Campus Thought: Walla Walla's *Collegian*, 1988-1989

Compiled by Harvey Brenneise

Year-in, year-out, the student-edited newspapers on North American college and university campuses include excellent news and feature stories. Indeed, Southern College's *Southern Accent* was rated First Class by the Associated College Press in 1988, receiving four of five possible marks of distinction. Also in 1988, Andrews University's *Student Movement* received four Columbia Scholastic Association Gold Circle awards, including a first for design. The *Student Movement* did not fare as well in the spring of 1989, when it did not publish three of its last four issues, ostensibly because of lack of funds, but following a firestorm of criticism of its April Fool's edition, which lampooned Adventist icons such as the second coming and Ellen White. The students at Walla Walla College also produce an outstanding, if less flamboyant, campus newspaper. Following are several features from the 1988-1989 *Collegian*.

—*The Editors*

Challenging Adventism

by Larry Brunt

The Seventh-day Adventist church is becoming de-homogenized. During the past 20 years, almost everything that we believe has been challenged to some degree or another. Walter Rea challenged the notion that Ellen G. White was inspired. Desmond Ford challenged the idea of the cleansing of the sanctuary. The church's stance on jewelry, movie-going, competition, and countless other issues has been challenged by a huge percentage of members. Problems continue to grow.

While it is nearly impossible to attribute these problems to a single or definite origin, there are certain notable contributing factors. One of these is the structure of the church itself.

The SDA church can be broken into two distinct sections with two seemingly opposing purposes. The administrative branch—conferences, unions, divisions—calls for community. Administration attempts to hold the church together by encouraging commitment, by maintaining the status quo.

The second branch, the academic, thrives in an environment which, by its very role, challenges blind acceptance. "It's part and parcel of the educational process to raise questions," states Doug Clark, professor of theology at Walla Walla College. "Part of the academic mind-set is to be curious and search for every possible alternative." The more highly educated people become, the more questions they will ask.

The juxtaposition of these two seemingly opposed purposes sometimes produces negative effects on the "tranquil" nature of the church. John Brunt, also a theology professor at Walla Walla College, points out that "You can't have a church that runs education systems without having critical thinking concerning that church's faith."

An additional factor contributing to Adventist disunity is an earlier movement in church history that encouraged "unthinking." Early church pioneers held vigorous debates and asked many questions of their theology. At the 1919 Bible Conference, we find the highest church administrators debating over the nature of Ellen White's inspiration. However, by the 1930s and 1940s, there was concern over too much questioning. The church encouraged an unthinking community—"a uniformity that couldn't hold up," notes Brunt. The result of being rudely awakened from a blind trust in the church by incidents like the Davenport fiasco and Rea debate has caused a serious rift of trust within the church.

Aggravating the situation is an attitude—a sensitivity—about theology that causes us to debate it more fervently. Religion is a part of us—a

Harvey Brenneise is an associate professor of library science and the head reference librarian at Andrews University.

part of our being. Says Clark, "Religious faith is so close to us that debate about theology spins off more tension. Religion touches us more closely than arithmetic, for example."

The dangers these divisions have produced are diverse. Especially as people grow uncertain of their beliefs, there is a real fear that the more questions asked, the greater the chance for people to lose their faith and leave the church. There is a tendency for people to become judgmental when presented with different, opposing perspectives. People who see things differently are accused of being doubters, radicals, or heretics. As a result, prejudices occur. These simple assumptions have hurt the church in the past, and continue to hurt it today.

There is a real fear that the more questions asked, the greater the chance for people to lose their faith and leave the church.

In addition to this concern over immediate fallout, there is the risk of cynicism and skepticism. People become convinced that nothing is known concerning theology or that what is said to be known is wrong.

The ultimate result of this is that the church loses a sense of community. The SDA family splits into separate groups.

This dehomogenization of the church also brings up the possibility of a future, right-wing reaction—"going backward with such rigidity that it is inconsistent with Seventh-day Adventism," Brunt explains. As was the case in the first half of the century, people could be encouraged to stop asking questions for strictly reactionary reasons.

The converse is also true. If nothing is done, it is theoretically possible for an increased secularism to sweep the church if it forgets distinct values. Entertainment could become more important than spiritual interests. Self-interest could become more important than the well-being of others and the furthering of God's kingdom. In many ways, this would seem to be the trend of modern Adventism: strictly Laodicean.

