

# The Gifts of the Spirit vs. The Demands of IBMTE

By A. Greg Schneider

The statements of purpose in the *Handbook* of the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education speak of fostering “a dynamic theological unity in the world Church,” of nurturing a “strong partnership between church leaders, educational institutions, and faculty engaged in the training of ministry,” and of energizing the “spiritual life of Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions through committed faculty. Words like “unity,” “partnership,” and especially “spiritual” denote powerful and deeply desirable realities that I, too, seek and have sought throughout my life and calling. Is the IBMTE, in its design as a board of official inquiry and endorsement, likely to accomplish these purposes?

The introduction to the *IBMTE Handbook* asserts also that the Church promotes its mission primarily through its ministers—“pastors, theologians, Bible/religion teachers, chaplains, and administrators.” Assuming that the mission of our church is that commanded by Christ, to make disciples, how is the spiritual formation of Christian disciples done? Is it a matter of demanding common assent to a list of propositions? Is it accomplished primarily in and through the activities of the ordained clergy? These questions and others have led me to reflect on my own spiritual formation. I offer my story here as one of many stories that ought to inform our answers to these important questions. Of course, mine cannot be a story that is normative for the whole of the richly diverse culture of Adventism. On the other hand, I am unwilling to have it swept aside or disparaged in the name of abstractions like “the world field.”

I was a gifted child, and I am now a gifted adult. What do I mean? Let me start with Mom, Roberta Klooster Schneider, an English major who was herself gifted by a dedicated Washington Missionary College faculty and the opportunities given her to grow her gifts as editor of the school paper and yearbook. She gave me the gift of language skills and the love of words. It was characteristic of Mom that at the time when Alex Comfort’s *The Joy of Sex* was selling over a million copies, she rather impishly evangelized for an obscure book she thought was much more interesting—*The Joy of Lex*. The foundations of my calling are built out of passions and skills I learned from her. Others built on those foundations—English teachers like Gay Mack at Takoma



Academy and Judith Nembhard at Columbia Union College, my mother's (and my father's) renamed alma mater. These two English teachers did as much as any ordained preacher to evoke in me a sense that I might become a minister of the Word.

My love of the Bible was nurtured at home and school and church—all three—but I remember best the big Junior Sabbath School room in the basement of the Takoma Park Seventh-day Adventist church. There on the bare asphalt-tiled floors we grade schoolers would scoot our metal folding chairs into small circles around our Sabbath School lesson teachers to recite memory verses and compete in Bible quizzes. Among the many faithful laypeople who led those circles, I recall especially Roy Rubottom, whose florist shop was just across the street from the church and who in later years would supply the orchid corsages I would pin with sweaty fumbling fingers to my dates' dresses.

At age ten, however, these were matters unimaginable. Mr. Rubottom mainly just wanted me to remember to bring my Bible to Sabbath School. He bought me one himself, so that whenever he directed us to look up texts,

I had his gift at hand. I still have that Bible, and I have opened it now and then to glance at Mr. Rubottom's signature on its front page, a tangible reminder of the spiritual gifts I have been given.

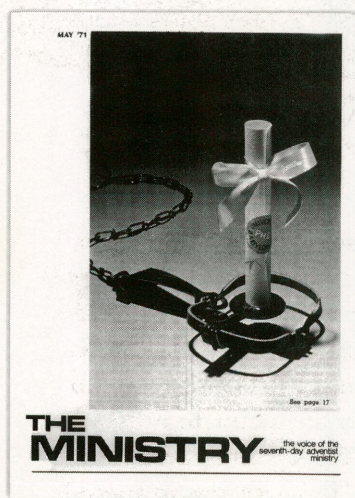
Thanks to Elna Quade, I learned to carry a tune. Mrs. Quade, music teacher at John Nevins Andrews school, also in Takoma

thought it a place of honor. Fortunately for my six-year-old self-esteem, it took me only a few weeks to find the melody and a breathy boy soprano voice to follow it with. Only years later did I tumble to the fact that I started out as a musical dunce.

