

# adventist today

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ANALYSIS  
OPINION

volume twelve | number two | march, april 2004



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stand?

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## Earning the Right to Speak

JOHN MCLARTY

**A**t a pastors' meeting a few months ago someone gave a well-crafted series of lectures on how to cultivate an effective, vital church. The presentation included creative theological reflection and was well-organized and supported with PowerPoint slides. But I had a hard time listening because the speaker had left the pastorate years earlier when he could no longer handle the stress. Since then, he has worked in a conference office. At the end of his second lecture, I asked if any congregation was actually implementing his proposals. He replied, "No," but added that in the future congregations would do these things because this was the next wave in the Holy Spirit's leading.

I quit listening. In fact, I quit going to the lectures. I should be able to learn from anyone, but I have a hard time receiving instruction about how to do my job from someone who has "burned out." I want to be more effective as a pastor, but I am old enough and have heard enough presentations on sure-fire methods that I no longer believe anyone who offers snake-oil cures for ecclesiastical ills. If you're going to get my ear, you will have to show me something that works. Telling does not impress me. You earn the right to teach me by showing me you can do it better.

Recently I've listened to several friends who vigorously argued that the Seventh-day Adventist denomination or our local congregation should be outspoken in opposition to the legalization of gay marriage. The primary reason they gave for the public involvement of the church in this issue is the risk posed to the children of future generations by the weakening of marriage that would occur if gay marriage were fully legalized.

I agreed that we should not redefine marriage to mean the lifelong union of any two adults irrespective of gender. However, I preferred the church to keep a rather low profile on this issue because I did not think we had earned the right to

speak loudly. It seems to me that divorce between heterosexual couples damages far more children than marriage between homosexuals ever will.

The biblical condemnation of divorce (especially in the New Testament) is every bit as emphatic as its condemnation of sexual unions outside of marriage. Yet the church has a divorce rate equal to that of the general public and greater than some identifiable groups of non-Christians. If the church is going to speak credibly about the meaning and limits of marriage, we must first demonstrate within our own community that our values and practices lead to increased satisfaction and longevity in marriages. After we've demonstrated our competence in monogamous, lifelong marriage, we will be in a much stronger position to offer searching criticism of other forms of sexual union.

**It seems to me that divorce between heterosexual couples damages far more children than marriage between homosexuals ever will.**

The church ought to speak publicly about moral issues like abortion, marriage, environmental stewardship, the death penalty, war. We won't all agree on what the church should say. We certainly cannot expect the larger society to approve of what we say. But church leaders should speak anyway. If nothing else, their public voice helps people remember that political, economic and legal considerations are not an exhaustive list of what is important. Spiritual, religious and moral concerns matter, and not just inside the church.

But the most powerful statements a church makes arise from what we show, not what we tell. When our congregations function as caring communities which catalyze emotional, spiritual and physical healing, when our marriages are demonstrably healthier and more enduring than those in society around us, then our words about how society ought to be structured will carry weight. Then we can expect the world to give us its ear. ■



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Anonymous



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**adventist today** reports on contemporary issues of importance to Adventist church members. Following basic principles of ethics and canons of journalism, this publication strives for fairness, candor and good taste. Unsolicited submissions are encouraged. Payment is competitive. Send an e-mail to [editor@atoday.com](mailto:editor@atoday.com) for writer's guidelines. Annual subscriptions \$29.50 (\$50/2 years) for individuals, \$18 for students, \$40 for institutions. (Payment by check or credit card. Add \$10 for address outside North America.) Voice | (800) 236-3641 or (909) 785-1295 Fax | (909) 785-1595 E-mail | [atoday@atoday.com](mailto:atoday@atoday.com) Web site | [www.atoday.com](http://www.atoday.com)

**adventist today** (ISSN 1079-5499) is published bimonthly for \$29.50 per year (\$18 for students, \$40 for institutions) by **adventist today** Foundation, P.O. Box 8026 Riverside, CA 92515-8026. Periodical postage paid at Riverside, California, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Adventist Today, Box 8026, Riverside, CA 92515-8026. Copyright © 2004 by **adventist today** Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering open dialogue in the Adventist community.

## Getting Better or Worse?

Mike Scofield's article (AT Jan/Feb 2004) hit me like a fresh breeze on a hot July day.

"Is the World Getting Better or Worse?" is a topic for which I was almost fired in 1961. I was head of the theology department at Atlantic Union College. A conference president had asked me to give a series on "last-day events" for his workers' meeting. Part of my talks were directed to the "signs," where I spent some time reviewing the same kind of topics that Scofield did so well, emphasizing that Jesus was more interested in the state of the church than the state of the world. I simply let Matthew 24 lead us along.

Apparently the ministers were in uproar because I was taking away from them some of their "best" evangelistic sermons. I thought I was giving them better arguments!

A few days later, the conference president (who today is a warm, close friend) was in the union president's office demanding my resignation. For several hours the secretaries and others heard the verbal exchange. Thanks to an enlightened union president I was spared. Interesting, isn't it? We still need articles by men like Scofield to keep us focused on the light, not on the shadows that may seem to be more interesting.

We are not against focusing on the deterioration of the global fabric, any more than Noah did or could. But there were better reasons to listen to the gospel call. After all, when the Door of the Ark was closed, when the end-time Door of Probation is closed one of these days, the world never looked so good to thought leaders. That is why Noah seemed to them to be so fanatical and why end-of-the-worlders will find much to be positive about.

**Herbert E. Douglass | Lincoln, Calif.**

**How does Mr. Henriksen ignore the more than 300,000 Iraqis who were brutally murdered under the Saddam Hussein regime, whose mass graves were only found after liberation? Surely it would have been good to have saved those lives, had the world community only found its will earlier.**

## Music Guidelines and Christian Contemporary Music (CCM)

To try to categorize the music of the church into either "traditional" or "CCM" is only to be narrow-minded (AT Nov/Dec 2003). Some of today's music is only transitory, while some of it may prove to be enduring. Music should be chosen that is appropriate for the occasion,

just as we would not dress the same way for a swim in the pool as for an evening concert. A new dress or suit that is simple in design rather than "faddish" can be fitting for a long period of time, so might be defined as "classic" in the broad sense of the term.

Contemporary music is not always "faddish" or extreme in style. Yet we should not close our minds to the value of that which has been around for a while. Our music leaders must learn to choose music appropriate for the occasion, whether traditional or contemporary; that is, what might be appropriate for individual listening might not always be appropriate for the worship hour, where the wide spectrum of listeners must be considered and respected. A variety of styles, avoiding extremes, is usually preferable.

So if we define the purpose of the setting—(1) church worship hour, to uplift, inspire and instruct the full body of Christ, (2) church-sponsored concert, to entertain a specific audience, or (3) individual Christian listening, for relaxation and personal enjoyment—we might find it easier to choose what may be appropriate.

**Carol Mayes | Chatsworth, Calif.**

## War in Iraq

Reasonable people can disagree about the nature of the liberation of 25 million Iraqis from the domination of the Baathist regime. However, Glenn Henriksen's screed (AT Nov/Dec 2003) represents not a reasoned disagreement but a selective diatribe. He is too long on polemic and too short on balance.

"Messing up Iraq," he says "has terminated more children, women and elderly in Iraq than were killed in the 9/11 attack on New York." This may or may not be the case, but how does Mr. Henriksen ignore the more than 300,000 Iraqis who were brutally murdered under the Saddam Hussein regime, whose mass graves were only found after liberation? Surely it would have been good to have saved those lives, had the world community only found its will earlier. Have we all forgotten the tragic lessons of silence exhibited in the Holocaust, in Cambodia and in Rwanda?

He further writes that the Iraqi people are "infuriated" and determined to avenge their national honor by killing every American they can find. Is this really the case? Or is it the remnants of the former regime—understandably upset at their sudden loss of privilege and power—who are trying to throw a monkey wrench into democratization?

His assertion that the United States—and, inter alia, the world—are not more secure because Saddam is gone is not borne out by current facts. Libya has abandoned its WMD program. Syria is acting more reasonably. There have been tentative moves towards an Israeli-Palestinian peace. Even the North Koreans, as I write, are discussing nuclear issues in six-party talks. All of these have been attributed to the result of getting Saddam out of power.

I do not rejoice in war or suffering or death. But it is possible, is it not, for us to understand that war is sometimes necessary to protect freedom and to liberate the oppressed? All AT readers would do well to ponder how that freedom was obtained, how it was secured, and how it has been defended. Until Jesus returns and until the Kingdom of God is established on Earth, we must defend freedom and extend it as much as possible. Instead of ranting and raving, we should be grateful to those willing to pay the price to defend that freedom.

**Mark A. Kellner | Rockville, Md.**

## Gospel to Hurting People

Thank you for the information on the Gay and Lesbian Adventist Kinship Advisory and Kit Watts' article on women's ordination (AT Nov/Dec 2003). I am thinking of family members who are gay, and others who have been so abused by men (some of them church leaders) that it would seem impossible they could ever "hear" the gospel from a man. But Jesus loves these kinds of people, also. Many who work with domestic violence victims believe the social structure of many churches actually facilitates violence against women (and homosexuals).

When I hear Adventists praying that Jesus would come soon, I think, "No, Lord, my loved ones need to know about You first!" I yearn for the day when my loved ones can freely walk into a warm and uncondemning church and find Jesus—or the day when Adventist people will take Jesus to the places where my loved ones are.

Kit Watts wrote, "Today, most Adventist church leaders believe women's ordination is dead." Since there are so many perplexing populations of people to be reached, I wonder why "most Adventist church leaders" are not wrestling with the challenge of taking the gospel to these hurting people rather than impeding women who have been called to such a ministry. Considering these things and the fact that my daughter (and many other youth who grew up in my former church) have been grieved out of church fellowship, perhaps the question posed on your front cover should have been, "Is the Church Getting Better or Worse?"