As the church's doctrines, beliefs, and values are challenged, problems will continue to arise. But along with these troubles comes the possibility for great opportunities.

Questioning provides an opportunity for individuals to take active steps in reaffirming their beliefs. As questions are raised, people are encouraged to search for answers on their own. Pat answers and cliches are no longer enough. People are challenged to know what they believe and why. The result is more active, individual exploration of the Bible and of Christian literature.

This personal study opens the way for forums and the exchange of ideas. Thus learning can take the form of listening to others and weighing what they have to offer—expressing and defending the positions their individual experiences are leading them to.

"In the long run," states Clark, "there is a positive effect. When people are free to ask questions and free to confront problems, then ultimately their faith is stronger." As answers are sought after individually—rather than passed down within a community—they become much more personal and real. The value of any intellectual movement is in the personal convictions it inspires.

Finally, the dehomogenization of the church presents several needs. We must actively work toward meeting them.

Clark suggests that we must work toward creating an environment in the church where people are "free to ask questions in faith, sincerity and honesty" without being "labeled as doubters and cynics." We must put an end to the notion that the person who asks questions is a trouble-maker and heretic. Instead, there needs to be an acceptance of open, sincere questions that the curious, committed, and educated Christian—Adventist or otherwise—will ask.

"We need to be in touch with the world, yet hold on to our unique heritage," says Alden Thompson, provost and academic dean at Walla Walla College. "What I see as the dream for the church is a mainstream, sectarian body." The church should not be blind to the world, but aware and in tune with it. However, there should be a difference.

Is such a dream attainable?

Thompson states, "According to the demands of the New Testament, I see no other possibility."

Larry Brunt is a junior humanities major and speech/communications minor. He served as religious editor on the staff of the *Collegian* during the 1988-1989 school year.

The Glow of Patriotism

by David Reimer

Living in Walla Walla tends to give one a sense of peace and security in relation to environmental problems. Dwelling in a desert removes us from some of the threat of the greenhouse effect. The general lack of forests and waterways eases concerns over acid rain, and the area has few animals in danger of becoming extinct. Removed from the forefront of politics and environmental conflicts, we seem to have it made, right?

Wrong.

Consider an area to the west of us known as the Hanford Site. In the early 1940s, the government acquisitioned 570 square miles from existing farms comprising the Hanford and White Bluffs communi-

ties. Located quite literally in the middle of nowhere, Hanford seemed the perfect location to work on the plutonium production required for the secret Manhattan Project. The plutonium used in the atom bomb dropped on Nagasaki was manufactured at Hanford. Since that time, the plant has operated at various levels of activity, peaking during the early sixties and dropping off steadily until 1983, when the Reagan administration reopened some of Hanford's operations as part of the large nuclear buildup effort.

Aside from providing thousands of jobs and a patriotic feeling prominent among area residents (Richland has an Atomic Bowling Center and a Proton Boulevard; one of the local high schools has also chosen the mushroom cloud as its school symbol), what has Hanford done for the community?

Documents released in 1986 reveal a history of public-safety abuses almost too frightening to believe. Hanford regularly emitted as much as 11,000 times the federally allotted amounts of radioactive and toxic wastes into the surrounding habitat—including the Columbia River—from 1943 to 1967. Not once was a public-health warning released.

Also present on the Hanford Site are hundreds of locations where millions of gallons of toxic and radioactive wastes have either leaked from their tanks into the ground or been poured directly onto the earth. All this has taken place above the groundwater level, and tests conducted in nearby wells show levels of toxic materials from 25 to 400 times greater than federal water standards allow.

The Columbia River, which supplies water to much of Washington and Oregon, has been heavily contaminated at times, with radiation showing up as far away as Portland and the ocean bay into which the Columbia empties.

Most shocking of all is the discovery that in 1949 the government intentionally released 11,000 times the federal limit of radioactive material into the air above Hanford just to see what it would do. A Whitman College student here at the time spent her Christmas vacation feeling fatigued and began losing hair shortly afterwards. Her hair never returned, and the reason for its loss was not known until 1986, when the government released minimal documentation of the experiment, under extreme pressure from several groups. The government continued releasing radioactive materials monthly for several years as a part of the experiment. The public was never informed.

No plans have yet been made for cleaning up the toxic wastes at Hanford. Studies are currently under consideration to determine whether Hanford's neighbors suffer a higher rate of cancer or other diseases, but after 40 years it seems that much of the damage is irreparable.

