

The Adventist End-Time Books

An Interview with Céleste Perrino Walker

by Julie Z. Lee

Céleste Perrino Walker is a freelance writer and author of more than a dozen books. Published in nearly every Adventist magazine and journal, Céleste is one of the most prolific and well-known writers in our church.

She discovered her talent at a young age when a fifth-grade teacher assigned her class to write stories that were then read out loud. Her exciting stories catapulted her to elementary school fame when her classmates began anticipating her readings. In high school, an expository writing class brought about similar reactions. Soon Céleste and her friends formed a writing club that met regularly during study hall.

In 1986, Céleste published her first story in *Insight Magazine*. Sporadic publishing in various magazines followed, but Céleste mostly kept writing as a hobby. It wasn't until 1990, when she attended a writer's week at the *Adventist Review*, that her career officially took off. By 1994, Céleste had published her first book.

Céleste currently writes a regular column for *Vibrant Life* magazine, and is published regularly in several magazines, including *Liberty*, *Our Little Friend*, and *Guideposts for Teens*. She also has four books in the works: *Adventist Family Traditions*, a sequel to her best-selling *Prayer Warriors* and *Guardians*, a book on joy, and possibly a book on women at prayer. Of course, these "projects" take backstage to her first career as a mother, homeschooling and teaching French during her homeschool co-op day.

As the coauthor of *Eleventh Hour* and its sequel, *Midnight Hour*, two novels that focus on the end-time from an Adventist perspective, Céleste joins *Spectrum* in discussing the impact of the "Left Behind" series and its implications for the mission of the Adventist Church.

Q: How do you feel about the success of the "Left Behind" books?

A: Shocked. It's mind-boggling to think how many people are reading them. And a bit encouraging to think so many people have an interest in end-times. As well, it's like a red flag showing a need for more information, for the truth. It's great that all these readers are interested in finding the truth about what's coming next, but sad that they won't find it in the "Left Behind" books. In my opinion we, as a church, have an obligation to acknowledge this hunger for truth and offer it. We have end-time books. We need to find a way to offer them outside the Church. Adventists already know about the end-times. Now we need to find a way to get this information to the general public. I would say that the sheer success of the "Left Behind" series clearly demonstrates that they are interested.

Q: How did the idea for Eleventh Hour and Midnight Hour come about?

A: Eric Stoffle (coauthor) and I met on the Adventist Forum online. We started talking about writing and about the kinds of books we'd like to see published. We both had a strong interest in end-times books. I don't remember who suggested the idea of writing one together, but it was just for fun at first. I had an inspiration about this girl, Dani, and wrote up the first scene. I sent it to him by e-mail. He immediately added on to it and sent it back. We both liked what we had written and decided to submit it for publication. (When I speak, I say that people often ask me how I could write with a man clear across the country. I tell them it's easy. We followed two simple rules. Rule 1: The woman is always right. Rule 2: When in doubt refer to Rule 1.)

Q: How much, if any, impact did the success of the "Left Behind" series have on your books? Have you read them?

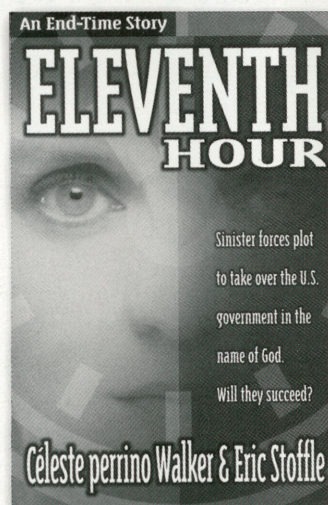
A: I couldn't say for sure, but I doubt it made any impact. Our books were marketed in the Adventist market, to people who believe the same way we do. The people in this market are probably not going to go out and buy the "Left Behind" books so they wouldn't choose that series over ours. The mainstream Christian market didn't have a choice between our books and the "Left Behind" books because ours were never marketed in the mainstream Christian market as competition for "Left Behind."

I believe our books were published before the "Left Behind" series began (at least *Eleventh Hour*), but I'm not positive when *Left Behind* came out. I highly doubt they were looking for something to compete with the "Left Behind" series. It was more like the year 2000 was coming and there was an interest in end times books.

I have not read the "Left Behind" series yet. But, at one time I was a Pentecostal and I remember seeing a series of videos about the rapture. I want to say the title was something similar to "Left Behind." Those videos scared me to death.

