

NOTEWORTHY



An Army of One (Thousand, Two Hundred, and Twenty-Nine Possible Evangelists)

By Alexander Carpenter

I've been to more potlucks, picnics, and get-togethers organized around the idea that we're all going to die than I care to count. Not that I'm trivializing the Apocalypse; I'm sure the end of the world will involve a lot of wailing and gnashing of teeth. But in my experience, talking about the end of the world is a proven way to make friends.

—Sarah Vowell in
Take the Cannoli (2000)

The other weekend, the General Youth Conference (GYC) arrived at the corporate heart of Sacramento, California. Kicking it off with the opening address on Wednesday night, twenty-four-year-old GYC president Israel Ramos pointed out that “although we’ve been living in the time of the end for awhile now, we are getting closer and closer to the end of time.”

Near the middle of the industrial gray convention hall sat twenty-one-year-old Andrew, sporting a crew cut, a tan Carhart coat, and paint-flecked pants. When a later speaker asked everyone to pull out their Bibles, Andrew—an Adventist since age three—pulled out his Palm Pilot

and began to read along. Working in the house-siding business in Spirit Lake, Idaho, Andrew and a buddy had driven down to GYC to listen, he said, and learn more about God and to see some friends.

The conference had just over one thousand, two hundred, and twenty-nine registrants, with weekend attendance near sixteen hundred, so the chances were good that one could see a few friends under the age of thirty. Attendees and speakers flew in from Austria, Norway, Singapore, Australia, Iceland, Canada, Thailand, and the United Kingdom. Sponsored by Michigan Conference Public Campus Ministries and ASI Missions, the GYC worked like the amalgamated offspring of an ASI convention and a General Conference session, with 3ABN broadcasting the evening and Sabbath meetings. This was the third annual General Youth Conference, and this year’s theme was “Carry the Light” and almost everything tied to evangelism. And the underlying message of that evangelism was to save the world in order to hasten its end.

The conference featured sermons by Doug Batchelor and Mark Finley and workshops—“A Way to Reach Out and Still Maintain Our Uniqueness,” “Relationship Evangelism,” “Health Evangelism,” “How to Share Your Faith,” and “How to Give a Bible Study.”

Witnessing was the chosen expression of faith. The conference combined theory and praxis, as the weekend culminated in hundreds of attendees spending Sabbath afternoon canvassing Sacramento for Bible study contacts.

General Conference president Jan Paulsen flew in on Thursday for a quick question-and-answer period and to deliver a noon speech. Questions ranged from queries about his favorite veggie food (whatever his wife cooks), to what to do about segregated conferences (nothing, as they give more people leadership opportunities). Many in the audience “amened” during his answer to the question regarding “professors at our institutions who don’t uphold the distinctive doctrines of our church.” Paulsen pointed out that this is the price we pay for freedom. He asked, if you don’t like what is being presented, why don’t you go somewhere else?

The seventeen-member GYC board is a mix of recent graduates from the University of Washington, Princeton, Brandeis University, and the University of Michigan, as well as staff at Weimar Institute and Ouachita Hills Academy and College, a few pastors, an Andrews University professor, and a conference president, among others. Four of the seven members of the Executive Committee have attended

self-supporting schools either in academy or in college.

In a break-out session on Christian leadership, Justin McNeilus, a Southern Adventist University student and budding evangelist, paraded several good-looking fellow students before a room packed with sixty-eight attendees. As each one told his or her story of preaching on Adventist doctrine, Justin told them to look around the room. "Is there anyone here you see, who couldn't preach an evangelistic series," he asked. Each one said "no."

In another session, Eugene, an instructor at Ouachita Hills College, logically answered questions from attendees on Revelation and the Spirit of Prophecy. He explained that many Adventists misunderstand the Ellen White statement where she refers to her writings as a lesser light. Citing the passage from memory, he asked rhetorically, "Can inspiration be less? It either is or is not." He assured the audience that he had read through all the Web sites attacking Ellen White and had never found a valid claim against her.

Among the thirty-six or so promotional booths, a dental student from Loma Linda University advertised Restoration, a ministry to call existing Adventists to a higher standard. At another, a recent convert from the World Wide Church of God handed out brochures for "Total Onslaught: A Revelation Series." Nearby, Fred, whose ministry advertises itself as "ASI's first born," shared that every problem point in Christianity comes from Jews. Although stating that he is not personally anti-Semitic, he pointed out that he sees problems with Judaism's proto-socialism. He then recom-

mended a book by Charles Colson. At the Uchee Pines Institute booth (less than \$3 thousand to become a Lifestyle Educator or a Lifestyle Counselor), a younger Calvin



explained in light southern drawl that if Adventism had stayed true to the health message we probably would have cured cancer by now.