Yes, the Walla Walla area appears to be lucky in many ways: removed from many ugly realities of the outside world, able to take an objective view of the environment and politics. Hanford has played on the peaceful attitudes and the quiet patriotism of the Columbia River Basin's inhabitants for more than 40 years. The final results of that betrayal of trust remain to be seen, but for the residents of the Columbia Basin—many of whom have lost several relatives to cancer—the pride of patriotism has soured.

For many of the residents of the Columbia Basin the pride of patriotism has soured.

David Reimer is a senior history major and French minor at Walla Walla College. He is the current *Collegian* editor, and was feature editor during the 1988-1989 school year.

Why Be an Adventist?

by Ernest Bursey

The biggest issue on Adventist campuses is not whether Adventist education is worth the cost of tuition. A bigger question lurking in the shadows for this generation is whether being an Adventist is worth it. Will the current generation of college students tithe their professional incomes? Will they hand over a substantial portion of their cash to pay for their children's Adventist education? Will they get up on Sabbath morning to take their children to Sabbath school? Or will they decide that the price of being a Seventh-day Adventist is too high for the benefits received?

Of course I can't speak for the next generation. I can only speak for myself as one who has been asking the big question for many years now. So I am going to speak for myself. Maybe I am speaking to myself, too.

Recently I listened to a group of alert college students wrestle with the question: Am I proud of my church? They were not able to say "Yes" with any strong degree of enthusiasm. Part of the reason is that they do not seem to know of the people in their church who are doing something more than tending the machinery of a middle-aged institution or looking after their own careers. I suspect they suffer from a lack of honest exposure to Adventist history, warts and all.

Adventist history has recently fallen on hard times. As Adventists, we seem to have a built-in "past-basher" that exceeds even the ho-hum attitudes toward history that characterize Americans in general.

After all, didn't our "movement" begin with a moment of embarrassment—the world was still here intact on the morning of October 23, 1844. And our continued presence in this world is often held up as an accusing reminder of the failures of all Adventists since the beginning. Why should anyone be proud of a church that has proved to be such a disappointment to itself and God?

I am an Adventist because of what I have read. What has helped me to see things differently is a healthy dose of personal reading in Adventist history. I have read and reread Graybill's *Mission to Black America* and the candid biography of James White by Virgil Robinson. I know about Fernando Stahl, the missionary who preached Jesus' coming and insisted on social justice. The prodigious efforts of Ellen White continue to dumbfound me.

Maybe it is time for an Adventist Heritage Week where the shakers and movers from the Adventist past can emerge to confront us. A fresh look at their achievements along with their warts could help us right now in moving off dead center.

The Jesus I know demands that his followers renounce the ways the world uses force and violence over others. He taught us that we must leave our enemies in the hands of God.

But not all the Adventist dreamers are dead. I'd like to meet Jim Rankin, the saint of Adventist Development and Relief Agency International, who has taught more than a quarter of a million Africans to feed themselves. Not surprisingly, more than 2,000 have decided to accept his Adventist commitments, too.

I am an Adventist because of the people who I have known and can never forget. A number of years ago I served as youth pastor for several churches in Loma Linda, California, a center of Adventist affluence. At the time I was deeply impressed by the generosity of several elderly women in the Campus Hill Church. Their resources were limited to small pensions. Yet they managed to support our youth programs and a number of other worthwhile projects with a generosity that shocked me. They scrimped and sacrificed so they could give lavishly. I cannot forget how little they lived on and how much they gave.

In the same community a local Adventist doctor provided major funding for the summer recreation program our church ran for hundreds of children. His money came with no strings attached except one—absolute anonymity. No one must know who was underwriting the program. I kept my mouth shut, but I haven't forgotten what that man did with his money.

These people and others have shown me what it meant to be an Adventist. The Davenport fiasco or the current salary explosions in the Adventist health systems can't erase their mark on me. In keeping with the command of Jesus they usually didn't let their left hand know what their right hand was doing. They loved the Lord with all their heart and strength and still somehow had a lot left over for the rest of us. Because of them I don't think I could walk away from the Adventist church in disgust, no matter how much greed and narrow-mindedness I think I can see in those who claim to speak for Adventists. I have seen the real thing.

I am an Adventist Christian because of Jesus. For the last decade I have been assigned to teach the Gospels every quarter here at Walla Walla College. The result for me has been a firmer commitment to Jesus and to the Adventist brand of Christianity.