**Karolyn Kasprzak | Tacoma, Wash.**

## Antinomies

No matter how much I like Bob Johnston personally, his paper (AT Jan/Feb 2004) reflects the kind of intellectual sophistry typical of those who think they can be Adventists and evolutionists at the same time. Sure, it's not easy understanding how God could be one and yet composed of three entities, but it's not impossible; it's not easy to understand how the Holy Spirit can function one way in one situation and another in another, but it's not impossible. And yet, according to Bob, these are analogies for the idea that God created the world in six literal days but took millions of years to do it? Come on!

Does he really expect anyone to believe this? I sure hope his students at the Seminary (our future ministers) didn't.

**Clifford Goldstein | Silver Spring, Md.**

## Goldstein on Bleats

Bill Blythe's essay, "A Few Bleats..." (AT Nov/Dec 2003) drove me to revisit Clifford Goldstein's article "Seventh-day Darwinians" (AT Sept/Oct 2003) with greater scrutiny, and I was affirmed of my first reaction. I found his article appalling. I was struck by his apparent elitist display of "holy intellectualism." Goldstein seems

**Since there are so many perplexing populations of people to be reached, I wonder why "most Adventist church leaders" are not wrestling with the challenge of taking the gospel to these hurting people rather than impeding women who have been called to such a ministry.**

to espouse the "belly-button theory" of church membership: one must become either an "innie" or an "outie"—"believe as I do or get out!" That rigid old snake of purging or purifying the church rears its ugly head every 10 or 20 years. However, many of us have been in "the way" far too long to make changes of fellowship, personal theology, subculture or anticipation of heaven—convinced that the church needs us all, the full range of conservatives and liberals. Theology, Darwinism, Creationism, Huxleyism and their various points of view tend to raise more questions than answers and none can be fully supported by observation or experiment. A fuller, more substantive, belief-conforming study seems more suited for Heaven. An affirming metaphor of faith borrowed from the legal community by means of which many of us have experienced conviction is: circumstantial evidence.

**Richard R. Williams | McMinnville, Ore.**

## Ellen G. White and the Heavens

Thanks for your crisp Glacier View reports and the latest AT. In one of the reports and in a letter from my dear friend Patti Hare, reference was made to Joseph Bates's amazement/appreciation for Ellen White's vision of the planets and also her description of the "opening heavens." What seems to be lost in the two AT references is that Ellen White never identified the "planets" she was describing nor did she mention the number of moons any planet may have. In Messenger of the Lord, I wrote: "But Bates attached the planets' names to what he

**Continued on page 6 »**

thought Ellen White was describing, and others [Loughborough] reported what Bates seemed to have understood from her brief comments. Telescopes today reveal much more about the planets, the number of their moons, and other heavenly phenomena than Bates would ever have dreamed of. What really astounded him was not the description of the "opening heavens," a reference to the so-called "open space in Orion." He was reported to have said that her description "far surpassed any account of the opening heavens he had ever read from any author" (page 144-145).

But Patty and Ed Hare understood the big picture as she wrote: "It is so obvious and such a wonderful illustration of how God uses inspiration for specific purposes and how important it is to take into account time and place." Exactly!

Continuing in *Messenger of the Lord*, "The point seems clear: the vision was not a lesson on astronomy that was intended to be verified by modern telescopes. Rather, it provided enough information, by a young woman totally uninformed on astronomy, that conformed to the limited information that Bates, an amateur astronomer, had in 1847. If Ellen White had given a preview of what the Hubble telescope revealed in the 1990s, Joseph Bates would certainly have been convinced that Ellen White was a fraud, a misguided zealot. His doubts would have been confirmed" (145).

In an early *Review and Herald*, Aug. 1, 1849, Ellen White wrote: "Then I was taken to a world which had seven moons. Then I saw good old Enoch, who had been translated." Again, she did not identify which "world" had the "seven moons."

**Herb Douglass | Lincoln Hills, Calif.**

**I am sure Schwisow knows that several SDA conferences have had to cut back on their payrolls the last few years, some drastically, because of the bad economy. To know this and to blame 3ABNs' financial setbacks on the plane, on Dan's leadership, or other gossip and print it in AT is very distasteful to me.**

### **Adventists and "The Passion"**

I enjoy your publication immensely! It is so necessary in today's church. Something on the arrogance and embarrassing positions many Adventist took on the "The Passion" would be appropriate. Starting with the *Review's* editorial and our retired academic professors.

Doug Mace | Loma Linda, Calif.

### **Schwisow on 3ABN**

I felt Ed Schwisow's article was written from the mindset of a conservative "in the box" SDA. It is so hard for many people to accept change even when change will let God help us fly higher. Schwisow wants Dan and Linda and crew to fly a two-seat Cessna that would not be so expensive, get better mileage, and visit fewer churches. I felt much of his article was gossipy and small.

I am sure Schwisow knows that several SDA conferences have had to cut back on their payrolls the last few years, some drastically, because of the bad economy. To know this and to blame 3ABNs' financial setbacks on the plane, on Dan's leadership, or other gossip and print it in *AT* is very distasteful to me. It is so hard to build something successful and not have some people complain.

I like 3 ABN's success in reaching the world, and the thousands it has brought to know Jesus Christ. Schwisow would keep the Sheltons in the hanger and not let God fly them high to the world.

**Ellsworth Wellman | Yakima, Wash.**

### **In Defense of Goldstein**

In reply to Ervin Taylor, "Church Apologetics and Sola Scriptura" (*AT* Jan/Feb 2004), I have the following comments:

First, while Clifford Goldstein is an esteemed friend, I can't help wondering how he warrants the honorific, "the church's most outspoken church apologist." Nor does Taylor explain in what way Goldstein's views on Ellen White's authority represent "official, orthodox Adventism." His assumption that Goldstein's belief in Ellen White's "fallibility" in theological and other matters represents "movement" in conservative or official Adventist thinking toward a more moderate stance, is not supported by the facts. No hint along such lines can be found in the larger body of conservative Adventist thought and literature just now, nor has Adventist officialdom approved any statement which reduces Ellen White's role and authority in this manner.

Second, Taylor makes another unproved assumption when he claims Goldstein's defense of the sanctuary doctrine represents a "minority point of view within the community of Adventist professional biblical scholars." For starters, one must ask how Taylor defines a "professional biblical scholar"—a phrase which smacks of the sort of elitism that often injures the reputations of

### **Send Letters to the Editor:**

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# Adventist Historians Meet at PUC

JAMES STIRLING

**W**hat does it take to become—and remain—a history teacher at an Adventist school? I had the opportunity to hear some who love to study and teach history and was impressed with their passion for the subject—and their concerns for the future of the profession. At a convention held over the last weekend of March at Pacific Union College in Angwin, Calif., 35 members of the Association of Seventh-day Adventist Historians (ASDAH) discussed research papers, talked about the state of history teaching, and generally socialized. Graduate students in history also attended.

Teaching historians are concerned about the educational climate in which technological professions are glamorized and funded, but social sciences, including history, are marginalized and even considered superfluous. History teachers in secondary schools are subjected to unrealistic “standards” which destroy teachers’ autonomy and force them to teach to a format “wheel” that administrators say is somehow a reform of old-style teaching. And then in many boarding academies history teachers are expected to become jacks-of-all-trades, teaching diverse subjects and even driving the school bus. Overloading a history teacher’s assignments can indeed burn him or her out. And in Adventist schools particularly, a history teacher’s tenure may be terminated by personality clashes with an administrator, a school

board member, or even a pastor or his wife.

But a main concern of the group was research reports brought by five presenters. Douglas Morgan, from Columbia Union College, in Takoma Park, Md., had examined the early Adventist treatment of European and American history in its scenario of the “Great Controversy.” Ellen White made this the title of one of her most popular books, written in 1888. Morgan pointed out that many large events of the 20th century like communism, Nazism, and the rise of Islam in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa were not represented in the book. He and the audience discussed the implications of recent historical trends for the great controversy theme. A featured speaker

## History teachers in secondary schools are subjected to unrealistic “standards” which destroy teachers’ autonomy.

was Fred Hoyt, from La Sierra University, who had compared descriptions written by three observers of a meeting at which Ellen G. White gave a long talk.

Other speakers discussed the context in which early Adventist pioneers developed their theology and church structure, the course of Adventist city missions, and problems in medieval studies. Some of these research papers may be presented in future issues of *Adventist Today*.

I found the atmosphere of this convention to be warm and accepting; I had many shared memories with other in attendance. I look forward to meeting with them again if possible at their next triennial session in 2007. ■

# LETTERS

the so-called “intellectuals” among us.

Third, Taylor thinks Goldstein “ignores the facts” by saying Desmond Ford’s attacks on the sanctuary doctrine were discredited long ago, since Taylor claims a large number of the scholars who initially examined Ford’s position agreed with much of what he said. But merely because professed scholars see light in a position doesn’t mean it can’t still be discredited on the basis of evidence. The fact remains that attacks on the Adventist sanctuary message inevitably arise from one of two sets of presuppositions: (1) the evangelical gospel of a finished salvation at Calvary, which makes both an end-time atonement and character perfection unnecessary; and (2) the higher critical approach to Bible study which refuses to allow Scripture to transcend its cultural matrix and become its own interpreter.

Once the Bible is permitted to discredit these two sets of presuppositions, one easily understands why conservative Adventists fail to be impressed with the reams of “scholarly” invective hurled against this doctrine.

Finally, no one who accepts the Bible-based, classical Adventist sanctuary message needs to “try to find a reasonable explanation” of its profound relevance to contemporary life. The heart searching and character development held by historic Adventism to be the essential corollary of this doctrine, is awesomely practical in its meaning for how we treat each other, how we subdue destructive tendencies to self-indulgence, and how we see ourselves in the larger cosmos. The problem is not with a lack of contemporary relevance in this particular doctrine, but a lack of contemporary willingness to accept its self-crucifying demands.

