

From the *Little Flock* to *Little Debbies*: A Cultural History of Adventism

by Roy Benton and Roy Branson

Well, lift up the trumpet and pass the vegeburger. Adventism finally has its own subcultural literacy list! Fifteen Andrews University scholars have generated some 400-plus distinctively Adventist terms, dates, places, institutions, media programs, persons both living and dead, and theological phrases. (From here on, items making the list will be marked + and those not included will be marked -.) Given their results, we may imagine these scholars fellowshiping at a *Sabbath potluck*+, passing the *soymeat*+ and pouring *Postum*+ while neglecting the *Numete-* and *Kaffir tea-*. Their mental faculties unbenumbed by stimulating substances, the Andrews team generated a new landmark work—not to be confused with *old landmarks, the*+. Perhaps they reflected on the respect accorded to such committee projects as the *SDA Church Manual*+ (but not the *SDA Bible Commentary-*). In any case, the scholars attempted to be as complete as possible while eliminating personal or regional bias. They even sent the list around to a few other *fellow believers-* for editing. Since *Spectrum*+ undoubtedly got on the list because of its reputation for being hopelessly

analytical, it will not be surprising that we have a critique of the Andrews scholars' work; a critique that is, at the same time, methodological, procedural, and substantive. Although the scholars' result is undeniably *truth-filled literature*+, surely our task as *Spectrum*+ editors is, as always, to sort out the cases of *truth mingled with error*+. In well over 90 percent of the cases where we tested a sample term we deemed important enough to crack the top 500, some version of it was already included. However, despite the scholars' pretensions to objectivity, there are odd oversights. It must surely have been institutional chauvinism that understandably included seminary professors *Heppenstall*+, *Horn*+, and *Wittschiebe*+, while omitting Loma Linda's equally well-known *David Hinshaw-*, *Graham Maxwell-*, *Jack Provonsha-*, and *Louis Venden-*; of course, the latter could be included under the catch-all *West Coast Adventist*+, but they would doubtless object.

Actually, Loma Linda may be a casualty of an even deeper, if predictable, prejudice of the scholars in favor of *our schools*+ over the *right arm of the message*+. All the American Adventist colleges and even a few academies in North America are represented, while all but the largest hospitals are left out. Come on, scholars: fledgling *Kettering College*+ but not established *Kettering Medical Center-*; *Avondale*+ in, but *Sydney Adventist Hospital-* out?

Roy Benton, associate professor of mathematics and philosophy at Columbia Union College, is a consulting editor of *Spectrum*. Roy Branson, a senior research fellow at the Kennedy Institute of Ethics, is the editor of *Spectrum*. They blame any lack of clarity in their commentary on a lifetime of substance abuse—habitual use of milk, sugar, and eggs.

The scholars show a further bias. Was it not a liberal prejudice that omitted outgoing Andrews University Seminary dean *Gerhard Hasel-*, but included former Pacific Union College and Avondale College religion teacher *Desmond Ford+*? To be fair, the Andrews scholars do list conservative education activist *Raymond Moore+* and his wife *Dorothy+*, as well as both *Joe Crews+* and his *Amazing Facts+* program. But our hypothesis of a liberal bias is bolstered by noting the inclusion of *The Review+* editors *F. D. Nichol+* and *William Johnsson+* and the exclusion of *Kenneth Wood-*, the staunch defender of the faith who served as editor for 16 years. Heaping insult upon injury (or is this affirmative action?), his columnist/author wife *Miriam+* makes the grade.

Understandably, five names from the White clan survive the final cut, but why rule out all but one Venden or Maxwell? Also, why omit *lower passions, the-* or *holy flesh-*, but include at least one specific entry that proves the Andrews 15 did not suffer from excessive prudery. (You find the term!) Is it generational bias that shuns the *Heritage Singers-* and *Wedgwood-*? It was not merely a case of long-hair snobbery since *Del Delker+* and *Brad Braley+* got in. It must be yet another bias—this time against evangelism—that omits reference to *presenting the message-*, leading to a person becoming *an interest-*, *gaining the victory-*, *going forward-*, and one day even accepting *a call from the field-*.

The list is only claimed to hold good for North America, and indeed the *world field+* may feel slighted. In Europe, *Conradi-* is a name as familiar as *White+* or *Canright+*. Conversely, even popular entertainer/pastors *Clifton Davis+* and *Wintley Phipps+* are probably unknown beyond the reach of U. S. television airwaves. So this issues a great challenge to the other divisions to come up with their own lists.

Indeed, this profound piece of work should inspire every *peanut eater+* and *worker+* with

continuing employment+ to expand on the original idea. E. D. Hirsch, Jr. defends cultural literacy tests at length and lists 5,000 terms he claims every real American should know. In a short preamble to their appropriately unadorned Adventist version, the Andrews 15 are careful enough to note that they aimed merely to give a descriptive list, not a prescriptive test to ferret out *backsliders+* or *worldlings-*. Exercising admirable scholarly restraint, they leave the interpretive work to be fleshed out by others. Who could fail to notice the in-group fixation on particularity implied by frequent appearances of the definite article (*truth, the+, pen of inspiration, the+, original diet, the+*) and possessives (*our schools+* and *our hospitals+*). A monograph is surely in the wings: From Papal 'We' to Adventist 'The': Religious Self-Preoccupation From the Little Horn+ to the Last Trumpet+. Taking a cue from two adjacent alphabetical entries, will someone become inspired to write From the Little Flock+ to Little Debbies+: A Cultural History of Adventism?

A Dictionary of Adventism and other cooperative ventures should surely follow. Are we ready for Adventist Trivial Pursuits (Quick now, for the orange tile: At *investiture+* what do you become the year after you are a *Busy Bee-*)? The Adventist Joke Book cannot be far behind. (Q: How can you tell who the Adventists are in heaven? A: They are the ones who insist on wearing watches in their crowns.) In the modern Adventist mode, we need taped versions of the list, and not only for the visually impaired and spiritually blind. How else can we convey the difference between *ad-vent-ist* and *ad-vent-ist*, the most conclusive single-word Adventist litmus test of all?

The 15 Andrews scholars who produced this list deserve all the credit in the world. Or at least in the North American Division. We trust that all such future efforts will continue to carry the whole work forward.