I am convinced that the central issues in the teachings of Jesus lie at the heart of Adventism—a life of humility before God and absolute integrity before others, a life of rigorous spiritual discipline that dares to speak of the narrow way, a life of confidence in God's care while working hard to do as much good as possible.

The Jesus I know demands that his followers renounce the ways the world uses force and violence over others. He taught us that we must leave our enemies in the hands of God. No matter how right I think I am or how wrong your beliefs, I must not ignore your conscience! The Adventist appeal for freedom of conscience for even atheists and blasphemers resonates with that demand.

Instead of finishing this piece with a flourish of reasons why you or I should be an Adventist, I return to the matter of the high price tag for being different. Is the cost too high?

Will the North American Adventist church be able to remain different from the culture around it, different enough to justify the tremendous energy and funds to keep its own institutions alive and healthy? If it becomes too much like American culture, there will be no reason to ask for sacrificial giving from its members. Like butter in hot soup, the church will melt into its cultural milieu.

My generation of Adventists is worried. So we insist that the next generation embrace quite a few "standards" or differences. Unfortunately, too many of these differences simply involve abstinence and avoidance of evils, as though goodness were simply the absence of vices.

I have a hunch that there are a lot of thoughtful young people who in their souls would like to be challenged to stick with or even join a church that really was different from the rest of culture as long as they thought the differences or "standards" dealt with were important. For starters, what about Jesus' list—justice, mercy, and faithfulness

(Matthew 23:23)? Maybe he knew that these are the "standards" that stand out in our world because they are in such short supply. Maybe the Adventist church has asked too little of its members. Maybe the price tag for membership has been high enough to pinch but too low to make a real difference.

I have the advantage of having a father who told his children that when the church went in the wrong direction, God expected us to do something about it. We should never forget that we have just as much right to be in the church and to speak our mind as the elders or the conference president. It is our church, too. He taught us to be part of the "loyal opposition" that wouldn't go away and wouldn't be silenced. He could never understand those who sat quietly in the pews or those who walked away.

I confess that much of the time I feel like part of the "loyal opposition." But I intend to stay. If God has given you a hunger for righteousness and a desire to join others in making a difference in this world, I pray that you will stay, too.

Ernest Bursey is an associate professor of biblical studies at Walla Walla College, and a doctoral candidate in New Testament at Yale University.

Faculty Unity Inspires Confidence

by David Reimer

Attending Monday night's faculty meeting was an impressive experience. I am a cynic, one who rarely places much confidence in people's idealistic statements. After all, it is much easier to say one believes a certain way than to actually do something about it. But Monday's meeting was enough to convince me that idealism is very much alive and well on the campus of Walla Walla College.

After President Bergman opened the floor for discussion, the air was somewhat tense. No one knew for certain where the evening's conversation would lead, and no one was sure quite how to begin. Dr. John Brunt, dean of the School of Religion at Walla Walla, made things clear for everyone involved.

In a speech that was simple yet quite eloquent, he pointed out that the reason for teaching here at Walla Walla is not to get rich or to receive recognition, but to function as a part of the body of Christ. Wage scales and pay increases aside, Brunt stressed that service is the main philosophy behind Christian education, no matter where other Adventist colleges may be headed. No matter where the "world's" patterns are leading.

The speech was very stirring, very idealistic, very—if one must be cynically honest—unrealistic. These people were being offered a choice between accepting or turning down a greater pay raise, and no one can say No to a better standard of living.

And then came the vote. Oh, sure, there was some discussion—discussion that never once challenged Brunt's remarks—but it was leading to an inevitable vote. When Bergman called for a vote, the faculty unanimously moved to accept pay adjustments—for better or for worse—as equals. No scale adjustments. No higher pay for full professors. No selfishness. The overwhelming spirit was one of service, of dedication, of sacrifice.

Quite honestly, my cynical mind was astonished. It's not that I don't respect my teachers; it's only that I hadn't realized before listening to some of their comments and witnessing the vote how deeply their convictions run. How serious they are when they talk about sacrificing for a Christian education. Even with the full knowledge—as Claude Barnett so kindly pointed out—that it is virtually impossible to leave here and not make more money, our teachers prefer to remain at WWC and vote down a pay raise.

Much has been said the past few weeks about Walla Walla College's troubles. They are here. They are also very real and very in need of solving. But after visiting that faculty meeting, after witnessing that incredible brand of dedication, one cannot help having restored confidence in the future of our school.