Neither Leland Tetz at Takoma Academy nor Paul Hill at Columbia Union College had much to work with when I joined their choirs, but they labored faithfully and gently with my mediocrity. These three musicians' gifts to me were the great traditions of Christian hymnody and choral singing, and by that music I have been led into communion with God and all his creatures more surely and deeply than by any of the sermons I have either heard or preached.

Lynne Schwindt taught both French and religion at Takoma Academy. Prior to her senior year "Youth Problems" class, much of my religious instruction had seemed to set me, with desperate energy, against the sinful world and against my own sinful propensities. So on guard was I against the evil without and within that I was ignorant and fearful of the world around me, unaware of and at odds with myself. Mrs. Schwindt used her knowledge of psychology, especially personality theory, to challenge me to know who I was, and who I might become. I found that I was not only fallen, but good, my sinful propensities only the misguided, misused gifts of God's good creation. Lynne's husband, Bob, taught psychology at CUC. His rambling reflections in class led me further along the path his wife had opened up, nurturing my spirit better than any pulpit ministry I had known.

To be fair, there were gifts from preachers that mattered deeply. Elder William Keith taught my baptismal class and conveyed to me the symbolism of death, burial, and resurrection in our Seventh-day Adventist ritual of immersion. I can still hear Elder Keith's soft southern drawl in the stairwell of Takoma



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Park, had a proven method for taming those comically wandering voices we sometimes hear in less well-taught children's choirs. I was one of the tuneless wanderers for whom she made a special place at the front of the music class. We were to be "whisperers," she said, a position she described in terms of such hope and promise that I

Park Church when, in a tiny moment of special attention to a preadolescent's budding but insecure manliness, he remarked to me and my parents how much he admired my firm handshake.

Later on, Bill Loveless became one of the few preachers in my young experience who met the demands of an adolescent and young adult intellect for ideas that made



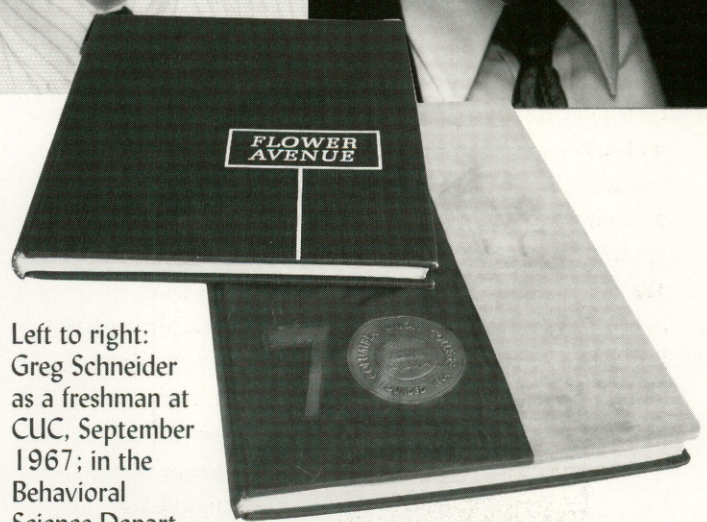
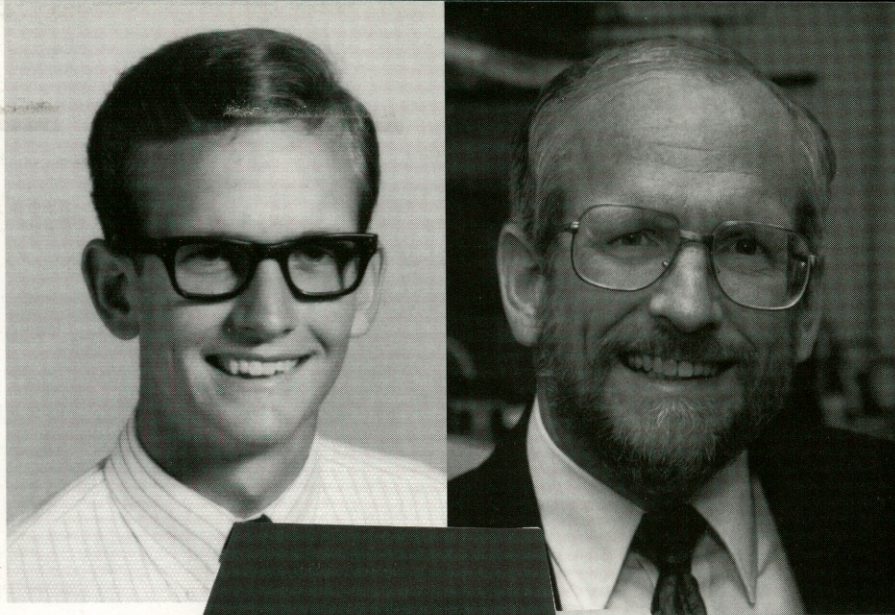
sense of my life and times. I especially loved the sermons where he would team up with Winton Beaven, Columbia Union College president, and they would, with disarmingly light banter, drive home profound points of faith and ethics. I also treasure the image I have of Elder Loveless on Sabbath mornings in Sligo church turning around, back to the congregation and face-to-face with the college choir as we led the congregation in the opening hymn. With the lower three voices in unison and the sopranos descanting on the alto part an octave high, we would see in his eyes a smile of affirmation and delight and we would reach to bottom of our being to produce sounds to make the spirits of all worshipers soar.

