin" that has been put on the issue in some of our official publications and news outlets. The vote was a calculated attempt by proponents to liberalize the church's long-standing position on divorce and remarriage. And I'd hope that some fair-minded Adventist journalists will hold them accountable. It is the right thing to do—regardless of one's theological leaning.

Believing that it is better to "debate an issue without settling it, than settling an issue without debating it," I have always welcomed candid and vigorous debates on theological issues. But to maneuver the parliamentary process to rescind a decision made by an overwhelming majority of delegates, to cut off debate, and to vote into the Church Manual a document that is riddled with theological fuzziness, and which is arguably defective in theology, holds the potential of splitting the church. Some conscientious pastors and church members can argue that they cannot ac-

...it is better to "debate an issue without settling it, than settling an issue without debating it," I have always welcomed candid and vigorous debates on theological issues.

cept the church manual as an authoritative document to govern the church since this provision is contrary to biblical and Ellen G. White teaching. A rejection of the authority of the Church Manual will be a sure recipe for congregationalism.

Unless such tactics as were employed in the Friday morning coup d'état are repudiated, this is going to have serious consequences in future sessions and cause a mistrust to grow that will only deepen the divisions that already exist between the industrialized and developing countries, between liberals and conservatives. This is why I felt compelled this morning to use a "privileged motion" to register my protest. ■

A review of the 57th session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

[Continued from page 2]

nently featured in the ceremonies.

Women preached, prayed, and read scripture. Our church has been unable to give women the recognition their work merits, but we have been unwilling to stuff them back into the kitchen and the nursery.

In the reports of several divisions, women in ministry were prominently featured, especially as agents of evangelism. Historically, the premier qualification for ordination among Adventist males has not been education but "soul-winning." So what happens when women do evangelism? You can't very well turn away the new converts they are bringing to the church. How long can the church insist that women are not qualified for ordination when they are engaging with increasing effectiveness in the primary activity that has qualified men for ordination? This is especially interesting in light of the fact that most of these great female evangelists are citizens of developing nations where the resistance to the ordination of women is strongest.

My guess is that the church will not resolve these contradictions any time soon. Women will continue to advance in leadership. And the Church will continue to refuse ordination. One possible outcome of this will be the devaluation of ordination, especially among educated Adventists.

Another sign of our improbable amalgam of liberal and conservative tendencies: I visited with many church employees who greatly value *Adventist Today*. It is the one Adventist magazine that they read from cover to cover. These people are not presidents, but they are departmental directors and assistants in the church bureaucracy, pastors, lay professionals who work for the GC or NAD, editors of church publications. They are committed to the church. They work for the denomination. But their vision of Adventism includes more critical thought, more concern for reform, openness and accountability than one would expect given the stereotype of church employees as drones with unthinking loyalty to the system.

Then there was the sermon by GC President Jan Paulsen on the final Sabbath of

the Session. He made it very clear that he was committed to preserving the Adventist identity and the hierarchy. He identified five elements that link global Adventism together: Our statement of beliefs ("the 27"), a single church manual, common constitutional structures, financial interconnectivity, and the writings of Ellen White (he said, "the gift of prophecy"). He left no question about his commitment to hold all church leaders accountable for their support of these "elements that bind us together" and, in an aside, called on the laity to hold their leaders accountable.

This strong call for unity and continuity came at the end of his sermon. It was his declaration of the vision by which he will seek to steer the church, but earlier he made repeated references to grace. In contrast to the graceless sermon on the first Sabbath, Paulsen said things like "after stupid choices there is still a balm in Gilead." "We have not done enough for those who have gotten weary on this journey... It's not their problem; it is our problem." "We are highly valued by God. Just by being a human being we are deeply loved by God." He told the story of a teenager driven from church by criticism of his clothes.

My sense is that Paulsen is conservative enough to keep the church moving forward in aggressive evangelism and progressive enough to find ways to accommodate members whose spiritual life has been shaped by the culture of academia. He will be vigilant in safeguarding a distinctive Adventist identity, but his vision of Adventism begins with a theological and pastoral appreciation of grace.

I left this General Conference session encouraged. No, the church is not going to do what I think it should do on a number of issues. But neither is it going to

tell me I am no longer a part of the family. "The 27" will be used increasingly as a creed, and public doctrinal battles will involve debate over the wording rather than the substance of the doctrines. The political clout of the respective advocates of increased and decreased ambiguity will tend to maintain the status quo. Authority will continue to accrete to the office of General Conference president, but at the conference level, at least in North America, the power of the president will be checked by the political and financial clout of an educated laity. (I'm utterly clueless about the divisions and unions. Sorry about that.)

Early in his Sabbath sermon Paulsen used a phrase that I would hope could become a slogan among progressive Adventists. "God is the cause of this church." I was intrigued that he avoided the language of "remnant" which is so divisive and used this language which accommodates a very wide range of convictions about the SDA church.

"God is the cause of this church" affirms God's providential leading of our church without insisting that every move of the church and every statement of its leaders has been correct, without denying that God may work in other churches. It speaks of divine purpose without whitewashing human complication and messiness.

God is the cause of this church. It is a conviction that justifies all the energy, tears, money, and years we have invested as laity and clergy. This conviction undergirds AT's vision of a church that is more honest, just, and compassionate.

God is the cause of this church. And if he can put up with the frailty and perversity of this creation of his, then surely we who call ourselves his children should not consider ourselves above participation in her life. ■