**Kevin D. Paulson | New York, N.Y.**

# Ruling Against Church in Sexual Misconduct Case

GREGORY MATTHEWS

**O**n Feb. 24, 2004, representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church reached an agreement with Steven R. Odenthal to settle a lawsuit that has the potential to change the way this church does ministry in the United States. Prior to settlement, this case worked its way through the Minnesota District, Appellate, and finally the Minnesota Supreme Court.<sup>1</sup> Those legal rulings may make this case into a seminal one which, in addition to establishing precedent in Minnesota,<sup>2</sup> is likely to be cited in future cases throughout the United States.

In mid-1997 Steven and Diane Odenthal began individual and couple marital counseling with Lowell Rideout (their Seventh-day Adventist pastor) that continued through September 1999.<sup>3</sup> Early on Rideout was attracted to Diane and said so to her husband. He advised the two of them that it would be difficult for them to have a harmonious marriage, for they were not right for each other. Rideout told them that his personality type was similar to Diane's and that he believed Diane would run off with him if he were to become available. Diane and Steven stopped counseling with Rideout for several months and then began

case it should be dismissed due to excessive entanglement, or if it was a tort separate from that and thus subject to court adjudication. Under those standards, Rideout could be judged on the basis of: (a) his duty, (b) whether or not he had breached that duty, (c) whether a breach of duty were a proximate cause of injury, and (d) possible damages. If Rideout were to be considered a professional person, then the standard of care would be that usually exercised by a member of that profession under similar circumstances.

Then it went to the court of appeals, which accepted to hear the sole issue as to whether or not the district court had jurisdiction to hear the negligence claim without violating First Amendment provisions against excessive entanglement in religion. The appellate court held that clergy malpractice could not be decided, as that would involve excessive entanglement and a violation of First Amendment provisions. The district court, they said, had excessively entangled itself in religion, in violation of the First Amendment, when it determined on the basis of Adventist rules and regulations that Rideout had gone beyond the role of pastoral counselor. Therefore, the court of appeals reversed the decision of the district court that had allowed the negligent counseling claim to proceed. This decision was not unanimous; there was one dissent.

Steven Odenthal then appealed this decision to the Minnesota Supreme Court, which accepted the appeal. The supreme court decision began by briefly reviewing the beginning counseling relationship that Diane and Steven had established with Rideout.<sup>4</sup> It established that the Odenthals began this relationship believing that Rideout was performing marital counseling, and that he had a background in psychology. The court concluded that entanglement issues did not prevail when the issue could be decided by neutral rules that did not involve a religious institution or doctrine. The court then had jurisdiction over clergy when these neutral principles established an applicable standard for clergy. It went on to hold that there were three neutral principles of Minnesota law under which this case could be decided: (1) state law regarding unlicensed mental health practitioners, (2) state law regarding licensure for marital and family counselors, and (3) state law regarding sexual exploitation by a psychotherapist.

In the application of Minnesota law, Rideout argued that his counseling was pastoral and therefore not subject to court jurisdiction, in part due to the fact that the Odenthals did not pay him for his services. The court ruled that Rideout had provided such secular mental health services due to: (1) his description of his services as marital counseling, (2) his discussion with the Odenthals of his psychological training and/or background, (3) his probable use of psychological tests and/or examinations, (4) his attempt to modify behavior in his suggestion that Diane would run away with him if he wanted her to do

**Legal rulings may make this case into a seminal one which, in addition to establishing precedent in Minnesota, is likely to be cited in future cases throughout the United States.**

it again. With this new beginning, Diane and Rideout confessed their love for each other. By now the local church had brought this matter to the attention of the Conference, which advised Rideout to resign, as he did, in September. Divorces took place in both families, and Diane and Rideout were married.

But Steven Odenthal did not take this lightly; he sued Rideout, the local church and conference, and the General Conference. He alleged that Rideout had: (a) violated Adventist doctrine and policy in his counseling methods, (b) committed clergy malpractice, (c) inflicted intentional emotional distress, (d) was negligent, and (e) breached his fiduciary duty in a confidential relationship.

The case went to a district court, which dismissed all claims except for negligence and vicarious liability by the Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Rideout had gone beyond accepted limits of pastoral counseling and therefore could be held to the standards of a secular counselor. He had provided psychotherapy, acted as a marriage counselor, and engaged in secular counseling. But the fundamental issue was whether his claimed negligence was actually a clergy malpractice claim, in which

so, and (5) his challenge of two secular counselors who had also been involved in the counseling. It also ruled that the law did not require that he be paid by the Odenthals. The interesting factor in this aspect is that the court found that if state law required that Rideout be compensated for his counseling, it allowed such compensation to come from the Minnesota Conference that paid him a salary. It also found that state standards of negligence could be applied to Rideout, such as confidentiality and conduct likely to deceive or harm the public, without an excessive entanglement with religion. Clergy malpractice was not a factor in a case where the clergyperson had provided secular services and/or held himself out to be providing the services of a psychological counselor.

The supreme court found that the district court had properly concluded that it had jurisdiction over Odenthal's negligence claim, and reversed the court of appeals on this point. It then remanded the case back to the court of appeals, and ordered it to consider whether or not the Minnesota Conference had vicarious liability for negligent training, supervision and retention of Rideout. It should be noted that this ruling did not find that the conference had any liability. It simply allowed the case against the conference to go to trial. It also now raised the issue that there might be liability on the basis that the conference had continued Rideout in his pastoral responsibilities under circumstances where an administrator either knew of his problems, or should have known of them.

Second Court of Appeals found that the Minnesota Conference president, Dennis Carlson, first became aware of allegations of misconduct between Rideout and Diane in April of 1999.<sup>5</sup> It also found that Carlson then became aware of a prior allegation of sexual misconduct against Rideout, and that Carlson failed to investigate that allegation and failed to follow Minnesota Conference policy in regard to action by a "sexual ethics committee."

The court then went on to rule that this case could be decided only on the basis of neutral standards, and that Adventist rules, policy and doctrine could not be a factor in considering this case. It further ruled that the claim against the Minnesota Conference could be heard on the basis of neutral standards, and that it could proceed on the basis of whether or not the conference had negligently retained him when it should have known of the claim of his negligent secular counseling. It also ruled that the court could determine whether or not the conference engaged in negligent supervision of Rideout by the neutral standards of a secular counselor. As a final aspect to its ruling, it found that the court could determine whether or not the conference was vicariously liable, due to the fact that Rideout's secular counseling was outside of his pastoral duties.

It should be clearly noted that none of this found the Minnesota Conference to be liable of any wrongdoing. It simply found that the court could determine such, without violating the First Amendment to the Constitution.

My analysis and comment: In all the years that this has taken place to reach settlement, and in all of the legal proceedings, there has been no finding of negligence against

any Adventist church agency. This whole process has simply been to decide whether or not a religious agency, or church, could be held accountable in a court of law for the actions of one of its pastors in a counseling relationship. While the court has not found liability, it has clearly found that in Minnesota, such can happen. One might argue that this case has precedence only in Minnesota, and such is legally true. It does not have precedence outside that state. But the 1976 Tarasoff ruling tells us that we should not be

**In all the years that this has taken place to reach settlement, and in all of the legal proceedings, there has been no finding of negligence against any Adventist church agency. This whole process has simply been to decide whether or not a religious agency, or church, could be held accountable in a court of law for the actions of one of its pastors in a counseling relationship.**

complacent. This decision of the California Supreme Court ruled that therapists had a duty to warn of danger to one another, though it established that duty only in California. But Tarasoff reasoning has been used to establish, either by statute or by case law, a duty to warn that is now just about nationwide.

There are those who believe that the Odenthal case is seminal and has the potential to be used as the basis for future case law throughout the United States. On a limited basis, a constitutional protection for the church has been breached, and this may have consequences for Seventh-day Adventist ministry. Church agencies face the potential of being liable for the actions of their employees to a greater extent than before.

There are those who will criticize Odenthal for bringing civil action against the church, chiefly because of the financial expenditures involved. Yes, the church has incurred a financial loss in this case. It so happens that the Minnesota Conference liability was covered, not under a denominational insurance policy, but under one from a private insurance company. So the major expenses of settling this case came from nondenominational sources. Further, while our legal system is not perfect in determining liability and loss, it is ethical for a religious agency to be responsible for loss incurred due to its negligence. The decision that a pastor can be held to a secular standard in regard to counseling, without a First Amendment violation, is of major significance. This is especially true as it includes the potential liability of the conference in all such activities of the pastor.

On occasion, hopefully very seldom, Conference administrators have operated on the principle of benign neglect.

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# Ruling in Sexual Misconduct Case

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That principle can be stated as: "If I do not know what is happening in the local church, I am not responsible for it." But this court decision makes church organizations potentially responsible for what they did not know, but could or should have known.

As a result of this potential liability, I foresee that conference administrators will feel forced to establish policies on pastoral counseling that will limit what pastors are allowed to do. Since few of our pastors are actually qualified to do counseling, this may be beneficial in persuading them not to try.

There is also a human element to this case. The prime actors were Diane Odenthal, Rideout, and the Adventist church. But other family members were unwillingly drawn into the issue. The Odenthals had children whose lives have been affected forever. Diane had a husband, and Rideout a wife. The lives of all have been irrevocably changed. In a litigious society such as this, what was the responsibility of the church to relate to these other affected people? That answer is not easy. Lawyers will advise their clients not to do anything that can be construed as an admission of responsibility. In our society, the "innocent

allow for future legal determination of some aspects of the case. We as a church may need to develop legal strategies that allow for such.

The church likely wanted to settle this case to bring to an end a long and contentious process that had consumed the lives of many people on both sides of the issue. It also likely considered the social climate of our time. In a day when clergy abuse is in the headlines, no one could predict what a jury might award in such a case. The time had clearly come to settle and move on.

One interesting aspect of this case is that the original filing included the local church as a defendant. The local church was correctly severed from the case, as well as the General Conference. Rideout was a conference employee, and it was the local conference that should have been a named defendant. But this may affect other employees who are now considered to be local church employees.

