

Discussed: Desmond Ford, Robert Folkenberg, magic lanterns,
Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventist News Network, *Australian Sentinel* and
Herald of Liberty, *Adventist Review*, *Sow 1 Billion*, *Spectrum*

A Print-Driven Church

By Bruce Manners

From its beginnings the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been a print-driven church. Sociologist Bryan Wilson sees Adventism as the “sect with the largest and most diversified literary output.”¹ Jonathan Butler suggests that “the history of Adventism had been a matter of ‘publish or perish,’” and that as far as church organization and “ecclesiastical bureaucracy was concerned, in the beginning was the word.”²

Butler's tongue-in-cheek comment articulates a truth that print has been a primary strategy the Church has used not only to expand and establish a presence around the globe, but also to inform and educate its own members. Print has served the Church well and been its major communication media, at least until recent times, when use of the electronic media has gained a foothold.

Print still plays a significant role, particularly in informing and educating members. The Sabbath School *Bible Study Guides* remain the most widespread teach-

ing aid the Church has, and the *Adventist Review* in its various languages and forms remains “a prime source for both the history and thought of Adventism.”³

Millerite Beginnings

The Seventh-day Adventist Church grew out of an apocalyptic revival of the 1830s and 1840s in the United States, often named after its most prominent advocate, William Miller. Simply stated, the Millerite movement predicted that Jesus would return about 1843 or 1844, before it set-



tled on the specific date of October 22, 1844.

Without the use of print media, the Millerites would have had limited impact. Fortuitously—providentially, some would say—the movement coincided with the growth and popularity of print. New York dailies were first published in 1832, and with the introduction of penny papers New York City, which had a population of some 300 thousand in 1836, newspaper circulations in the city totaled 70 thousand.⁴

Religious publications were popular. One clergyman noted in 1839 that “a well-conducted religious periodical is like a thousand preachers, flying in almost as many directions, by means of horses, mail-stages, steam boats, railroad cars, ships, etc., etc.”⁵ An 1850 New York state census found that religious periodicals exceeded a quarter of the total newspaper circulation.⁶

Without print, the Millerite movement would not have had the impact it did, and print was used to its fullest extent. “Probably no other religious movement or denomination ever produced so vast a quantity of printed matter at that period in so short a time.”⁷

It was Miller’s partnership with Joshua Himes in 1840 that took a local success and turned it into a national movement.⁸ Himes, “well versed in the art of promoting an idea,” immediately “embraced the nineteenth century technology available to him in an effort to tell the world about Miller’s parousia.”⁹ The first Millerite periodical, *Signs of the Times*, became the movement’s leading publication. Adventist historian LeRoy Froom charts forty-four known Millerite periodicals, their distribution area, and circulation, some with a second life under a new name. He suggests that by May 1844, five million copies of them had been distributed in the United States, a nation of seventeen million at that time.¹⁰

The Millerites aimed to send their publications to “every reachable Christian community on earth.”¹¹ There is evidence that Miller’s work was studied in England before he achieved more than a local reputation in the United States. England was targeted later—Miller and Himes are believed to have spent almost one thousand dollars supplying literature to inquirers and Millerite preachers working there.¹² However, with the uneventful passing of October 22, 1844, “the presses were silent. There was no *Advent Herald*, no *Midnight Cry*. There were no meetings to attend. In their loneliness few desired to speak, for they were still in the world.”¹³

Adventists Continue to Emphasize Print

Enthusiasm for print was transferred to the founding group that became the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Several “ephemeral publications” appeared between 1846 and 1849, and a vision of Ellen White in November 1848 gave direction to the publishing program.¹⁴ She instructed husband James to print a “little paper.... From this small beginning it was shown to me to be like streams of light that went clear around the world.”¹⁵

In July the following year, James White and the *Present Truth* became “the voice of Sabbatarian Adventism.”¹⁶ *Present Truth* and *Advent Herald* were combined in November the following year to become the *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*. For many years the *Review* was “the church,” with most Sabbatarians scattered about, lacking church buildings or regular preachers. The *Review* helped members gain “a sense of belonging.”¹⁷ Some readers prized *Review* next to the Bible because it nurtured their spiritual lives.¹⁸

Ellen White was a print enthusiast and had a global vision linked with her interest in health and education: “In all parts of the earth they [God’s qualified people] are to establish sanitariums, schools, publishing houses, and kindred facilities for the accomplishing of His work,” she wrote.¹⁹ As the Church spread around the globe, it established publishing houses on every continent. The *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* lists fifty-five. These are autonomous, linked under the umbrella of the Church, but expected to produce their own literature.