On Sabbath, everyone seemed to be going somewhere, except for the in-house Starbucks *baristas*. The Adventist young people were tobacco and cuss-word free, carrying Bibles and cell phones, dressed in suits or baggy pants or hoodies, and displaying more jean jumpers than could be seen at a Texas quilting bee. Incredibly diverse rows of young Asian-American youth groups and newly married couples were ubiquitous. Onstage, the odds were that the younger the speaker, the less white he (no women gave sermons) would be.

Stephanie, one of three students studying at C.A.M.P.U.S. (Center for Adventist Ministry to Public University Students) said that she finally feels she has found purpose that was previously missing in her life. After studying English at Andrews University, Newbold College, and then Eastern Michigan University, she is taking a year off to learn the tools of witnessing and to evangelize students around Ann Arbor.

Over and over, the speakers suggested that this evangelism had

a purpose: to bring the end of the world faster so that Jesus would come. During his Sabbath sermon, Doug Batchelor screened the newest offering of Amazing Facts, a digitally affected, Jerry Bruckheimeresque DVD about the end of the world, *Final Events*. This, he noted, can be used for evangelism.

In for a quick but popular visit on Thursday, President Paulsen pointed out that being an Adventist is a voluntary thing; that ours is a community made up of individuals. Pausing, he leaned nearer to this young throner: "Remember you are dealing with people, not just technical deliverers of information," he said. "As you carry the light, make sure that you're not only right, but that you deliver the compassionate concern of Christ."

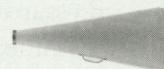
Alexander Carpenter handles special projects for *Spectrum* and the Association of Adventist Forums.

Twenty-Five Years after Glacier View and Who Cares?

By Gregory Schneider

October 27, 2004, was the twenty-fifth anniversary of Desmond Ford's address to the Association of Adventist Forums chapter at Pacific Union College, the event that led to "Glacier View," shorthand for a process of heresy hunting and scapegoating in which Ford's gifts as pastor and teacher were lost to the Church.

More was lost than Ford's gifts.

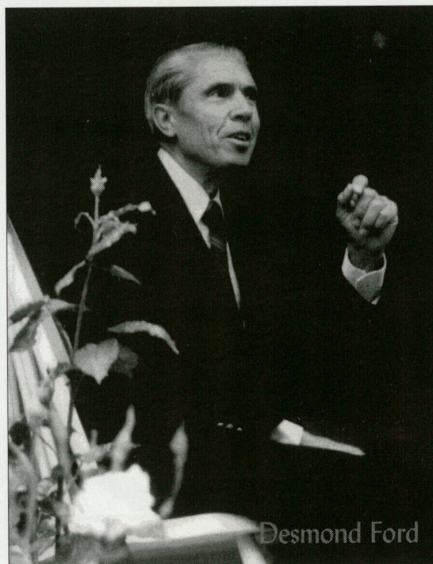


The purge mentality of the times, however, prevented those of us who were around back then from dealing with the full depth of the losses. That sense of unfinished business was why, perhaps, some colleagues urged me and other veterans of those days to do something in commemoration. In the end, I was recruited to lead an hour-long discussion on the topic for PUC's Choir Room Sabbath School on October 30, 2004.

The room was full that morning, and some people were sitting on the floor. My mentor and first boss, Adrian Zytoskee, now retired after finishing his career as a senior vice president in the Adventist health care system, came late, and he sat up front in one of the extra chairs that someone foraged to accommodate the overflow. Adrian, with characteristic dry wit, reminded us that he, not Ford, was the author of the title of the address: "The Investigative Judgment: Theological Milestone or Historical Necessity."

Zytoskee had feared that few people would come hear a talk framed in a less provocative way. He and Wayne Judd, a religion professor at that time, had been drafted by administrators and colleagues on campus to lead the new local chapter of the Forum, and they were laboring to build interest in the local Forum's activities. When close to one thousand people showed up in Irwin Hall chapel, it had seemed to them that their labors were succeeding beyond their imaginings.

Almost completely unimaginable, however, was the aftermath, when fury and outrage among segments of the Seventh-day Adventist subculture pressured college administrators to assent to the disastrous plan to place



Ford on a "study leave," in order to get him off our campus and let him "prepare" for Glacier View. Zytoskee's judgment was the same at our Sabbath School as it had been twenty-five years earlier: allowing the study leave, as well as other strategic errors, helped create and exacerbate the crisis of those times. The mess was avoidable, not inevitable.