In the case of a Task Force worker, the Conference may very well provide all or a portion of that salary. The common thinking is that a Task Force worker is not a conference employee, but employed by the local congregation, and that therefore the conference has no responsibility for the supervision of that person. As Rideout was considered to be a conference employee due to his salary's coming from the conference, so also another person may be considered to be a conference employee if any portion of their salary comes from the conference. The so-called "deep pockets" rule may apply here.

If Rideout had been considered a local congregation employee, that would have had serious consequences. The local church and its leadership would have been held responsible for his actions. Yes, the conference would likely have stepped in to protect the interests of the local church and in so doing would have extended its leadership. But this would have been at a great emotional toll on the affected people, and there would have been a potential for some individual liability.

This court decision is likely to affect the church's work for a long time to come, during which we will watch the ramifications of the case. ■

## References and Notes

<sup>1</sup>Steven R. Odenthal v. Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, Minnetonka Seventh-day Adventist Church, and Lowell Rideout. The first decision of the Court of Appeals was filed on Aug. 28, 2001, and the second was filed on Jan. 27, 2003. The Minnesota Supreme Court decision was filed on Aug. 15, 2002.

<sup>2</sup>The Odenthal case has already been used by the Minnesota Court of Appeals to decide *JM v. Minnesota District Council of the Assemblies of God*, and *St. James Assembly of God Church (March 25, 2003)*, Lisa Olson, et al., v. First Church of Nazarene and The Minnesota District

**Does the church have a responsibility for innocent people who are affected by the actions of one of its employees? If so, what are the limits of such responsibility? Can this responsibility be fulfilled without litigation, and without an agreement from the concerned parties not to litigate?**

wife" might have to seek refuge in a woman's shelter and get public assistance in order to put her life together. Does the church have a responsibility for innocent people who are affected by the actions of one of its employees? If so, what are the limits of such responsibility? Can this responsibility be fulfilled without litigation, and without an agreement from the concerned parties not to litigate?

In the area where I live, a government agency has attempted to take such responsibility. A government employee has been alleged to have sexually harassed certain people who worked under him. Several of those people have filed lawsuits against the government agency. That agency is paying the legal fees of employees who have filed the lawsuits because those in charge feel it is the right thing to do, and the plaintiffs have agreed to limit the boundaries of the lawsuit.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the government agency believes that it is in its financial interest to pay the legal expenses and limit its liability. This situation tells me that it might be possible for the church to provide assistance to people who have been wronged, and still

## Summit on Ellen G. White Writings

ARTHUR PATRICK

Ellen White continues to evoke hostile attack, intense study, and spirited support in the South Pacific Division. A lively tradition of discussion about the prophet has thus evolved; this tradition entered a vibrant new phase during February 2004.

The International Prophetic Guidance Workshop of 1982, held in Washington, D.C., may be the most important event of its kind relating to Ellen White in Seventh-day Adventist history. The workshop generated 941 pages of materials that its attendees immediately carried worldwide. These included data and interpretations more comprehensive and influential than those of similar conferences, such as ones held in 1919, 1978 and 2002.

In 1999, the South Pacific Division (SPD) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church developed a five-page "A Strategy Document for a Better Appreciation of the Ministry and Writings of Ellen G. White," and recently held a summit on Ellen White.

The summit convened Feb. 2 to 5, 2004, on the campus of Avondale College, drawing 104 participants from the division's vast territories. Guest presenters from the United States were historian Gary Land from Andrews University; New Testament specialist Jon Paulien from the SDA Theological Seminary at Andrews University; and James Nix, director of the White Estate at the General Conference headquarters in Silver Spring, Md.

Local presenters included a range of specialists in biblical studies, theology, history, medicine and church leadership. A series of narrations by a woman and several

men under the title, "My Personal Journey with Ellen White," was a heartwarming feature of the three evening programs. The church intends to augment these testimonies with those of others and publish them as a book.

Day 1 topics included a consideration of theories of inspiration, fundamentalism, and its impact on Adventism; biblical perspectives on prophets and prophecy; and the responsibility of a community of faith to test claims of individuals that they have the gift of prophecy.

Day 2 focused on why Ellen White's writings are not in the biblical canon, whereas a book like Esther, which does not even mention the name of God, is included; the variety of ways Ellen White used Scripture; 19th-century visionary experiences in North America; Ellen White as a health pioneer; and the Dammon affair, in which Millerite preacher Israel Dammon was arrested while leading a noisy meeting soon after the Great Disappointment of 1844.

In addition, Don McMahon, a medical specialist from Melbourne, reported on his comparison between lifestyle principles found in Ellen White's writings and those of other 19th-century health reformers. McMahon's analyses offered a fresh way to assess Ellen White's health writings.

The final morning of the summit addressed the theme "Ellen White Today and Tomorrow," with James Nix, Arthur Patrick and Laurie Evans presenting, plus a panel that involved overseas guests and others.

The summit built solidly on the foundation of the 1982 workshop, demonstrating the value of biblical studies, systematic theology, and historical studies for those who would well understand and faithfully apply Ellen White's writings.

A 12-page sheaf of responses from summit attendees now informs the ongoing work of the SPD Biblical Research Committee as it seeks to lead the church to implement Ellen White's legacy in a modern setting. ■

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*Church of the Nazarene (May 20, 2003), Mary Doe, et al., v. FP and Diocese of Winona (Aug. 19, 2003), Patricia L. Rooney v. Michael T. Rooney and Christ's Household of Faith and Ramsey County, intervenor (Sept. 16, 2003). Within this short period of time four different churches or denominations have been affected by the Odenthal case. While there are some general similarities in these cases, one (Christ's Household of Faith) has branched out to involve child support. The boundaries as to how this case will affect churches in Minnesota cannot be now determined. As these cases continue to unfold, their reasoning and rationale may very well be expressed in case law coming from other jurisdictions.*

<sup>3</sup>These comments are derived from findings of the Court

*of Appeals in the decision filed on Aug. 28, 2001.*

<sup>4</sup>This section is based on the decision of the Minnesota Supreme Court filed on Aug. 15, 2002.

<sup>5</sup>This section is based on the decision of the Minnesota Court of Appeals filed on Jan. 27, 2003.

<sup>6</sup>In addition, these employees have been allowed to go on leave from their jobs with full pay and benefits. This situation has existed for a long time, has cost the government agency some very large sums of money, and has the potential of costing it much more. This case involved an elected official of Arapahoe County, Colo., who can be removed only by either a criminal conviction, which has not yet happened, or by the electorate. He can not be directly removed from office. During this time he was elected once, and recently removed in a special recall election.

# Should Adventists SPEAK UP on Marriage?

FROM THE PACIFIC UNION RECORDER  
VOL. 104, ISSUE 4

**T**he battle over marriage has become hotter than a sizzling summer heat wave. As of press time, the Adventist church has not issued any formal statements, although it has previously issued statements addressing both marriage and homosexuality. These can be read on the church's Web site: [www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements.html](http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/statements.html). There is a strong case to be made for the Adventist voice to be heard on this issue.

## The Law of Love

As Adventists seek to faithfully witness to both the grace and law of God, it is important to recognize the hazards inherent in today's highly polarized cultural climate surrounding gay marriage. Some dismiss religious talk about morality and homosexuality as hatred of gays.

**Today, morality is all too commonly considered to be a matter of subjective opinion. The Adventist voice needs to be heard affirming the eternal and objective nature of the law of God. This is, after all, one of our central issues.**

Our public witness should always affirm what the General Conference statement on homosexuality says: "The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes that every human being is valuable in the sight of God, and we seek to minister to all men and women in the spirit of Jesus."

But gay marriage constitutes an assault on both the grace and law of God. It is premised on the notion that gays are born gay; that the gay lifestyle should gain full social and legal acceptance; and that society should make no moral judgments about their sexual conduct.

The grace of God provides the power to overcome all inherited and cultivated tendencies to sin. Because of

Christ, everyone has the freedom to make moral choices about their conduct. The law of God teaches us to express our sexuality in the context of heterosexual marriage. The Adventist witness to both the grace and law of God can make an important contribution in the current climate.

## The Ten Commandments

Some have argued that religious values are an unwelcome intrusion into this debate and violate the separation of church and state. Here again, Adventists have a unique and balanced perspective that deserves to be heard.

Historically, Adventists have distinguished between the first and second tables of the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments contain a person's religious obligations. These are duties owed to God alone, not to the state, and over these the state has no legitimate authority. The state should not dictate the content or practice of our faith.

The last six commandments address a person's moral duties to other people. Because these pertain to human relations, they can also be civil obligations enforced by government and law. It is wrong to say the state cannot restrict the definition of marriage to a man and a woman because this imposes a religious value. If that were true, then it would be equally wrong to criminalize murder, theft, fraud and perjury, because these are also religious values contained in the Ten Commandments.

## Absolute Morality

Today, morality is all too commonly considered to be a matter of subjective opinion. The Adventist voice needs to be heard affirming the eternal and objective nature of the law of God.

This is, after all, one of our central issues. We have always claimed that we offer unique insight into the eternally binding nature of God's law, including the Sabbath. There are real consequences for violating the moral law, whether or not we fully grasp what those consequences are. A final or distant divine judgment is only one consequence. We really do reap what we sow.

Even the "new age" movement has embraced this principle, under the guise of "karma," which teaches that we get exactly what we deserve. The Gospel, of course, teaches that by the grace of God, we may actually receive far better than we deserve.

## Undermining Relationships

When marriage is undermined, everyone suffers. Children are more likely to be raised in homes without both parents. Adult relationships are rendered more unstable and insecure.

Gay marriage cannot properly be said to be an exclusive cause of undermining marriages, but it is both a symptom and a cause—part of a culture that places primary value on personal sexual fulfillment.

