

Ordination of SDA Women Endorsed by Religion Professors

By Ron Jolliffe

The doctrine of the church was the study theme of the sixth annual Andrews Society for Religious Studies (ASRS) convention which met in conjunction with the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature (AAR/SBL) annual meeting in Chicago, Ill., December 11-13, 1984. The purpose of the Andrews Society is to encourage the scholarly pursuit of religious studies and to provide intellectual and social fellowship to its members.

Perhaps the most significant action taken by the group was the statement they made in support of the ordination of women:

The Andrews Society for Religious Studies, meeting in Chicago, Illinois, this 13th day of December, 1984, hereby affirms its faith in the fundamental equality of all believers in Christ; in the desirability of developing all those gifts, talents, and abilities bestowed by our Lord upon his church; and in the scriptural basis for the equality of men and women in service to God and to His church.

We pledge ourselves to encourage, support, and uphold the hands of the general church leadership and the Commission on the Ordination of Women. We urge the Commission to recommend to the church in its forthcoming quinquennial session that women be considered as candidates for ordination to the gospel ministry wherever it would strengthen the work of the church.

Other actions taken included installing the new president, Douglas R. Clark, professor of religion at Southwestern Adventist College, and selecting Sakae Kubo, former president of Newbold College and currently professor at the graduate school of theology at Walla Walla College, as the president-elect. The society also gave Richard Coffen, retiring president of the Andrews Society and book editor of the Review and Herald Publishing Association, a formal vote of appreciation for his leadership.

About 45 people attended each session. The majority of those who attended were religion teachers from the various Seventh-day Adventist colleges, but seminary students, pastors, church administrators, publishers and members of the Biblical Research Institute attended as well. Several papers were read at the meetings: the presidential address, "Toward a Seventh-day Adventist Agenda on Ecclesiology" by Richard Coffen; "Scriptural Models of Community and Church" by Herold Weiss, St. Mary's College; three reviews of Hans Kung's *The Church*, by Larry Mitchel, Pacific Union College, Warren Trenchard, Canadian Union College, and Barry Casey, Columbia Union College; "Sectarianism and Remnant" by Chuck Scriven, Walla Walla College; and "Diversity within the Church" by John Jones, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary (Far East).

Respondents included Jerry Gladsen, Southern College; Pedrito Maynard-Reid, West Indies College; Steve Vitrano, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary; William G. Johnsson, Adventist Review; and Larry Geraty, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary.

The next meeting of the Andrews Society for Religious Studies will convene Novem-

ber 21-23, 1985, in Anaheim, Calif., immediately before the 1985 AAR/SBL meeting. According to Douglas Clark, "The 1985 plans call for focus on the biblical text from a variety of viewpoints, dealing with such questions as how the biblical text is perceived and utilized in the church at large."

Those interested in joining the ASRS, or in receiving copies of the papers read at the 1984 conference, should write to Larry Mitchel, Pacific Union College, Angwin, Calif., 94508, for details. Membership includes the ASRS newsletter, which is published three times a year. Dues are \$7.00 per year, or \$8.00 for those members who wish to receive conference papers before the annual meeting.

Ron Joliffe, who teaches theology at Southwestern Adventist college, earned his M.Div. at the SDA Theological Seminary. He also studied New Testament at the Claremont Graduate School and at Heidelberg University.

Canada Considers Changes in Church Structure

By George Colvin

The publication in November, 1983, of a 200-page study on Seventh-day Adventist Church structure by F. Kenneth van Ochten, an Adventist attorney in British Columbia, demonstrates that concern about church structure is not limited to the United States. Van Ochten was asked by the Canadian Union Conference to examine church structure in Canada. The resulting study deals particularly with the legal aspects of church structure, especially the relationship between the unincorporated church's organizations and its incorporated property-holding bodies, called "associations." But his research also produced conclusions in other areas, and though van Ochten himself warns against overgeneralizing his find-

ings, some of those results could apply to areas outside Canada.

The major point of van Ochten's study is that the present legal organization of the church needs to be changed. In the present structure, the church's operating entities (such as conferences and union conferences) conduct most of its activities. As unincorporated groups, these entities have no legal existence. The church's property, meanwhile, is held in the name of the associations which are legal entities that can, for example, sue and be sued. These associations have their own controlling boards, usually composed of the operating officers plus some others, that cannot be directly controlled by the constituencies of the unincorporated bodies. This arrangement arose for a number of reasons, including concerns of church-state relations.

Van Ochten finds this arrangement no longer sound. He also notes many disadvantages with it: the possibility of unlimited personal liability for all officers of the unincorporated bodies; the dangers of the placing the control of all church property in the hands of a few people not directly responsible to the members; ambiguities in business relationships, both inside and outside the church, caused by conducting most church operations through a legally non-existent body; and administrative inefficiencies caused by dual structures. Nor are these remote concerns. As van Ochten writes:

It would probably surprise most ministers [and teachers, as van Ochten later indicates] to learn that, though they are paid and employed through the unincorporated church, that body has no capacity in law to enter into an employment contract. It may surprise some Church administrators that when a minister [or teacher] is hired they may be directly personally liable in the event of a claim for wrongful dismissal.

Van Ochten recommends a unified church structure in Canada, abolishing the present

dual arrangement. To the extent that laws in other countries resemble Canadian law, this situation and recommendation would also be important to other countries. There are indications that this concern is now being examined by the General Conference as it applies to the United States.

Apart from these legal concerns, however, van Ochten deals with matters of general church order that certainly have a wider applicability. His work draws extensively on Adventist history, Scripture, and Ellen G. White, and takes into account recent developments, such as several well-known litigations that have dealt with Adventist Church structure. His work also considers, though less extensively, non-Adventist sources and produced a noteworthy bibliography. Because his research led him to conclude that "there has been virtually nothing written in the specific area of Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiology," van Ochten was in the position—like the other committees and commissions studying church structure—of pioneering his topic.

This work led to a number of conclusions. Van Ochten emphasizes that Scripture mandates no particular church structure, that in Protestant bodies the church is the people of God, that organization may legitimately change in response to social realities, and that organization should aim at functional effectiveness rather than at legitimating hierarchical authority. He also lists certain fundamental principles of church organization: purity and unity, variation, purpose, representation, decentralization, and legality.

Van Ochten finds the church substantially decentralized and denies any need for major structural alteration of the church, at least in Canada. Van Ochten further suggests that congregations may have within the present structure "a considerable amount of congregational autonomy . . . that is not being

used." Although van Ochten favors retaining of the Canadian Union Conference, he recommends that its functions be reduced. Particularly in light of the limited Adventist literature on church organization, van Ochten recommends a follow-up study on proposed models for changes in present church organization. This study would consider theology, history, and special counsel; administration; legal concerns; public relations; and intra-church issues.

Van Ochten's report clearly did not deal in depth with some areas of concern in present Adventist church operations such as communications; some of his conclusions (such as those related to representativeness, also not considered in depth) seem to be assumed rather than proved. But his work represents a substantial contribution, especially in the bibliographical and legal areas, to the ongoing work of Adventist church restructure.

George Colvin is a Ph.D. candidate in government at Claremont Graduate School, where he is writing his dissertation on the Pacific Press cases. He is also a consulting editor for *Spectrum*.

CORRECTION

In Vol. 15, No. 3, Desmond Cummings Jr. should have been identified as director of the Institute of Church Ministry. In the article, "Testimony of a Prisoner of Conscience," the name of the Cuban leader who ordained Noble Alexander is Pedro de Armas, the name of the American missionary mentioned is Andrew Riffel, and the port from which Cuban boat refugees set sail is Mariel.