Elder Bob Zamora was both teacher and preacher for me. As my undergraduate New Testament teacher, he built on Mr. Rubottom's foundation to endow me with a passion to know the historical and linguistic depths of the biblical text. More pivotal still was his invitation for me to assist him at a week of prayer he gave to the students of Mount Vernon Academy in Ohio. There, as impromptu spiritual counselor, I learned the joy of service in the nurture and formation of young people. It changed my life. Prior to this experience, my double theology and history major had reflected my design to become a minister and a lawyer—to specialize in religious liberty work—and thus defend the Adventist Remnant from encircling dark forces of the last days. During the week with Zamora, teaching and nurture of my younger fellow disciples began to emerge as my calling.

Then I received the gift of a group of young ministers scattered through the Columbia Union who departed from their normal rounds of pastoral duties to plan and execute a series of weekend retreats they called "Quest." The leaders, Ray Greenley and Clarence Schilt, had been schoolmates of my older brother and sister, and they were happy to recruit their friends' kid brother. I was pleased and surprised that two conference presidents, Elders Bob Follett and Don Reynolds, also accepted invitations to these meetings.

The Quest retreats were near ecstasies of spiritual communion. The legacy I received were the mysterious and inexhaustible scriptural images of the Church as the Body of Christ through which came the gifts of the Spirit. I found the biblical language with which to speak of what I felt called to be. I was to be one of the teachers whom the Spirit gave for the building up of the Body

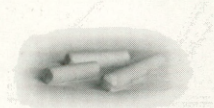
Photo: Courtesy of A. Gregory Schneider



Left to right: Greg Schneider as a freshman at CUC, September 1967; in the Behavioral Science Department at Pacific Union College, ca. 1998. Below: CUC 1969 and 1970 yearbooks.

of Christ. Of course, these metaphors had been lying there in the letters of Paul for nearly two millennia, but it took the profound spiritual intimacies I enjoyed with friends to bring them to life. Once, the Church had seemed to me mostly a club where belonging depended on assent to a list of required beliefs and conformity to a set of demanded behaviors. This "dry bones" idea was now wrapped around with the body and blood of Jesus Christ and the Church became a means of grace to me.

I have named only a few people to represent a wide, dense network of family, friends, teachers, and, yes, preachers who formed me spiritually. They created a lattice of very personal ties among concrete human beings, and they taught me how true spiritual formation is done in its very human actuality and mortal fragility. I thrived amid bonds of trust that these people and many others before and around them labored faithfully to build. I have learned also,





however, how easy it is to break down such bonds. This rich, vital moral and spiritual ecology that was Seventh-day Adventism in Takoma Park in the 1960s had been wounded, and most of the wounds were self-inflicted.