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# Pacific Union Conference Opposes Gay Marriage Bill

*The Executive Committee of the Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists voted in March to go on record as opposing AB 1967, a bill that would amend California law to provide for gay marriage by changing the language of marriage statutes. Where it refers to a man and a woman, the language would be changed to "two persons."*

*Below is a letter from Thomas Mostert, president of the Pacific Union Conference, to assembly member Mark Leno, author of the bill, and to Ellen Corbett, chairperson of the Assembly Judiciary Committee.*

The Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is the administrative arm of the church serving a five-state western region, including some 200,000 members in California. Our church has long served the people of California through a variety of community services. Through the teaching and healing ministries of Jesus Christ we seek to communicate God's love for all. I am writing to respectfully express our opposition to AB 1967.

Marriage is the bedrock institution of society. It insures society's health and survival. As such, sound public policy ought to protect marriage. The Defense of Marriage Act, approved by a wide margin of Californians, affirmed the commonly understood definition of marriage that has existed in societies throughout all time.

Seventh-day Adventists are not unsympathetic to the rights and needs of homosexuals. As a church, we have refrained from the culture war conflicts over these issues, professing no expertise on how public policy should address these needs. However, the current effort to modify the designation of marriage to include same-sex relationships goes beyond the legitimate protection of the rights of homosexual citizens.

The SDA Church teaches that "marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship." We are convinced that it is perilous for society to change what God has established. The redefinition of marriage will have profound negative consequences for parents and children, and will impact social, emotional, physical and sexual health. Such consequences may be clearly perceived by all, regardless of whether one holds a religious perspective. We urge your committee to carefully assess all the relevant public health data before acting precipitously.

There are two claims commonly asserted against religious perspectives on this issue. First, it is suggested that

religious views of marriage are irrelevant because religious organizations should not seek to legislate morality. However, since AB 1967 is clearly an attempt to legislate a new moral and sexual ethic, religiously motivated points of view comprise a legitimate perspective in the debate.

It is also wrongly asserted that religious moral views are illegitimate because they would violate the separation of church and state. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has championed the separation of church and state for at least one hundred years. You may well be familiar with our advocacy since we send *Liberty* magazine to all legislators as a public service. In AB 1967, all concede that the state is being asked to revisit the definition of marriage as a civil institution, not in its religious aspect. All agree that the state has legitimate authority to regulate marriage as a civil institution. In analyzing whether state action would violate the separation of church and state, one must look to the nature of the action, not the nature of the arguments. Religious justifications for preserving the current definition of marriage cannot properly be ruled out of order where, as here, the state can legitimately regulate marriage as a civil institution.

The attempt to place same-sex marriage in the context of civil rights is also erroneous. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in California is a multi-ethnic community consisting of dozens of language groups and nationalities. Many of our members and clergy marched in the civil rights movement and take offense at equating moral choices governing sexual conduct with skin color, which can be neither chosen nor changed.

The voters of California have voiced their will on this issue, and affirmed that marriage is defined as a man and a woman. The effort represented by AB 1967 to change this definition clearly contradicts current law and should not be supported. It appears to be blatantly unconstitutional, and risks eroding respect for both law and democracy.

In conclusion, we are convinced that the divine wisdom that created and ordained marriage between a man and a woman is clearly reflected in public health and welfare data that is subject to objective assessment, and that same-sex marriage constitutes an experimental and dangerous social policy. We therefore urge you and your committee to reject AB 1967.

Respectfully yours,  
Thomas Mostert, President ■



## ADVENTISTS AND THE PROPOSED “MARRIAGE AMENDMENT”

# The Constitution and Same-sex Relationships

RONALD LAWSON

**T**wo prominent Adventists have recently urged a reversal in our church's long-held position of opposing the enactment of laws attempting to impose morality. They have urged that it take a public position against the recent changes in North America towards recognizing same-sex relationships and publicly support the “Marriage Amendment” to the constitution that has been put forward by conservative Republicans at the behest of the Religious Right.

**Supporting the “Marriage Amendment” would place the Adventist church in opposition to what is a civil rights—not a religious—issue, and it would undermine our long-held position supporting the separation of church and state.**

An article titled “Marriage under Siege: Is Society Headed for Moral Chaos?” by Roy Adams, associate editor of the *Adventist Review*, was published in its October 2003 NAD edition. Adams reviewed the

U.S. Supreme Court decision finding the Texas sodomy law unconstitutional, the court decisions in Canada which made changes in the definition of marriage and ordered Parliament to enact a law that will apply this to the whole of Canada, and the decisions by the Episcopal Church to accept an openly gay bishop and the blessing of same-sex partnerships where local bishops wish to allow this, and he drew attention to a case focusing on same-sex marriage that was then awaiting a decision from the Massachusetts Supreme Court. Then, posing the question “What is to be our stance as a church?” he urged that Adventists alter their usual public position on such issues: “Silence is not an option. The stakes are too high. And normal considerations of tolerance and political correctness cannot apply—in fact would be irresponsible. This is the time for faith communities to speak out....”<sup>1</sup>

Alan Reinach, director of the Pacific Union's Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department, adopted a similar stance in a Nov. 20, 2003, e-mail newsletter titled “Church State Newsflash!: Massachusetts Supreme Court Rules in Favor of Gay Marriage.” He urged that Adventists officially support a proposed “Marriage

Amendment" to the U.S. Constitution that would recognize marriage as limited to that between a man and a woman, and override any contrary decision by a state court. He urged that the church do this in order to "legislate morality that corresponds to majoritarian religious beliefs." On March 5, 2004, after President Bush had endorsed the proposed amendment, Reinach followed up with another e-mail, "Newsflash and Editorial Commentary: Should Adventists Speak up on Marriage?" in which he noted that the Adventist church had not yet issued any official statement on the amendment and urged that it was time for its voice to be heard.<sup>2</sup>

I believe that the course advocated in these articles is both wrong and dangerous. It is based on a misreading of Scripture, the court decisions, and what the authors call "the gay agenda." It would place the Adventist church in opposition to what is a civil rights—not a religious—issue, and it would undermine our long-held position supporting the separation of church and state. I will address each of these points in turn.

Scripturally, the advocacy of support for the "marriage amendment" is based on a reading of the Bible that ignores the fact that in biblical times women were the property of their fathers and then their husbands (see the 10th commandment, where wives are listed as property but not even the first such item); polygamy was common; women did not have to be consulted before being married off; etc. In other words, marriage has been evolving over these thousands of years. So it should have been, and so it still is. It forgets that Jesus did not regard the truth enunciated in the New Testament as the final revelation of truth, for he promised that the Holy Spirit would guide us further.<sup>3</sup>

It also forgets that the Adventist commitment to "present truth" is based on an acknowledgment that we continue to expect further such guidance in our generations. The recent decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court, the Canadian courts, and the Massachusetts Supreme Court have nothing to do with religious freedom or religious rites. They would in no way force any pastor to perform a same-sex marriage. I quote from the Massachusetts decision: "Civil Marriage is, and since pre-Colonial days has been, precisely what its name implies: a wholly secular institution.... No religious ceremony has ever been required to validate a Massachusetts marriage."<sup>4</sup>

The decisions, and the hopes of gays and lesbians, are about civil rights: the right to happiness—to choose whom we love and to whom we will commit ourselves for the rest of our lives—is a fundamental civil right. The Massachusetts decision recognized this: "The benefits accessible only by way of a marriage license are enormous, touching nearly every aspect of life and death.... It is undoubtedly for these concrete reasons, as well as for its intimately personal significance, that civil marriage has long been termed a 'civil right.'"<sup>5</sup>

When Reinach reminded readers that the U.S. Constitution's full faith and credit clause could force

California to recognize the implications of a Massachusetts acceptance of same-sex marriages for provisions concerning "divorce, tax, inheritance, child custody or visitation"—areas where those in same-sex relationships are currently not protected—he was recognizing that such decisions would grant fundamental civil rights. The constitutional amendment would create and perpetuate a class of second-class citizens.

**The recent decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court, the Canadian courts, and the Massachusetts Supreme Court have nothing to do with religious freedom or religious rites. They would in no way force any pastor to perform a same-sex marriage.**

Adventism was initially willing to be radical and nonconformist on some social issues. However, that stance was abandoned as we sought the approval of fundamentalists and evangelicals, and during succeeding decades we established a poor record in several areas of civil rights, both in internal practice and in failing to raise our voices on behalf of justice in the land. For example, during our early decades our prophet was a woman and women were included among the ranks of General Conference officers, major evangelists and pastors. However, following the death of Ellen White, women gradually disappeared from these positions. The General Conference, in the Pacific Press case, responded negatively to the cry of women for equality and justice, and two General Conference sessions refused to allow the ordination of women pastors.<sup>6</sup> More recently, as our church belatedly reopened other roles to women, it has continued to refuse them access to the top positions of power (they are still denied the possibility of being a president at any level of the church structure).

Adventist history is similar in regard to racial minorities in the United States. Ellen White's *The Southern Work*, which encouraged integrated congregations, was soon allowed to go out of print, and "temporary" segregation was permitted. A long history of discrimination in admissions to academies and colleges, of no opportunities for promotion of blacks within the church structure, of refusals to treat black patients at white Adventist hospitals, etc., followed, until educated black laypeople held a press conference blowing the whistle at the 1962 General Conference Session in San Francisco.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, when black pastors had demanded opportunities for promotion to positions in conference offices during World War II, a decision was made to give them instead something they had not requested—separate black conferences—in order to prevent them from taking positions where they would be "over whites." The Methodists abandoned segregated conferences in the 1950s;

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## Adventists and the Proposed “Marriage Amendment”

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Adventists added them in 1944 and still have them.