This stands in marked contrast with the Jehovah’s Witnesses, probably the premier religious organization to use the printed page, whose publishing is centralized and controlled from its Brooklyn, New York, headquarters. David A. Reed, a critic and former Jehovah’s Witness, describes those headquarters as a “mini Vatican of thirty-odd buildings,” with a Writing Committee that determines the content of publications. More than a billion pieces of literature come from the Brooklyn plant each year.²⁰

One Witness publication, *The Truth that Leads to Eternal Life*, has had a circulation of 115 million. Each printing of the *Watchtower* runs in excess of ten million, which must make it one of the most widely circulated magazines.²¹ James M. Penton argues that because of the way the *Watchtower* is distributed, vast quantities are never read, although Witnesses are each expected to read some three thousand pages of their literature each year. The Jehovah’s Witnesses have

almost one hundred branch offices around the world, many with small printing shops, but they are centrally controlled.²²

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States during its formative years depended on literature distribution. A Tract and Mission Society, begun in 1870 under Stephen Haskell, expanded quickly with the placement of books and literature. By the mid-1870s there were reports of Sabbath-keepers in various European nations, the southern

and periodicals,” he wrote.²⁶ Adventists landed in Sydney, Australia, on June 6, but based themselves in Melbourne, one reason being that the city had one of the largest libraries in the world.²⁷ There Adventists established the Bible Echo Publishing House, and by late 1885 a trial issue of *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times* rolled off the press. In January 1886, the first regular issue was published.

Along with a small number of workers, print was a major emphasis of the Church’s early initiative into the

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—S.N. Haskell

United States, Mexico, and Australia, with calls for literature from Scotland, Ireland, China, and New Zealand. The society sent publications to every mission station on the coast of Africa.²³ “[P]ublications upon present truth are called for by individuals in almost every nation under heaven where civilization exists,” reported Haskell.²⁴

Print as Mass-Media Tool

Print was the tool of choice as the early Adventist Church embarked on its mission to reach the world. It was a choice made out of necessity—it could be where Adventist members did not exist; and it could go where they could not. Print was the mass-media tool of the nineteenth century, and the Church used it extensively.

This use of print was well illustrated when Adventism first entered Australia and the South Pacific. Ellen White targeted Australia when she spoke of a January 3, 1875, vision at the Battle Creek church, Michigan. She told about printing presses in many foreign countries, and mentioned them printing periodicals, tracts, and books. When asked if she could name the countries, she said she had only been given the name of one, Australia.²⁵ Among the first Adventist missionaries to Australia ten years later were a printer and a literature evangelist.

The missionaries’ interest in print was shown when the group’s leader, Stephen Haskell, noted a discovery during a four-hour stopover in Auckland, New Zealand (June 1, 1885), that five hundred libraries existed in New Zealand. “We have reason to believe that every one of these would take our publications

Pacific. “It seems the part of wisdom to make use of the printing press as far as possible,” wrote E. H. Gates in October 1906.²⁸ These workers were among those described as “travelling salesmen. Their line consisted of tracts and books published by the Seventh-day Adventist publishing houses.”²⁹ Haskell soon persuaded newsagents to stock the *Bible Echo*. This outlet, the publication of pamphlets, and itinerant Adventist literature evangelists in New Zealand had one critic complain in 1892 that Adventist literature had achieved almost blanket coverage of the north island.³⁰

A supplement to the September 18, 1899, *Bible Echo* reported book sales up, with sales of forty-one thousand for the year. The star performer, *A Friend in the Kitchen*, was a best seller, with more copies than any other book on the market (seventeen thousand) in the twelve months that led up to June 30, 1899.³¹

Print became the tool of choice in the 1890s, when Sunday-keeping legislation became an issue, but grew more extensively when Australia began to draft its constitution. The *Australian Sentinel and Herald of Liberty* (later the *Southern Sentinel*) was distributed widely to people of influence since they were presumed to be “watchdog[s] over the religious portions of the Australian Constitution.”³²

Although few in number, members of the Adventist Church became the “organisational pivot of the anti- ‘recognition’ campaign” (the recognition of God in the Constitution), which found allies among secular-



ists who feared sectarian conflict.³³ Although the allies failed to prevent a recognition clause in the Constitution's preamble, they did claim "some direct influence" on its final shape with insertion of Section 116, which forbade the federal government from prohibiting free exercise of religion.³⁴

The Maturing of Adventist Print

The official Adventist print media supports and defends the Adventist Church and its mission and ethos, but there is recent evidence of its increased willingness to share information and to grapple with problems within the Church. The difference between reporting the dismissal of Desmond Ford and the resignation of Robert Folkenberg shows this shift and demonstrates the Church's recently enhanced understanding of public relations and communication theory and practice.

