
From the Editor

'You Are My Witnesses'

By Roy Branson

Certain events largely define who we are. Those moments when we decide the destiny of others particularly establish our identity; they declare to the world and to ourselves just what sort of people we understand ourselves to be. Two seemingly disparate events are defining Adventism today: the infant heart transplants at Loma Linda University, and the deliberations at the 1985 Annual Council concerning the role of women pastors, particularly in North America.

Fundamental to Christianity is a special commitment to the vulnerable, not only responding to their needs but respecting their dignity as people as well. In the next few months, we will be permanently affected by how two groups of leaders within Adventism wield their power over those who have very little: physicians treating desperately sick infants and church officials deciding the role of women in the church.

Baby Fae

The Baby Fae transplant is the first time since 1844 that an Adventist event in America has also been a national event. It is much more than a medical innovation; it is also a moral statement, an embodiment by Adventist physicians of moral and religious values. What Adventist physicians did in Loma Linda attracted American—indeed, international—attention because the public sensed that to some extent their understanding of themselves as individuals and as a society lay in the hands of the physicians in Loma Linda. Reproduc-

tions of reports and editorials from all over the world (even when reduced to three-quarter size) fill 192 pages of a special edition of the *Loma Linda University Observer*. Editorials and essays in *The Christian Century*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *Time*, the Vatican's *L'Osservatore Romano*, among many others, regarded the Baby Fae operation as a moment for contemporary society to reflect on what it considers human life to be, how it respects the dignity of non-human life, and how it protects individual choice.

Leonard Bailey has announced his intention to continue performing baboon-to-human heart transplants in infants with hypoplastic left-heart defects. The Loma Linda University Medical School has added to its faculty a national authority in the blood- and tissue-typing necessary for organ transplants and is establishing a center for immunological studies. Loma Linda clearly plans to remain prominent in the field of infant heart transplants. That means the university—and therefore, Adventists—will inevitably be at the center of public debates about medicine, ethics, and public policy.

Already, since the operation, the system for obtaining human infant hearts for transplants has been improved. But if such human hearts are actually to be transplanted into future Baby Faes, national and state regulations regarding the care of terminally ill infants may have to be revised. Undoubtedly this will be one of the topics studied by a blue-ribbon commission just appointed by Ronald Reagan to investigate the nation's programs for organ transplants. Other pub-

lic bodies are likely to conduct hearings to review national policies governing the treatment of animals used in experiments. Loma Linda may well be asked to provide testimony. The emergence of the Adventist Health Systems/U.S. as possibly the largest non-profit health-care system in the country will no doubt mean Adventists will have frequent occasions to address the increasingly pressing moral dilemma of how to allocate scarce medical resources.

Adventists should welcome these opportunities to participate in discussions of how society defines itself. Happily, at this time when it has been thrust into prominence, the Adventist community has encouraged not only the physicians who are advancing medical knowledge, but also a widening circle of theologians and ethicists who are already contributing to the public discussions raised by the Baby Fae operation. The most visible evidence is the recently established Loma Linda University Center for Christian Bioethics.

But if Adventists expect society to listen to their discussions of ethics, society will have to see Adventists act ethically. Much now lies in the hands of physicians at Loma Linda, and whether their attempts to save the lives of infants through innovative heart transplants are perceived as using power to strengthen, not manipulate, the weak and vulnerable. Physicians at Loma Linda have to provide adequate assurance to the public that enough information has been given to parents before they consent to their babies receiving experimental surgery. Just as important is establishing clear and convincing evidence from animal research and the clinical experience with Baby Fae that a baboon-to-human heart transplant can actually be offered to desperate parents as a therapy with as good a chance for success as any therapeutic alternative. If a better procedure exists, it must be tried first or persuasive reasons given why it could not be used in a specific case. (See the special section on Baby Fae in this issue.)