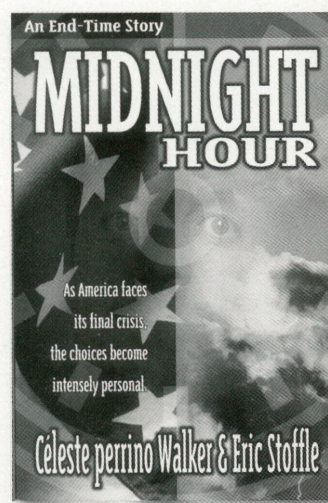
Q: How did the collaboration with Eric work?

A: It worked really well. At first we just added about ten pages each time the manuscript went back and forth. Later, we settled on our own characters and



***Eleventh Hour* by Céleste perrino Walker and Eric Stoffle. Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1998.**

Worldwide confusion. Personal tragedy. International chaos. Sinister forces plot to take over the U.S. government in the name of God. (from the book cover)



***Midnight Hour* by Céleste perrino Walker and Eric Stoffle. Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1999.**

A country without a president. A world without a leader. Three men poised on the brink of supreme power. When people choose tyranny over chaos, no place on earth is safe. In the sequel to *Eleventh Hour*, America faces its final crisis. (from the book cover)

we'd add on mostly to our own characters. We consulted each other regularly about the plot line though, and we stuck with the ten pages at a time rule so neither of us could write the book out on a limb. We kept each other in check that way.

Q: How much research did you have to do for the books?

A: I didn't do much research for the books, specifically. I had read a lot on the subject. I think, being Adventists, we all "research" the end-times more or less. We have this fascination with what's going to happen at the end.

Your average Adventist has a working knowledge of what the end-times are going to hold. There are several "theories" about how exactly it's all going to come down, but for the most part the specifics are anybody's guess. The medical information was easy enough given my nursing background. Eric wrote all the political stuff, which I wouldn't have had a clue about. I did a lot of research about the virus though. I believe the book I read was called *The Hot Zone*. That was very helpful. And I had some articles about the Mary and her "works."

Eric and I didn't want to concentrate on the theories so much as on how the people would react to the events and the truth, when they learned it.

Q: How long did each take to complete?

A: It's hard to say because we were both working on other things at the time. I think *Eleventh Hour* might have taken a year (published in 1998) and *Midnight Hour* six to eight months (published in winter of 1998-99). Seems like we had to rush that one.

Q: What kinds of theological expectations did the publisher put on you and your co-writer?

A: We had to represent the Seventh-day Adventist Church in theology, but write in a non-denominational way so the book could be marketed outside the Church or given to non-Adventist friends without them thinking it was "churchy."

Q: What kind of marketing plan does your publisher have for these books, other than Adventist bookstores?

A: They've been out a couple years . . .

campmeeting is about the only marketing plan Adventist books receive. At least that I am aware of.

Q: You talked about how the publisher asked you to tone down the "Adventist" aspects so the books could be marketed to a general public. When will this be done?

A: Pacific Press created an imprint called Sycamore Tree under which they publish books that aren't specifically Adventist, for example, they don't mention Adventism specifically. They were/are hoping to market these books to the general public, but so far they don't have any avenues open . . . mainly Christian Booksellers Association (CBA). There are NO marketing attempts outside the Church that I am aware of. Yes, the general market needs to hear it the most. I think the publisher is relying on Adventists sharing the books with their friends.

*Q: What has been the response to *Eleventh Hour* and *Midnight Hour*?*

A: The people I have heard from have been very positive about the books. One woman wrote and said, "I just finishing reading *Eleventh Hour* and *Midnight Hour*. Whew! At first I thought they would make everyone paranoid, but now that I have nearly finished they give me great courage for what may lay ahead." We did get a lot of "criticism" for leaving *Eleventh Hour* on a cliff-hanger. The Adventist Book Center managers I met begged me not to do it again. A woman wrote to me and said, "I can't believe you left us hanging like that. Eric Stoffle must have put you up to it. You'd never do a thing like that." (Ha ha!!)

Q: How did writing the book change or affect you?

A: It helped me to focus on the relationship with God, something I had been trying to do more for years. That's what's important, after all. Not how it all comes down in the end, but how your relationship with God is. Do you have a relationship that won't be shaken? If not, now's the time to make it right.