The room was full of middle-aged and older folk who had known the mess firsthand or had friends who had kept them informed. We feasted on Zytoskee's story as both reminiscence and catharsis. As the energy in the room expanded—and a torrent of inquiry, anecdote, and analysis began to flow—Pastor John Hughson observed that there was not time enough to do all the discussion people might want to do. Would I meet him there in the Choir Room at 3:00 p.m. for a more leisurely forum? he asked. It was a clear crisp autumn day in Angwin. I could not imagine people giving up the afternoon to yet another theological talkfest, but I also could not say No.

As I drove back in the afternoon, I pictured myself meeting only the

pastor and maybe his wife, and saying, as Desmond Ford almost always did when one-on-one theologizing was in order, "Let's go for a walk!" I did get in a good walk that afternoon, but alone, and not until just before dark. There were twenty or twenty-five people in the room who were good for another hour and a half or so of talking it all over.

In age and experience and outlook they were much like the larger crowd of the morning: Most were middle-aged and older, most remembered the perfectionist theology that had been Desmond Ford's nemesis, and none voiced affirmation or support for it.

Many remarked on the paradox that the Church twenty-five years later had come to agree with the heart of the "heretic's" message: assurance of salvation through faith in an "alien" forensic righteousness. They felt that perfectionist gospels had largely disappeared. Others reminded us that there were a lot of congregations outside our comfortable little college-and-hospital enclave where Adventist perfectionism was very much alive and well.

Now, some time after the discussion, I am wondering if one of the main differences between twenty-five years ago and present times is that the disputing factions have found it expedient, for now, to leave each other alone. We have, perhaps, a de facto, if uneasy, Adventist theological pluralism. And then there is the generational pluralism.

The three or four college students who had braved our crowd of oldsters in the morning clearly had had enough and did not return. They, more than any of the points of theology or church politics our group discussed, remain on my

mind as I write. They are on my mind not only because the students have been in my classes or in my home, but also because they had, and have, almost no idea what my age cohorts and I were talking about.

These are bright, thoughtful, inquisitive young adults, active in campus ministries and clubs, the kind of people we invest our hopes in when we think of the future of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America and beyond. Two of them sat on the floor in the back through the whole of the morning session and then came to me to ask who and what we were all talking about and why.

They had entered the room just as things were starting and walked right past the handouts I provided, one of which was designed to inform people who knew little or nothing about Desmond Ford, his message, or his opponents. They somewhat sheepishly observed that, yeah, college students typically do miss the handouts. Nevertheless, I have talked with them since they read my handout, and I have talked with some of their peers about this event a quarter century ago that can still so deeply engage my age mates and me.

The young people's lack of comprehension or interest is about more than just the "normal" American gap between generations. These are young people who do not quite know what Seventh-day Adventism has to do with who they are discovering themselves to be. They know about Ellen White and know that their church believes they ought to feel something about her, but they do not know what they ought to feel or why she or their allegiance to her or the movement she founded ought to be so important to them.

Some of them are rather deeply

annoyed at the combination of so much vague "ought" with so little clear "why." Words and phrases like *sanctuary* and *investigative judgment*, moreover, elicit just plain blank stares. At an even deeper level, the theological conflict of twenty-five years ago is something virtually incapable of engaging these students' minds and hearts—on either side of the divide that seemed so momentous to us then.

The "harvest principle" perfectionism that sees Christ waiting for his character to be perfectly reflected in his people before coming again makes little sense to these young people. Their experience, even when raised Seventh-day Adventist from infancy through elementary, secondary, and higher education, gives them few grounds to identify so strongly with an Advent remnant. They see no need to "perfect" their characters or to feel cosmically ashamed when they fall short.

They know they are preparing for careers, and they hope that maybe the Seventh-day Adventist Church will help them along with the career project, but the community of surveillance implied by this kind of perfectionism—if they have feelings about it at all—is something they want no part of.

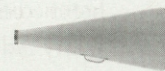
At the same time, the structure of guilt and forgiveness built into Desmond Ford's message of salvation by the forensic and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ finds few echoes in the consciousness of the young people I know. There is little quest for assurance of salvation, and virtually no sense of fear, godly or otherwise, in the face of a sovereign, transcendent God justly offended at the violation of his holy and perfect law.