The other side of my story, then, is of feeling beleaguered, fearful, and lonely—a set of feelings that at times seemed to envelope the community like a toxic smog, hard to see or to talk about, but tangible nonetheless, and suffocating. In this part of the story, the ordained Seventh-day Adventist clergy, especially those in ecclesiastical administration, played a major role. Now, after more than thirty years, I can finally name that spiritually poisonous atmosphere more precisely. It was the feeling of being watched by an apprehensive and controlling presence; of having to fight for breath in a miasma of disapproving surveillance.

An image that appeared on the cover of *Ministry* magazine during my college years conveys the flavor of much of the trouble. It was a photograph of a steel trap, gaping jaws set to snap shut on the hand that took the bait. The bait? A scroll of paper wrapped in ribbon and labeled, “Ph.D.” It seemed funny, at first, until I saw Ph.D.’s and others who were my mentors subjected to the effects of the fear, ignorance, and

Clockwise from top center: Winton H. Beaven; Greg Schneider as a senior at Columbia Union College; Urban Service Corps featured in 1970 Columbia Union College yearbook; Desmond Ford. Inset: Gordon A. Madgwick.

arrogance the magazine cover reflected.

Gordon Madgwick was completing his Ph.D. in English literature as he served as Columbia Union College’s dean of students. As student association vice president and then president, I had many dealings with him and benefited mightily from his extraordinary energy, discipline, and loving respect for the young people to whom he ministered. His example and his counseling, more than any other’s, confirmed me in my calling to serve God and his Seventh-day Adventist people in the teaching ministry.

That was the 1960s, however, and the college board, heavily populated by ex officio ministerial administrators, demanded reassurances or crackdowns on rumored worldly behaviors by college young people. Dean Madgwick had to spend undue time justifying recent college decisions to allow women to wear pants and men to wear beards. Apparently, pants and hair were weighty moral issues at a time when the body counts were mounting in Vietnam and the Civil Rights movement was crescendoing to an angry peak in the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

College president Winton Beaven took time to explore with his students the spirit of these turbulent times using the “hook” of Bob Dylan, the Beatles, and Simon and Garfunkel. He helped us to discern where in the lyrics and in current events the Spirit of God was moving us and where a hostile spirit lurked. One of the denomination’s finest public speakers, his addresses to students more than once elicited standing ovations. I have recently recalled such scenes with another middle-aged colleague and seen him shake his head in bewildered wonder. In his days of student leadership, he had experienced the college president as mostly a nuisance and obstruction. He could hardly believe that any student body had in a college president what Columbia Union College had: an effective spiritual friend and guide.

Bill Loveless also provided profound spiritual guidance in sponsoring the Urban Service Corps, a tutoring program for inner-city children that helped us respond in positive service, rather than fear and revulsion, during the assassinations, riots, fires, and war in the late 1960s. Many defenders of the faith in pulpit and conference office, however, denounced this program,