Julie Z. Lee is the media relations coordinator at Pacific Union College. She is the secretary of the Association of Adventist Forums.
jzlee@puc.edu

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



The Politics of Aging

In his otherwise stimulating article ("The Politics of Aging," *Spectrum*, autumn 2000) Ron Osborn mistakenly asserts that "a majority of the divisions violated the Church's working policy by failing to send the proper quota of lay members to the session." Osborn supports this claim by referring to preliminary delegation quota figures (issued two months before the session) published in the *Adventist Review* on June 30, 2000.

From a quick reading of the General Conference Constitution one might conclude that the number of laymembers and the number of pastors/teachers/nonadministrators should be equal and that the combined number will constitute 50 percent of the entire delegation. A closer look at the wording of Art. 4, Sec. 8 is warranted: "In the selection of regular delegates and delegates at large, organizations shall choose Seventh-day Adventists in regular standing, at least 50 percent of whom shall be laypersons, pastors, teachers, and nonadministrative employees, of both genders, and representing a range of age groups and nationalities. The majority of the above 50 percent shall be laypersons."

The first point to observe is that these ratios apply to delegates who are "selected." Members of the General Conference Committee, along with the associate directors of General Conference departments, are delegates-at-large by virtue of their positions. There is no process of selection involved. A further thirty-four delegates from the General Conference staff are included in the delegates-at-large category. However, it is not possible to select laypersons or administrators in this group since all are considered to be within one classification (nonadministrators in the pastors/teachers/nonadministrators group). Therefore, the number of "selected" delegates is 1,674 (2,000 minus the groups listed above).

Of the 1,674 delegates, at least 50 percent (837) should be comprised of laypersons, pastors, teachers, and nonadministrators. Further, a majority of this group (or 419) should be laypersons. The constitution does not set a maximum in these groups; instead it establishes minimums. Delegation quotas were carefully monitored in the weeks leading up to the session. All divisions were in compliance with the constitutional quotas. Two weeks prior to the session there were 483 lay delegates (including the forty-eight laypersons on the GC Committee) and 557 pastors/teachers/nonadministrators (including the twenty-six in that category from the GC Committee) in the total delegation of 1,938 at that moment. (Not all divisions sent their entire quota of delegates and unfortunately some delegates authorized to attend were unable to obtain visas.)

Osborn's observations about the unequal numbers of laypersons and pastors/teachers/nonadministrators are correct but his conclusion is somewhat faulty. The higher number of delegates in the pastors/teachers/nonadministrators group arises from the fact that these two groups, laypersons and pastors/teachers/

nonadministrators, comprised more than 50 percent of the delegation. A greater number of the second group was selected than was required in the constitution.

The Toronto session approved some revisions to this and other clauses of the constitution, which should aid the interpretation for the future.

Lowell C. Cooper

General Vice President

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Ron Osborn responds:

I appreciate Elder Cooper's letter. He calls attention to several important facts that were not reflected in my article, including the modification of delegate compositions in the weeks leading up to the session; the higher total number of nonadministrator delegates in Toronto than required by the constitution; and the difficulties some divisions underwent in sending their intended delegations.

After carefully reviewing the constitution and the updated figures Elder Cooper presents, however, I still believe that the voice of the laity was less than it should have been in relation to the rest of the regular delegates and delegates-at-large. The constitution does not state any specific number of laypersons that must be selected, but a ratio of half or more of the selected delegates. By Elder Cooper's revised figures, there were 483 lay delegates and 557 pastors/teachers/nonadministrators—still well less than half the combined total stipulated under the constitution.

In the overall context of church administration, an uneven balance between these groups will have a stifling effect on dialogue since persons employed by the Church often have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. In the context of youth representation, the results are likewise cause for concern since the majority of college and postcollegiate age Adventists are not employed by the Church and fall under the category of laity.

Application for a Christian Pen Friend

I kindly submit my request for a Christian pen friend to you. This pen friend will keep on strengthening my faith by feeding me spiritual views as we're in the time of the end. I am a male aged thirty-nine. I have a Christian family of six. I am a health worker by profession serving at the Mitandi SDA dispensary under hard circumstances of insurgency in Western Uganda. I shall be very happy to get your Christian response.

Hezrou Kasasya

Mitandi SDA Dispensary

P.O. Box 487

Fort Portal Uganda

Race Relations in the Church

Articles in the *Adventist Review* and in *Spectrum* about race relations in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and concerning forgiveness—individual and corporate—plus what I believe is the influence of the Holy Spirit, have brought me to this point of wanting to confess and ask forgiveness for what I now think is a moral wrong of more than half a century ago.

