

**ANDREWS UNIVERSITY
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**THE COLTON CELEBRATION CONGREGATION: A CASE STUDY
IN AMERICAN ADVENTIST WORSHIP RENEWAL, 1986-1991**

Author: Viviane Haenni, 1996

Advisor: George R. Knight, Ed.D.

This study investigates the experience of Celebration Center (Colton, California), its milieu, and its impact on the North American Seventh-day Adventist Church through what has been perceived as the celebration movement and controversy, while addressing underlying historical, sociological, and philosophical/theological questions.

The principal findings of the study reveal that Celebration Center has uniquely attempted to explore a more multilayered approach to church life and worship within White Anglo Adventism. The celebration experience has ventured into breaking up some old Adventist expectations through its congregational trend; its emphasis on love, acceptance, and forgiveness; its different church organization and more holistic worship; and its accent on the divine presence, the Holy Spirit, and the spiritual gifts of all believers. In trying to explore in the late 1980s a new experiential liturgical language, Celebration Center seems to have uniquely embodied change and become, at times, the irrational scapegoat of people's fear/anger and sense of loss brought by societal and religious modifications.

Anticelebrationists have generally been perceptive in their recognition of deeper changes at stake in the celebration experience but have been mistaken in attributing them to a conspiracy within or outside of Adventism. The implemented changes by the celebration movement are reflective of powerful trends shaping American Christianity and Adventism, such as revivalistic, third wave, and baby boomer religious innovations and the convergence between the liturgical and pentecostal/charismatic movements. Celebration worship grows out of a particular worldview not completely in harmony with the theological and philosophical assumptions of the years of denominational consolidation and stabilization (1920-1950) that are predominant among antagonists. The celebration movement and the reactions against it can be both understood as grass-roots attempts to bring renewal within White Anglo North American Adventism.

The principal implications which arise from the findings are: (1) A timely need for Adventism to recount its own history, apply to worship its holistic approach to reality, and to investigate new models of hermeneutics, ecclesiology, sacramental liturgy, and church structure. (2) The common convictions of pro and anticelebrationists could inform Adventism of possible directions for the future and offer grounds of reconciliation.