Adventists have thus earned a miserable record in the area of civil rights. The actions urged on the church in the two articles reviewed here would extend that record further. What is the Adventist interest in pushing the constitutional amendment? Reinach urged that Adventists work to “uphold traditional marriage because society has every legitimate interest in the welfare of children and the stability of families.” How does allowing same-sex couples to legalize their relationships undermine the welfare of children or the stability of heterosexual families? Religious conservatives have frequently attacked homosexuals, labeling them all as promiscuous. Surely the prospect of same-sex couples wanting to commit themselves to marriages that cannot be broken easily should bring joy to Adventists, and lead us to do everything we can to foster such stability. Surely, too, we rejoiced over the 3,000-plus same-sex marriages that were celebrated in San Francisco in recent weeks, for the fact that gays and lesbians were joyously embracing marriage meant that



between Adventists and the rest of society. The truth is that the lifestyles adopted by both heterosexuals and homosexuals are equally diverse.

There is a strong parallel between the struggle to gain recognition for same-sex marriages and that to end the anti-miscegenation laws (those prohibiting interracial marriage) a generation ago, for both aimed at striking down provisions preventing citizens from marrying the person of their choice. The Massachusetts Supreme Court decision repeatedly cited decisions on the anti-miscegenation laws as precedents. The first colonies to enact anti-miscegenation statutes were Virginia (1662) and Maryland (1663). Amendments to put a prohibition of interracial marriage in the U.S. Constitution were introduced at least three times between 1871 and 1928, but never reached a vote in Congress.<sup>8</sup>

In 1948, California became the first state to find an anti-miscegenation law unconstitutional, when its Supreme Court found that its law violated the due process and equality guarantees of the 14th Amendment.<sup>9</sup> At that time 32 of the 48 states had such statutes. In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court found a statutory bar to interracial marriage violated the 14th Amendment when it ruled the law in Virginia unconstitutional—a decision that rendered all such laws moot.<sup>10</sup>

Both these decisions were courageous, handed down in the face of strong contrary public opinion: in 1968, the year after the Loving decision, a Gallup Poll found that Americans, by a margin of more than 3 to 1, still disapproved marriages between whites and blacks.<sup>11</sup>

**It is shocking to read a letter advocating that the Adventist church work to “legislate morality that corresponds to majoritarian religious beliefs,” especially when its author is a departmental leader charged with protecting religious liberty.**

a faltering social institution was being strengthened. The alternative for our church is that it persist with the advice it has frequently given to gay men—that they pray about their homosexual “problem,” date a woman, and marry her—in spite of the fact that the evidence shows plainly that such irresponsible advice is likely to result in the devastation of the lives of all involved in the families thus formed.

In his article, Adams reveals his ignorance when he uses the term “the gay lifestyle.” This is the equivalent of looking at the data on the divorce rate, the frequency of premarital sex, and the abortion rate, and concluding that “the heterosexual lifestyle” in the United States is one of serial monogamy and sexual dalliance. The statistical evidence shows that these rates are high among Adventists, with alarmingly little difference

In its 2003 decision on same-sex marriage, the Massachusetts Supreme Court wrote: "In this case, as in Perez and Loving, a statute deprives individuals of access to an institution of fundamental legal, personal, and social significance—the institution of marriage—because of a single trait: skin color in Perez and Loving, sexual orientation here. As it did in Perez and Loving, history must yield to a more fully developed understanding of the invidious quality of the discrimination."<sup>12</sup>

It is shocking to read a letter advocating that the Adventist church work to "legislate morality that corresponds to majoritarian religious beliefs," especially when its author is a departmental leader charged with protecting religious liberty. Has Elder Reinach, in his recent anti-gay crusades, forgotten what lies behind the Adventist commitment to religious liberty? The danger of any democracy is that the rights of minorities will be ignored. Do we need to be reminded that in our society Adventists, like homosexuals, are a minority?

What Reinach advocates is diametrically opposed to the general position of the church against enacting morality-based law. Both in the 1880s, when we had to fight to fend off the enactment of Sunday-sacredness laws, and now in both the United States and Canada, religious conservatives have sought to make their version of Christian morality the law. In neither instance were the rights of the majority at risk—our working on Sunday in no way transgressed the right of Sunday-keepers to observe their day in the 1880s, and today no church would be required to perform or even recognize same-sex marriages. Those attempting to enact their own morality, then and now, are attempting to render another group second class, arguing that by enforcing majoritarian religious beliefs they are keeping the faith. Last time Adventists were the victims. We, of all people, should know better than to support attempts to enact

such laws or constitutional amendments. Adventists have many important reasons to fight the proposed marriage amendment to the Constitution.

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## Should Adventists SPEAK UP on marriage?

### » Continued from page 15

Ironically, instead of fostering commitment, as supporters of gay marriage contend, the evidence from Scandinavia suggests that gay marriage undermines commitment in all intimate relationships, making personal fulfillment more important than the many other reasons for sustained commitment.

### Civil Rights?

Supporters of gay marriage present their case as a civil rights issue, similar to the struggle of black Americans to gain equal rights. But at least some African American Adventists disagree. Wayne Shepperd, vice president of the Pacific Union Conference, comments: "Being black, or of any other ethnicity, is not a moral issue. Gay marriage is. African Americans asked for and received nothing more

than the right to be treated like all other Americans. Gay leaders are asking for the government to officially endorse their lifestyle. This is quite different from civil rights."

Shepperd is right. The fundamental issue is not about rights, but what is right.

The Adventist voice needs to be heard on many key issues in the marriage debate. Where the left would exclude religious values from the debate, we can affirm that religious values can legitimately inform public policy, but only in the social moral sphere. Where the right would tend to apply religious values not only to social moral issues like marriage, but to religion directly, Adventists need to reaffirm the separation of church and state. ■

*Alan J. Reinach is director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty for the Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.*

# Banning Gay Marriage is Discriminatory and Wrong

GOVERNMENTS DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT OR OBLIGATION TO DISCRIMINATE

DAVID PERSON

Since Feb. 12, the City of San Francisco has issued marriage licenses to more than 3,000 gay couples. According to news reports and polls, most blacks oppose this. So I know that it would probably be safer to paddle a canoe into a hurricane than to endorse gay marriage. But that's what I'm doing. And I'm doing it as a straight, Christian black man because I believe we aren't connecting the dots between the discrimination that our people historically have faced, and the discrimination that gays also have faced.

Instead, we've been duped into debating whether or not homosexuality is a choice, suggesting that if being gay is a choice then gays deserve whatever discrimination they get.

Choice or not, discrimination is wrong. And we of all people should know this.

We heterosexuals choose whom we will marry. But it wasn't until 1967 that all of us heterosexuals were completely free to choose whomever we wanted to marry. That's when the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed state bans on interracial marriages. Until then in many states, blacks and whites couldn't marry. This was discrimination, plain and simple.

It wasn't right then for states to discriminate against men and women who wanted to marry across racial lines. It's not right now for cities, counties and states to discriminate against gays who want to legally bind their relationships.

But unfortunately, our culture has always winked at bigotry directed toward gay people. Like many straight men, I grew up doing what boys do when they spot one of their own displaying feminine interests or tendencies. I, too, called these little boys sissies, punks and faggots. I, too, was wrong. Without knowing it, I was being a bigot. I was treating one of my classmates harshly because he was different from the rest of us.

And by the way, I doubt my effeminate third-grade classmate had "chosen" to be the way he was. He either was born that way, or forced by some predator to be that way. Either way, it was wrong to blame him for being what he was.

As an adult, I see even more clearly what happens when we discriminate against a group of people. We make them targets. That's what happened to Matthew Shepard, the Wyoming college student who was beaten, lashed to a fence post and killed in 1998. It's also what happened to Billy Joe Gaither, who was tortured, burned and murdered in a small Alabama town in 1999. And if our discrimination doesn't make them targets, it forces some of them underground, where they are more likely to engage in pathological behaviors that inevitably seep into the larger population.

Witness the closet for the new millennium, the so-called "down-low" phenomenon: men having sex with men—often with multiple partners and without condoms—but without openly identifying themselves as gay or bisexual. Couple it with the overall rise in HIV infections among blacks as well as the disproportionately high rate of infections among black women, and it's hard to deny that there is a connection.

Discrimination encourages hate. And hate is what killed Shepard and Gaither. It's also what killed many of our ancestors. The specific rationale for discriminating against gays may be different from the rationale for discriminating against blacks, but the hate is the same and comes from the same place.

And to my fellow Christians, I say that hate is not Christian. Discrimination is not Christian.

If they don't want gays to marry in their churches, fine. Churches aren't obligated to violate their own creeds and beliefs. But governments don't have the right or obligation to discriminate, not even when ostensibly acting on the will of the people, as Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger will argue when California launches its legal challenge to block San Francisco from issuing any more marriage licenses.

All of us—regardless of race, economic status, religion, gender or gender preference—are equal under the law. For gays and straights, it is downright un-American to accept anything less. ■

*David Person is an editorial writer and columnist for the Huntsville Times.*

# 3ABN Defended by Board Member

DR. WALTER THOMPSON

**T**he article entitled "Three Angels Broadcasting Network: A High-Flying Organization" by Edwin A. Schwisow (AT Jan/Feb 2004) was most interesting.

Brother Schwisow has clearly made his case, and I will assume with high motives, to challenge 3ABN to more seriously consider its decisions and be even more effective in its expressed mission. Please allow me to speak to just a few of his observations.

It is true. We the members of the board of 3ABN are only human and it is true we are not many in number. While some might consider this a deficiency, our board is efficient, flexible and able to respond to opportunity and need—an advantage many larger boards might envy. Brother Schwisow may be correct in noting that some critics interpret our governance as compliant with Danny's heavy-handed control. So be it! In fact, any board that functions according to the dictates of its critics is already in trouble. The truth is that 3ABN and Danny have an excellent working relationship. We do not micromanage—by design. We have perceived our role as giving him room to move as the Spirit of the Lord directs—having a common understanding that with the free reign there is also responsibility for action. We are listened to and heard when we have advice and counsel, and are available to him when he has needs and concerns. It is difficult for me to conceive a better model for success than this. In addition, Danny has a number of other counselors whom he consults frequently—though unofficial, these serve much as an advisory board might serve.