In 1946, I had the responsibility and privilege of editing the *Golden Cords* at Union College, where I was a student. In that annual the student pictures are so arranged that pictures of the minority students are placed at the end of each class group. The responsibility was not solely mine, and I heartily wish some advisor or faculty member had said, "Josephine, we can't do that!" However, that didn't happen, and I am the one feeling a conviction to apologize at this late time.

Because of difficulties with finding current addresses for all the people who may have been hurt by this segregation, and other complications, I'm taking the route of writing to these publications. If this letter is published, and if you as a reader know anyone who may be involved, please call that person's attention to this letter, or send me the person's address so that I can write to him or her personally.

I ask forgiveness not only from the students who experienced the discrimination, but also from family members, readers of the book, and any others who may have been hurt.

How thankful I am that we serve a God who is eager to forgive, and I hope that his children who have been wronged may also feel it in their hearts to extend forgiveness.

Josephine Griffin Benton

Ellen White's Ancestry

To Ronald Graybill:

I hope that your book review, "That 'Great African-American Woman,' Ellen Gould Harmon White," which appeared in *Spectrum* (Autumn, 2000) does not represent the position of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. It tends to raise questions in the mind of the readers that the Seventh-day Adventist denomination leans toward racism.

Since my book was released, the E. G. White Estate, Incorporated, whose office represents the official voice of the Church concerning matters pertaining to the prophet, after your study thirty years ago, has hired another genealogist to continue the research into the ancestry of Ellen Gould Harmon White.

My book states my findings after visiting with family members, interviewing many old-timers of the Church, and reading historical documents from state archives, visiting grave sites, and reading the tombstones of those who lived before the development of this nation.

Did those who researched the topic thirty years ago, have presence of mind to extend their search into the black/colored communities? I sought to develop a study on the contributions of African-Americans and the development of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. It began as a response to questions put by the present generation. As in the parable of Jesus concerning the lady and the lost coin, it is interesting what can be found when the house is given a thorough cleaning.

Charles E. Dudley Sr.

Issues the Church Cannot Afford to Ignore

Greetings from Denmark. Recently I shared the article by Tihomir Kukolja, "Issues the Church Cannot Afford to Ignore," (*Spectrum*, Autumn 2000), with an outstanding Anglican and a friend of the Adventists, Dr. Martin Conway. He read it with interest. Dr. Conway was made a doctor of theology by the Archbishop of Canterbury in Lambeth Palace, London, and he was a candidate for general secretary of the World Council of Churches, a few years ago. His involvement in the ecumenical movement also included long service in the Student Christian Movement in the UK, the World Council of Churches and the British Council of Churches. Currently, he is chairman of the Oxford Diocesan Board for Social Responsibility. He has given me permission to share his comments with you. He wrote:

"Thank you for the chance to see the article by Tihomir Kukolja. I was not aware of the Adventist dimensions of the incidents in the South Pacific, or in ex-Yugoslavia, although I had been very struck by the book on Rwanda by Gourevitch.

"First, welcome to the ranks of Christians and churches that are struggling with all these never-ending political, economic, and social dilemmas! What seems to European Christians to be the standard view—that the church should have nothing to do with politics—is grossly oversimplified, and only leads, as the article trenchantly demonstrates, to a "hiding the head in the sand" approach that helps no one. For better or worse, Christians are going to get involved in one way or another in political and other dilemmas and both need and deserve careful, intelligent, biblical teaching from their churches. So, all strength to those who can participate in programs through which disciples can learn how to teach in that field.

"Second, while Harry Blamires (quoted in Kukolja's article,) has been a useful and well-regarded teacher, he is by no means the only—and certainly not the most recent—writer in this field for the non-Adventist segment of Christianity. There are extensive libraries available. For example, the Roman Catholic Church has, of course, a proud history of social teaching, of which the statement "The Common Good" by the English/Welsh bishops, published in the run-up to the 1997 General Election in the United Kingdom is a particularly good example, much admired by other churches.

"Among Protestant churches in the United Kingdom Professor Duncan Forrester, who just retired from the University of Edinburgh, has directed a Centre for the Study of Public Affairs, which has produced a series of Occasional Papers that are regarded highly. His own book, *Beliefs, Values, and Policies—Conviction Politics in a Secular Age*, the Henseley Henson Lectures of 1987-1998 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) might be as good an introduction as most."

Boerge Schantz

Denmark

(A subscriber and reader of *Spectrum* from its beginning.)