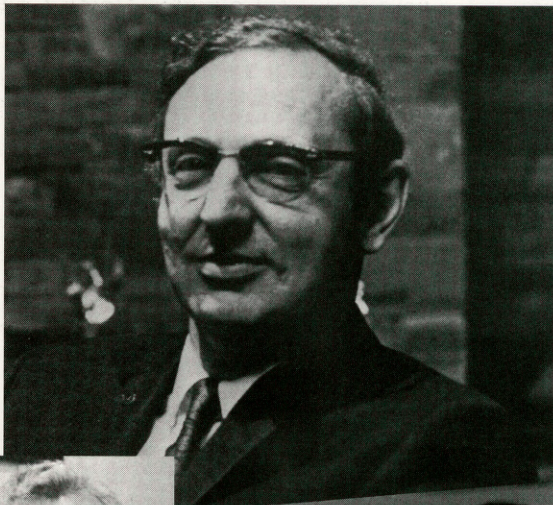
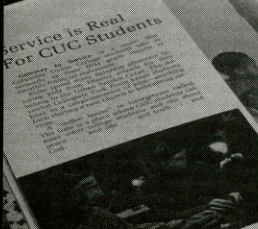
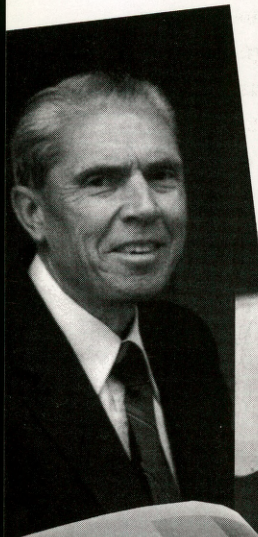
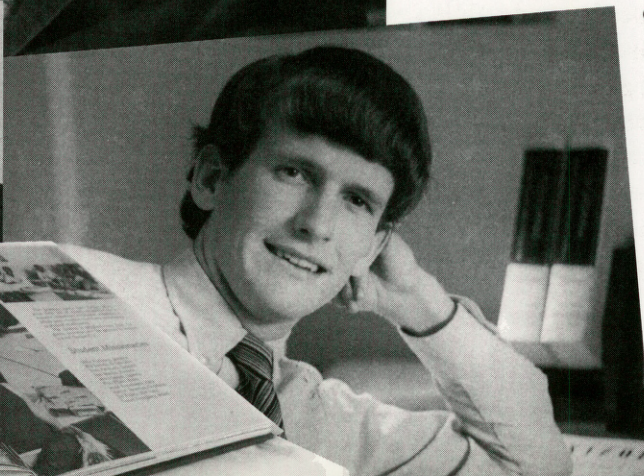


Photo: Columbia Union College





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ostensibly because the tutoring in secular subjects was done on Sabbath. Jesus's question about whether it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath seemed not to occur to them.

The dean of women at Columbia Union College, Betty Howard, labored as effectively as these men to elicit and celebrate the gifts and energy of dozens of CUC students, men and women alike. "Come on in and talk a while," she used to say to me. When I sat down in her office, the dozens of snapshots of my fellow students on her bulletin board told me that this midwife of the Spirit had many children. Nevertheless, talking with her made me feel special and realize that in pursuing my studies at this Christian college, I was becoming part of something special. She was as strong a shaper of the spiritual life on our campus as any of the men I have mentioned, and, like them, utterly free of pious cliché or rigid dogma in guiding young people.

The ministerial hierarchy of the Columbia Union, however, seemed blind to these good workings of the Spirit. Instead of lending their own discernment and support to Columbia Union College's quest for the deeper matters of the law and the Spirit, they saw to it that the college campus was "cleansed." It was a bitter and wounding time for those of us in student leadership. Our mentors were gone—Beaven from the presidency, Madgwick from the dean of students' office, Loveless from Sligo Church, Dean Howard from Halcyon Hall. We who had loved and admired them were left not only with the grief of loss, but also with angry questions about how persons who had done so much to lead us to Christ and tie us to his church could be subject to such unrelenting attack and rejection from the Church's leadership.

The distrusting gaze of what we took to be "the Church" made it difficult to grieve our loss cleanly, and thus doubly difficult to welcome those who followed our mentors in their respective offices. These were dedicated people of talent and goodwill who did the best they could, and we student leaders did the best we could to work with them. But the pall of doubt bred a series of misunderstandings and conflicts, helping to make my senior year feel like a limping endurance contest, rather than the bold sprint to the finish it might have been.

When it came to deciding what to do next with my life, the weight of ministerial watchfulness helped push me away from accepting a well-funded invitation from Andrews University to pursue a master's degree in religion. I chose instead the University of Chicago Divinity School, where I could pursue my interest in a field called "Religion and Psychological Studies." I felt I simply had to get out of what I was by then calling "the Adventist ghetto."

It was not an easy choice, for I had internalized much of Adventism's culture of surveillance and thus doubted myself as well as the Church and the world. The doubt and fear intensified as several watchful church leaders warned me I was risking not only my future career in the Church, but also the very integrity of my faith. Nightmares of devil-like figures assaulting me haunted my sleep in my first months of graduate work. An undercurrent of insecurity and suspicion tainted my relationships with professors and students in the divinity school. This was a spiritual legacy of the same church that had gifted me with a love of the Word and a sense of calling as a teacher.