They do know that they ought to have a "relationship" with God

and/or Jesus, but they are often as vague in their minds about what that means as they are about anything in their lives. They are deeply certain, however, that all these are intensely personal matters over which each individual is absolutely sovereign. Hence the conviction, widespread and growing year by year, that required religious service attendance of any kind at our college is not just an annoyance, but a deeply repugnant violation of a sacred space, the sanctuary of their hearts and minds.

I cannot but conclude that the long-term outcome of the controversy twenty-five years ago was to push us as a people irreversibly along this path of a highly individualized and subjectivized religiosity, and without benefit of the sufficiently plausible theological resources we might have had. When we scapegoated Desmond Ford, we sent an isolating, suffocating message to wide segments of our people that conversations among the priesthood of all the believers must avoid anything so unsettling.

We also suppressed the issues about the nature of inspiration that were raised not only by Ford's work, but also by the scholarship that contextualized the writings of Ellen White and demonstrated how profoundly human her theological constructions were. To face unsettling truths can lead to a loss of some meanings, but also, for people of faith, hope, and love, to the retrieval and reconstruction of meanings more plausible and durable for having been tested. The testing ground ought to have been an earnest set of conversations in which a trusting



community of believers allows us to be mutually priests to one another.

And so on Sabbath afternoon, October 30, 2004, when a long-time colleague asked me to interpret to the group what the young people I knew were thinking and feeling about the faith, since it was not the issues that had so galvanized us twenty-five years ago, I stammered and groped for an answer. And when a student the next Monday in my afternoon seminar asked me how the Sabbath School had gone, I stammered and groped again.

But I told the truth as best I knew it, and I confessed that my generation and I had not really done the work that would have provided them with more and better meanings whereby to find themselves and construct careers and callings as Christians and Seventh-day Adventists. They were and continue to be very gracious in allowing that, although my confession may not be enough, it is something.

Gregory Schneider teaches at Pacific Union College, where he is a professor of religion and behavioral science.

Leaving

By Ezrela Cheah

While recently visiting with friends I found our conversation drifting toward religion. One friend's church was nearing the end of an evangelism series. She observed that many attendees had Adventism in their background and that many once-upon-a-time Adventists seemed to live in the region.

Being beyond the fringe of traditional Adventism myself, I merely listened to my friends discuss—as so many Adventists love to—the whys

and hows of the departing faithless.

“Perhaps it's our hedonistic culture,” some pondered.

These were not baby boomers fretting over the exodus of youth from the Church. These were peers of mine who may have sampled the dark side but had hurried back when the birth of children or world events spurred personal soul searching.

“Maybe they have only known the head knowledge but not a heart experience,” another friend proposed.

I was tempted to muster up past fervor of my own and raise questions that I currently have.

A Presbyterian-turned Catholic in the room interjected a different perspective. People vary; needs vary. Her whole family, on an individual basis, found itself embracing a different denomination. What drew members in? The mysticism, the reverence, the meditation, the tradition. Would these same factors repel some people? Probably.

All of this set me thinking about the concept of leaving. Jesus talked about leaving, notably about a runaway boy. What do I know about runaways? Not much, to be sure, but here's what I've recently learned.

During the past month, I began volunteering at an agency that reaches out to homeless youths. The agency has impressed me with the comprehensive nature of its services and the complete acceptance it expresses throughout its program, not just in policies, but also in everyday practice, in the little things.

Here is what I have learned: 90 percent of homeless youth report violence in their homes, and 30 percent are sexual minorities (gay, lesbian, bi- or transsexual, or questioning). It should be noted that these youths most likely experience exclusion among peers at school,

and rejection by society and family. Thirty-six percent of homeless girls report sexual abuse. Not all homeless youth leave home by choice; some are forced to do so by family, left behind, or raised homeless. Is it any wonder that so many choose to leave?

The history of Christianity has had bright spots and dark spots, and so has Adventism. Perhaps those who leave the Church have lived in the dark spots. Or perhaps, as with me, their understandings have changed.

For example, when growing up I took the word *liberal* to be an unkind adjective used to describe certain differing religious views. Now I consider myself liberal by many standards. Observe that with the change of two letters the word *liberal* becomes *liberty*. Jesus was a liberal who brought liberty, a social reformist of his day, and certainly a runaway from the local religious mainstream.

Some of my friends who discuss religious runaways will no doubt take classes on how to combine convincing scriptural arguments. Others will seek to improve the tone of local church politics by becoming actively involved in it. Given these differences, I'm sure the conversation that started me thinking about runaways will continue.