The article makes note of Danny's exorbitant salary—exceeding the salaries of even the highest paid administrators of the Adventist church. In fact, we have patterned 3ABN salaries after the church with the exception we do not provide most of the benefits the Adventist church provides for its workers. Three of our board members are administrators within the organized church and can vouch for this fact. It is also a fact that many of the royalties on music and publications made by the Sheltons are donated to the ministry. During the hearings regarding taxing 3ABN properties at the State last year, the prosecution pressed the defense very hard attempting to find evidence that Danny and Linda were hiding something about their income—like many other TV ministers. They found nothing; in fact, they expressed amazement with the economy with which 3ABN and its administration operate.

Finally, the last point I wish to make, and the one

triggering the article: the commercial jet. My comments will be short. The board has been involved in all of the discussions and planning regarding the planes. Our discussions and decisions have been deliberate. Our board has only one objective, i.e., to be faithful to the proclamation of the Three Angels Message to the world in preparation for the return of Jesus. We believe God has called us to this ministry and is faithful to his promises to his servants. We have not made our decisions carelessly, nor without divine petition for wisdom. I believe the board would agree with me in saying that God is not

**It is true. We the members of the board of 3ABN are only human and it is true we are not many in number. While some might consider this a deficiency, our board is efficient, flexible and able to respond to opportunity and need—an advantage many larger boards might envy.**

generally governed by public opinion, nor is He limited in his provisions. Furthermore, when we look at the world around us and see it spiraling rapidly downward to oblivion, it is inconceivable to me that God would withhold any good thing from His servants who have accepted the burden He has commissioned. And this includes airplanes!

Having said that, the record of heaven is true, God does discipline his children when needed and in ways that will ultimately glorify His name. Throughout the 20 years of its life, God has kept a close hand on 3ABN, opening and closing doors as only He understands. Undoubtedly there is a reason for the reduced income of the past year. It is our responsibility to seek the reason and correct it when discovered—assuming that is the reason for the financial reduction. Certainly we are all human and very capable of misinterpreting the signals from heaven. We are involved in a universal conflict between God and Satan that is real. We expect conflict, and hope to grow the stronger because of it. And certainly we are grateful for those of our critics who honestly desire to see the cause of God go forward to glory. From these we covet not only admonition, but earnest prayer for guidance from the Almighty as well. ■

*Walter Thompson, M.D., chair of the 3ABN board of directors, lives in Burr Ridge, Ill.*

# A Prophet Among Us?

HOW "TESTS OF A PROPHET" APPLY TO A FARMER AND HIS VISIONS

ANONYMOUS

**I** have enjoyed an unusual relationship with a prophet over the last several years. It's unique because of its nature, but also because it describes a bond of respect and suggests how church leaders should treat members who believe they have a special gift.

Almost five years have gone by since I read the first letter from the prophet. The secretary who screens the correspondence had placed it with junk mail. In the church world headquarters where I worked, such letters are nothing new. On occasion I received reports of prophecies in the form of dreams, warnings, new light and visions. This one fell into the category of a vision.

**The handwritten script was distracting, and I felt ambivalent about "the vision." But it kept coming back to my mind, for it was different from the egocentric pronouncements of so many who write this sort of thing.**

I have always believed that we need to take such persons seriously and listen to them, even if they do turn out to have a mental disorder or just want attention. For that reason I read the letter. It had been handwritten and contained a few grammatical and spelling errors.

The writer described an incident that happened to him between 3 and 4 a.m. on April 19, 1999. By some process he could not explain, he found himself on a grassy hill where he viewed Jesus leading a group of children. "I knew I was in Heaven, feeling its exuberance and life," he stated. He also encountered an angel on this first trip.

I kept the letter for a couple of weeks and shared it with a colleague, who found it interesting but not impressive. The handwritten script was distracting, and I felt ambivalent about "the vision." But it kept coming back to my mind, for it was different from the egocen-

tric pronouncements of so many who write this sort of thing. I sent the writer a reply and a few days later received a call from him. He told me he was a farmer in Kansas with three grown children. And I listened. His name was Steve, and he told me he had sent his letter to about a dozen or more other church leaders. I was the only one to respond. He sent a second vision in May of that year. In the night a small voice had told him, "Jesus is waiting to pour out his Holy Spirit, but his people are not ready to receive it." "Focus on Jesus," the voice repeated several times.

Between May 1999 and February 2000, I received in the mail nine more of his visions and dreams, each with the same theme of depending on Jesus through whatever should come. During this time Steve purchased a computer, and we wrote back and forth by e-mail, mostly to my home. Because the pieces seemed so relevant I offered to edit them and showed them to a few people. I was taking my career into my own hands, for I now believe this move may have jeopardized my future work. The responses from these people were noncommittal, some saying such visions were given only for a local church, that they presented nothing new. A few others read them but returned them with little comment; another said the "mark of the beast" was symbolic and not a real mark, and every Adventist should know that; also one scholar scoffed at the idea that people wearing jewelry could possibly go to heaven! Among the group there was only one completely positive response from a scholar.

I shared these letters, not because I totally believed them, but because the "what if" still haunted me. There was also the writer's character. I called his pastor for a reference, and the pastor told me that Steve and his wife Donna were some of the finest Christians he had known. It was this reference that led me to continue our friendly correspondence. Steve held nothing back about his life; his writings were devoid of any self-promotion. Over the years he has shared with me the trials of being a farmer in this drought-ridden part of Kansas. The two of them live on a meager income brought in by driving a school bus, harvesting various crops and raising milk cows. He is a fourth-generation Adventist who attended academy. Both his parents are still alive at 96 and 86. One of his sons is

a physician in Detroit, another is a farmer, and the third still in school. A daughter lives nearby.

Steve told me, "I am a farmer and have no real public-speaking experience. I am not looking for a following, and I enjoy the peace and quiet of where I live and what I do on the farm. I am glad that Jesus revealed himself to me. Then I was told to share the things I was shown. I feel that I have done what I was asked to do the best I could, so I am not going to worry about it. I will be glad to share with anyone who would like to know, and that's as far as it will go. I believe in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and that it has a message; however, people are imperfect and that is why we need to focus on Jesus.... No one can take what I was shown away from me because I saw with my own eyes things I can't describe.... Many blame God for things Satan does to make him look bad. That started way back.... Don't feel bad about confidentiality. As far as I am concerned, anyone can read what I have seen. My desire is that it will draw them closer to Christ and give him the praise."

In the summer of 2003, Steve and Donna told me that they were coming by way of Washington, D.C., after visiting their son in Detroit. They met me in the lounge of the General Conference, and I took them on a tour. Then we went for a ride into Washington. I was surprised that the couple seemed so young. They were an attractive, wholesome-looking pair in their 40s, tanned by the Kansas sun, and they spoke with distinct Midwestern accents. Steve had a sunny disposition and sprinkled his conversation with humor and laughter. Donna, more subdued, talked of their life in Kansas and expressed support of her husband's experiences. After supper we talked a long while. They are the kind of people that make one feel comfortable and accepted.

There have been a few other visions, but none lately that I can remember. We keep up our friendship. Steve's supportive pastor moved to another church, and the one who took his place has made life uncomfortable for Steve, even requiring him to give up his position as head elder. Since then he and Donna frequently attend another Adventist church.

What do these messages mean? Since Adventists claim the Second Coming is to happen soon, the messages establish that doctrine. But their primary focus is on how people can be totally dependent on Christ. It sounds so simple; "nothing new" I've been told. But how many have listened in today's noisy world?

In reading the letters, I found a few peripheral details that seemed like new ideas. The most interesting one concerns Christ's scarred face. Steve says that Jesus looks "Jewish" with striking brown eyes. He does not know how to explain the picture from Revelation that shows Jesus with white woolen hair. But I liked what Steve said about the 144,000: "They are a special people among the saved. There

will be countless millions saved. Many Christians will turn away when tests come, but millions will join the ranks. Many will be tenderly laid to rest. God will take care of his people."

What about the tests of a prophet that we heard described in religion classes in support of the ministry of Ellen White? Here is how they apply to Steve.

1. Do the prophet's words agree with scripture

**If Christ is not the center of the message, there is no message. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit must be presented as kind, merciful and righteous—a blend of love and fairness.**

(Isa 8:20)? This is not as easy as it sounds, for scripture can be twisted to meet personal agendas.

2. Do they make predictions that come true (Deut 18:22)? Most end-time predictions haven't had a chance to culminate. One can be misled by those who correctly forecast tragic events—Satan can cause them. Superstition is one of his most effective tools. Steve did say that he believed George Bush would win the 2000 election, but that the future would be bleak no matter who won. He felt Bush would make our future worse.

3. Do they emphasize Christ as Savior (1 John 4:2,3)? If Christ is not the center of the message, there is no message. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit must be presented as kind, merciful and righteous—a blend of love and fairness.

4. Does the messenger follow the life and teachings of Christ and have the fruits of the Holy Spirit in his or her life (Gal 5:22; Matt 7:15-20)? This does not mean that they never make mistakes, but do they have a loving spirit and treat others with respect? How do they treat their families, pets or those who don't agree with them? What is the general direction of their lives? Does the message reveal God's love or build up strife with an accusatory tone?

Paul says "Despise not prophesying" (1 Thess 1:20). "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17,18; Joel 2:28, 29).

God says he has spread the gifts of the Spirit among his people to be used, and prophecy is one of them (1 Cor 12:4, 10). What if a janitor in Toronto or a housewife in Pittsburgh has that gift? Or a farmer in mid-America? ■

# Lessons from Someone Else's History

JOHN MCLARTY

STORY OF CATHOLIC SISTERS IN AMERICA OFFERS CAUTIONS TO ADVENTISTS

**A**ccording to the author, a Catholic and a reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, nuns were the entrepreneurs of American Catholicism, creatively and energetically working to extend the territory and deepen the ministry of the True Church. In the early 1800s especially, Catholics experienced fierce prejudice and active persecution in the United States. By the end of the 1800s they had become largely accepted in American society. What made the difference? The entering wedge, the right arm of the gospel-health work. During

the Civil War 20 percent of the nurses on both sides were Catholic nuns. In many communities in the burgeoning West, nuns opened the first hospitals. By 1950, 20 percent of the hospital beds in the United States were in Catholic hospitals created and operated by the sisters.