The echoes of Columbia Union College's purge, moreover, were awakened in my spirit at the beginning of my teaching career. My mentor and now colleague, Gordon Madgwick, was once again forced from office, this time the office of academic dean, because he and President Jack Cassel had risked welcoming Desmond Ford to the Pacific Union College campus. Ford's first year at Pacific Union College was also my rookie year as a college teacher. While I struggled to find my feet as a teacher of social science and religion, this upright, charismatic, and, to some, curiously abrasive man drew down on himself and his colleagues the wrath of American perfectionist Adventism.

The fury of Ford's detractors helped create an atmosphere where secret tape recordings, back channel reports to church administrators and editors, and even charges of demon possession all flourished. Any means seemed legitimate if, in the end, he and anyone associated with him might be silenced. In the charade



of the Glacier View retreat, he was.

It was a move that blighted the optimism with which I had begun my teaching and my membership in a new community of learning. The community of surveillance had returned, and with it the toxic smog of distrust and doubt. Conversation partners who had sharpened my wits and broadened my awareness fell victim to the purge politics. I saw immediate family members and intimate friends whose spirits had been enlivened by Ford's message of freedom in Christ flung back into spiritual depression and self-doubt. Many colleagues lost their jobs simply because rumors among the constituency caused enrollment to plunge.

In such a setting, the building of bonds of trust, the nurture of collegiality, the cross-fertilization of minds dedicated to Christ and to the pursuit of truth all tended to take a lower priority than social and emotional survival tactics. We learned to leave each other alone and thus reduce risks from prying eyes and ill reports. It was an atmosphere far removed from the sweet spirit of the Body of Christ that I had tasted with my young ministerial friends in the days of our Quest retreats. As I struggled to breathe in it, I groped for ways to remain faithful to my calling and hoped that events like those that generated it would not be repeated.

But there have been rumblings of yet another purge. A self-published book by a Seventh-day Adventist brother deals ostensibly with the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture and also deals harshly with distinguished SDA theologians with whom the author disagrees. The obvious agenda of the book is opposition to the full equality of women in ministry and church life. This book has served as a catalyst to yet another effort to "cleanse" a religion department, this time at Walla Walla College. So far, the move to a wholesale purge has not succeeded. Nevertheless, as I have witnessed the suffering of these friends and

colleagues, I have felt old wounds from twenty and thirty years back begin to throb.

The pain is now assuaged a bit because I have very recently learned of dramatic repentance and reconciliation between church administration and religion faculty at Walla Walla College. I will note, nevertheless, that there are people who used to be members of that close fellowship of religion teachers who have felt compelled to move on. Glad as I am of the healing at Walla Walla, I cannot help but ask when and where the next breakout of clerical suspicion and purge politics will occur.

The answer, apparently, is that we will institutionalize these tendencies. Every religion teacher, eventually perhaps every teacher of any kind, will be kept on a short leash, forced to prove his or her good faith every five years regardless of past records of faithfulness in service to the Church and its educational institutions. The smog of surveillance will now be generated continually.

If I could converse closely with those who have conceived the IBMTE, I would want to say this:

"Brothers, you are not my superiors. I am not your subordinate. We are all equally members of the Body of Christ. Your influence, by virtue of your position, is more extensive than mine, but it is in like measure attenuated in its capacity to elicit the spiritual gifts of the rising generation. Where I live no 'dynamic theological unity' has ever been promoted by the Church's inquisitorial supervision of its schools, unless it be the unity of shared suffering.

"Your lack of trust and respect for me and for my colleagues disrupts the intense and delicate work that only people in our positions can do. The IBMTE is in essence a tool of power and control. As such, it is no more appropriate for creating the kind of unity that nurtures gifts and confirms callings than a hammer is for painting portraits.

"As an expression of the teaching 'organ' of the Body, I would plead with your pastoral administrative 'organ' not to institutionalize behaviors that have in the past wounded the Body and left long-term toxic effects. Please, let us find a way to avoid further hurt. Even better, let us find a way actually to build a 'strong partnership' like that spoken of in your statement of purpose for the IBMTE."

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