If Adventist physicians at Loma Linda

become as widely known for their embodiment of the highest ethical ideals in carrying out medical experiments as they have for performing the first baboon-to-human infant heart transplant, they may catapult the Adventist community to a new level of involvement in society. Baby Fae may come to be known as a turning point in not only American medicine but also in the Adventist Church.

Women in Ministry

While the identity of the Seventh-day Adventist community is being stamped by how Adventist physicians use their medical expertise to treat infants, their most vulnerable patients, we are also being shaped by those in our church with ecclesiastical authority. How they decide to treat those women who have prepared themselves to serve the church as ministers will epitomize their attitude toward women in general. And how Adventists regard women expresses how they respect the dignity of all people.

Over a decade after the topic was first studied by our church, officials of the denomination are again seriously considering ordination of women. Even before a church-wide policy on ordination of women to the pastoral ministry is decided, the 1985 Annual Council will be acting on recommendations from the North American Division as to whether women pastors in their field may conduct baptisms.

In 1974, a 23-person General Conference committee, led by the vice president who was chairperson of the Biblical Research Institute, and coordinated by that institute's director, declared that "we see no significant theological objection to the ordination of women to Church ministries," and recommended that "the ordination of women to the gospel ministry be considered, if possible, by the 1975 General Conference Session." In 1976, the General Council of the

Biblical Research Institute voted that "it sees no serious theological objection to the ordination of women to various offices, including the ministry" (see *Spectrum*, Vol. 15, No. 3). Since then, that conclusion has never been challenged by any official denominational group.

For some time, women in North America have received their requisite Master of Divinity degrees from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University and have successfully pastored. But while their male classmates have received ministerial licenses and have been ordained, these women, simply because they are women, have not (see articles on the 1984 Annual Council in the *Adventist Review* (Nov. 8, 1984) and *Spectrum* (Vol. 15, Nos. 2,3 and 4).

The 1985 Annual Council has the opportunity to demonstrate that Adventists are working to overcome discrimination based on race or sex. The Annual Council can authorize women pastors in North America to baptize wherever a conference feels that they would strengthen the work of the church. Such an action by the Annual Council would not require any other division, union or conference to do the same, but it would allow parts of Adventism to progress now toward full equality for women in the pastoral ministry (see the recent recommendation of the Andrews Society for Religious Studies discussed in this issue).

The Adventist Church tolerates diverse practices. For example, Eastern European members in good standing send their children to school on Sabbath, and teachers in African Adventist schools receive salaries from the government. Members in some parts of the world church would think it immoral if the world church forced them to tell their daughters that the Adventist Church—in principle—considered them unfit ever to be full-fledged ministers. Surely Adventists can accept some parts of the

world church affirming the equality of women by first approving their conducting of baptisms and eventually welcoming them as ordained ministers of the gospel.

People outside the Adventist community will certainly be watching to see whether we reject women who are as well-qualified and -educated as men from performing the same pastoral duties as male pastors, just because they are women. But more important than the effect on others is what such a decision would do to us. The pastoral ministry has always been open to ordination of persons of all nationalities and races. (Consider how offensive it would be if the Adventist Church excluded certain ministers from baptizing or receiving ordination simply because they were black or Oriental.) If we discriminate on the basis of sex, we will have betrayed our Adventist heritage of inclusiveness, which is based on the New Testament principle of oneness in Christ.

Adventists are not used to being regarded as powerful and therefore accountable for what they do. But the public, realizing with some surprise that Adventist health institutions are leading society into uncharted waters, is saying that it wants to know who Adventists are. In the next few months, church officials have the opportunity to reveal by their decisions that we are a people who respect the dignity of individuals, not only outside but inside the church; that we recognize equally the contributions of men and women at all levels of our church.

This may well prove to be the time when American society begins regarding the actions of Adventists and their institutions as making a genuine difference. This may also be that moment when Adventists sense that how they embody Christianity in society is truly significant, that the mission of Seventh-day Adventism is certainly to invite individuals to accept the gospel, but also to demonstrate how Christianity can shape a complex, technological world.