The other major institutional contribution of the sisters was the Catholic parochial school system, which by 1950 was educating 11 percent of American students in over 10,000 Catholic schools. Catholic elementary and secondary schools (and even colleges) depended heavily on the faithful, underpaid work of nuns.

In a sentence that reminded me of Ellen White's role in the history of Loma Linda University and Medical Center, the author wrote, "Sisters were, far and away, the biggest risk-takers of the Church, often taking out big mortgages to build schools and hospitals." I was also reminded of White by the sisters' attempt to work around the deeply embedded racism in the church by opening two orders specifically for black women.

Those familiar with early Adventist history will hear echoes in the extreme frugality practiced by the sisters who were teachers. "In February 1920, the order sent three volunteers to open a new elementary school in

Westwego, a working-class suburb in New Orleans. Sister Bonaventure Monhollan, the youngest of the group, later recalled that on Mondays they rose at dawn and walked two and a half hours to reach the school. They had a cold lunch of jelly and cheese sandwiches. At night they went to a small cabin, rented with borrowed money, which had no cooking utensils. One night they looked in the larder to find only a small glass of jelly, one teaspoon and two slices of bread. "Well, I looked at the other two, then at the two slices of bread and said to myself, 'I am the youngster,' so I got up from the table, went to bed and cried myself to sleep."

There is much to celebrate in the work of these heroic, stoic Amazons of the Kingdom of God. And there are some sober lessons. In 1968, there were 180,000 sisters. Convents were full. The following year the flow of young women into the sisterhood abruptly stopped and the population of nuns began aging. Now there are about 80,000, with a median age of 69.

What happened? Fialka cites several possible factors. One is the change in society. Through the 1800s and the early 1900s, the orders offered women a real alternative to ordinary domesticity. Nuns were adventurers. They got an education. They could become leaders of significant institutions in an era when women were expected to stay home and tend to the children. In the decades after the 60s opportunities for women dramatically expanded.

**In 1968, there were 180,000 sisters. Convents were full.... Now there are about 80,000, with a median age of 69.**

Another sobering explanation lies in changes that followed Vatican II. At that church council, 8,000 men and 15 women (who were given the same observer status as Protestant representatives) spent three years thinking about the future of the church. Vatican II



## A REVIEW

*Sisters: Catholic Nuns and the Making of America*  
by John J. Fialka  
St. Martins Press, New York,  
2003. 335 pages.

altered the historic honor and spiritual status of nuns. Some sociologists believe that in the process, the church reduced the attraction of the “separated” life of a nun.

Following Vatican II many orders underwent a radical revisioning process. Some orders rapidly and dramatically altered the center of their identity and practice from spiritual and religious to political and psychological. Their new guiding “saints” became Ralph Nader, Cesar Chavez and Carl Rogers. They practiced solidarity with the Sandinistas and ecofeminists. They identified with the struggle against the Vietnam War and the military-industrial complex. They became obsessed with global issues and blind to local ministry.

This secularized, amorphous mission to the world did not draw young people who were looking for a way to radically engage in the religious life. But it is precisely that kind of radicalism that would move a young person to embrace the disciplines of the religious life. On the other hand, many nuns who left said that one of the factors pushing them out of the religious life was their growing awareness that as women they would always be second-class citizens in a male-dominated church.

A critical concern facing the orders of sisters now is retirement. Very few of the orders funded retirement for their members. Older members were financially supported and physically cared for by younger members entering the orders. That had worked well for over a thousand years around the world. But in the United States after 1968, younger people no longer joined the orders. In 1985, a survey by the Arthur Anderson auditing firm estimated the gap between available retirement funds and actuarial predictions of need was \$2 billion. A current estimate pegs the funding gap at \$6 billion.

The book finds one bright spot in a rather gloomy picture. In Nashville there is a convent that is receiving new, young recruits. St. Cecilia's class of 2001 was composed of 18 women whose average age was 24. According to the director of vocations, these young women are looking for a traditional religious life. The top questions applicants ask are “Do you wear a habit?” “Do you have daily devotions?” “Do you pray the rosary?” Eighteen new nuns is wonderful. Eighteen per year, however, represents at best a slight slowing but not a reversal of the inexorable decline.

This history of Catholic sisters in America offers several cautions for Adventists. Liberal friends and society at large may applaud the removal of distinctive practices or disciplines by a religious group, but that generally does not increase the group's attractiveness for people who might actually join, and it will not keep people from leaving. Counting on an eternal supply of new converts to support the aging members of an organization can be very embarrassing if that supply dries up. Quality schools and quality medical

institutions are no guarantee of converts.

The story of these sisters dramatically highlights the danger of change. There appears to be a strong correlation between some of the changes introduced by the orders following Vatican II and the accelerated decline in vocations. But a careful reading also illustrates a corresponding truth: Change is inevitable. In the same period, vocations to the priesthood also declined by half. In 1965 about 1,000 men joined the priesthood. In 2000, 450 joined. There are about 2,000 Catholic parishes without a resident priest.

Could the sisters have managed change better and avoided their precipitous decline? Maybe. But stasis was not an option. Society was changing and so was the church. The Bishops Conference decided to compel all the orders to join an umbrella organization. Some believed this crippled the entrepreneurial spirit that had helped to build the orders.

**Vatican II altered the historic honor and spiritual status of nuns. Some sociologists believe that in the process, the church reduced the attraction of the “separated” life of a nun.**

The Adventist church in the United States is also in numerical decline, especially if you do not count first-generation immigrant converts. We face a serious challenge with providing for the retirement of church employees. There is not a large stream of young people embracing the stern disciplines that have characterized our church in the past.

It is glaringly obvious that our present administrative systems, evangelistic methods and congregational patterns cannot be expected to reverse our own pattern of shrinking, aging membership. We can't just do the same things harder and expect better results. We are facing inevitable change. The question is, will we change deliberately or reactively?

Adventism was built with an aggressive, entrepreneurial spirit. It is now characterized by a highly integrated top-down control structure. It is highly unlikely that someone sitting in an administrative office is going to spark significant renewal in the church or launch a creative initiative that will actually reverse current trends. The future lies in the hands of young adults and their God. Perhaps, if we will give them enough support and permission, they will create a new church that saves the best of the old. But if we make preserving the institution our primary mission, I am afraid that my grandchildren will know the Adventist church only as the heroic, barely remembered work of their ancestors.

God forbid. May it never be. ■

# Marcus Wesson and Mass Murder in Fresno

JAMES STIRLING

**T**he Adventist church name has a way of popping up in unexpected places, often unpleasantly. Like the Koresh case in Waco, Texas, in 1993, another in Fresno, Calif., involved a man with Adventist influences in his background who tangled with the law; this one took the lives of nine people, mostly small children, on Friday, March 12, 2004. Slain at gunpoint, all nine were his own children. The smallest ranged from a 1-year-old infant to an 8-year-old girl; two older ones were a girl of 17 and a grown woman of 25. Not present for the slaying were at least four, perhaps six, women who were the mothers, two of them also Wesson's daughters. At the time of writing Wesson was being held for trial, for a grand jury has determined that the case is strong enough to warrant arraignment.

Earlier on that Friday afternoon Wesson had talked at the front door with police who had been summoned to settle a "domestic dispute"; two of the mothers had demanded that Wesson give them back their two 7-year-old boys. While the police tried to reach backup groups before entering the house, Wesson allegedly retreated to a back room, assembled the children, and shot them one by one in the face and piled them up. Then he returned to the door and surrendered.

What made Wesson do such a horrible thing? The first thing that came to mind for some people was that the deed must have been prompted by religious motivations, cult membership or pure insanity. Reporters began to probe for family members who could tell something. Acquaintances told of their impression that Wesson had been authoritarian in his families, keeping them in strict discipline and refusing to give them freedom. He had not permitted his children to attend school, but had seen to it that they were "home schooled." Some of his daughters had attended a local Adventist church and became members, though seldom attending, and this included one of the victims. His two sons declared unequivocally that Wesson was a Seventh-day Adventist. His Adventist mother in Washington state expressed disbelief that he had done this; she said he had always been a good Christian boy before leaving home.

The public relations arm of the church's Central

California Conference conducted its own investigation of local church membership records and prepared a Web site for "frequently asked questions" about Wesson and the church, effectively distancing themselves from him and his deed. The office report said, "As far as we can determine, Marcus Wesson has never been a member of any Seventh-day Adventist church," although he had had "sporadic contact" with some local congregations. "As an adult," they said, "he occasionally took some of his children to church services." He had occasionally attended church camp meetings at Soquel, Calif., and had been employed as a janitor there in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They also cited the local police chief as observing, "This is not about religion.... Seventh-day

**The question lingers about how much effect the church's influence, however slight, should have had on Wesson's behavior.**

Adventists are good people." The report also declared that the church found murder, incest and polygamy to be reprehensible. That point was underscored by a quotation from Fritz Guy, theology professor at La Sierra University, who emphasized that no Adventist congregation would condone Wesson's life style and actions.

The question lingers, though, about how much effect the church's influence, however slight, should have had on Wesson's behavior. Was there a fundamentalist tendency he had observed that tended to encourage his patriarchal stance in the household? In a conversation with a construction worker friend, Alex Garcia, Wesson had once remarked, "God has blessed me. I am fortunate to have more than one wife." In this attitude Wesson mirrors the stance of David Koresh, who similarly headed a polygamous household in Waco, Texas, before its destruction by U.S. marshals in 1993.

Wesson and Koresh—they have something to say about unhealthy family relationships that church congregations elsewhere can take note of. The church's good name may be in their hands. ■