As it does, my friends will still be my friends, though we will continue to see the same picture differently. And I will continue to wonder: Do people leave the Church or does the Church leave people?

Ezrela Cheah graduated from Southwestern Adventist University in May 2000 with a bachelor's degree in education and currently practices therapeutic massage in Portland, Oregon.

The Other Side of Paradise

By Herbert Ford

Pitcairn Island, a two-square-mile volcanic dot in the South Pacific Ocean, made headlines around the world last fall because of a trial in which six of seven men who were accused were found guilty of rape and indecent assault on young girls—acts said to have been committed over some thirty-five years, though none had occurred in the past six years. An additional six Pitcairn men who no longer live on the island are slated to stand trial on similar charges early this year.

Although commonly called an “Adventist island” by many, Pitcairn has never been an all-Adventist island. Today only a small fraction of its population of about fifty belongs to the faith.

Seventh-day Adventists first became associated with Pitcairn in 1876, when a package of Adventist literature sent by Adventist pioneers James White and J. N. Loughborough arrived by ship from San Francisco. A decade later, Adventist layman John I. Tay taught the islanders the principles of the Adventist faith. In 1890, the majority but not the whole of the adult population was baptized upon the arrival of the Church’s missionary schooner, the *Pitcairn*.

Pitcairn is the smallest and most remote of several British-controlled “overseas territories.” The island is governed from Wellington, New Zealand, some 3,500 miles away, although the Pitcairn Island Council is the on-island governing body.

Events leading to the recent Pitcairn trials got their start in 1999 from an act of consensual sex between a New Zealand man and a fifteen-year-old Pitcairn girl. A Pitcairn trial was

held and the New Zealander found guilty of sex with a minor. During a tour of duty on Pitcairn shortly after that trial, Gail Cox, a London policewoman, learned in kitchen table conversations with Pitcairn women of the general practice of early-age sexual activity on the island. Policewoman Cox relayed her information to her superiors in London. They, in turn, informed government officials, who ordered the investigations that have led to the trials.

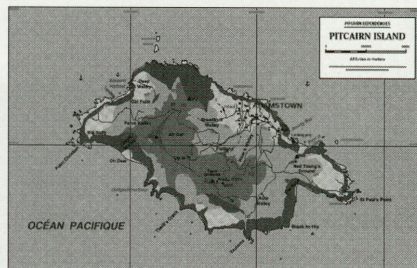
The islanders say the trials could have been handled by the island’s own British-sanctioned laws without the huge cost of importing all the paraphernalia of downtown London justice to Pitcairn. Pitcairn law, they point out, has seen hundreds of trials held successfully on the island during the past century.

As the investigations progressed, a former Adventist pastor on the island publicly reported to the Church’s South Pacific Division headquarters that there had been widespread sexual abuse on Pitcairn; his intimation was that other pastors had turned a blind eye to the goings-on. Other former pastors denied knowing of such abuse and said they did not feel their pastoral duties included unrequested investigative activity into the private lives of the islanders.

Early in 2004, the island’s governor decided that Lyle Burgoyne, who was serving as both Pitcairn’s Adventist pastor and as its medical officer (he being a trained nurse), should no longer be the island medical officer. His departure following the end of his term of service left Pitcairn without a pastor at a time of growing island tension.

An offer was made by Religion Department faculty of Pacific Union College to solicit for a well-grounded, unplaced theology graduate from a

U.S. Adventist college or university to be oriented and sent to Pitcairn. The offer was turned down. Not until the trials actually began in October,



months after Burgoyne’s departure, did a representative from the South Pacific Division headquarters arrive on the island, along with the large cadre of judges and defense and prosecution lawyers, come to conduct the trials. He left Pitcairn after three weeks to be replaced shortly thereafter by a pastor who is expected to complete a regular two-year pastorate.

The international legal, logistical, and social complexity surrounding the Pitcairn trials defies explanation short of a book. Until the year 2000, a difference relating to the age of consensual sex existed between Pitcairn law, which dates back to 1838, and British law, under which those recently found guilty were tried. The convicted Pitcairners feel they have been found guilty by a law that did not govern their lives at the time the acts of which they are accused were committed.

Additionally, many of the islanders felt betrayed by their governor’s decision to invite news reporters to the island to cover the October trials. This move, they believe, held all Pitcairners—the innocent along with those found guilty—up to worldwide public hate, ridicule, and contempt.

Herbert Ford directs the Pitcairn Islands Study Center at Pacific Union College.