An Australian theology lecturer, Ford in 1980 was head of the theology faculty at Avondale College, Australia, but was serving at Pacific Union College, in California. While there, he was granted a leave of absence to research and prepare a statement on the "sanctuary and related issues," subjects of considerable

controversy.³⁵ Matters evolved and came to a head at Glacier View, Colorado, later that year, when a committee of 115 church leaders was invited to consider Ford's position. As a result, the Church dismissed Ford from the ministry and terminated him from church employ.

As could be expected, the reaction in the Church's official press supported the decision. In *Record*, the South Pacific Division's weekly church paper, the September 8, 1980, issue titled an article, "Ford document on sanctuary studied: variant views rejected." An eight-page insert told of the conference's deep spirituality and Ford's "Christian spirit" in his apology for inconveniencing the Church.³⁶ A reprint from the *Adventist Review* (Dec. 8) detected "remarkable" unity among those at Glacier View.³⁷

Author Laura Vance notes a different reaction, with Ford's dismissal causing divisiveness and protests from pastors, academics, and laity.³⁸ Many members turned to unofficial Adventist sources for information—to *Spectrum*, for instance. In the United States, *Evangelica* was established to promote Ford's views, and in Australia an underground network of information sharing became a cottage industry.³⁹ A sense of unfairness and uncertainty led people outside the Church's media

Chapters in the Story of Adventist Publications



The *Advent Review* predates the official organization of the Adventist church. Ellen White described the products of Adventist presses as streams of light circling the globe. Today books and magazines are printed for people of all ages.

to gain information. The Church's print communication failed to handle this kind of crisis effectively.

In contrast, Folkenberg's resignation from the General Conference presidency demonstrated more maturity. In January 1999, an ad hoc committee of nineteen members learned from a General Conference attorney about "information that raised significant ecclesiastical concerns about Pastor Folkenberg's dealings with [a plaintiff named] Mr. Moore" in a pending lawsuit.⁴⁰ As a result, a special General Conference Executive Committee was set for March 1 to consider the situation. On February 8, Folkenberg resigned, stating that the controversy was "detracting from God's work." "[T]o avoid pain and conflict to my family and the church I love, I am removing myself from the controversy," he declared.⁴¹

The Church claimed a strong desire to provide information "before any reports began to appear in the press ... that there would be no attempt at cover-up."⁴² The Adventist News Network (ANN), the General Conference e-mail and Web site news provider, became a major player. Folkenberg was given a voice and complained that news releases from church sources and in the public press left the impression that he had personally gained

from his dealings with Moore, which he denied.⁴³

At the same time, legal confidentiality limited access to information concerning the causes of Folkenberg's resignation, but a five-page document that listed the concerns backed up reassurances that "the concerns raised were real." "This is not a confidential document," said South Pacific Division president Laurie Evans, who offered it to church members on request, "but out of a pastoral concern for Pastor Folkenberg and his family we don't plan to publish it."⁴⁴

Unofficial Adventist publications did not have these same pastoral concerns. *Spectrum* published details of a convoluted and disastrous association Folkenberg and other church entities had with Moore over land dealings in California.⁴⁵ *Adventist Today* was less inhibited, maintaining that "stories of [Folkenberg's] questionable business deals abound."⁴⁶ Although official sources provided some evidence for action against Folkenberg, those who wanted specific details had to go elsewhere.

The lack of specific details—for "pastoral" reasons—within the Church's official news sources was perhaps expected. Church members may have appreciated the fact that not too much "dirty laundry" was aired. Indeed; after the report in *Adventist Today*, one reader suggested renaming it the *Adventist Enquirer*.⁴⁷ Importantly, enough information came through official channels to allow members a sense of the action's appropriateness.

However, the Church proved that it could move at speed in a crisis, and that speed was reflected in getting information out quickly to church members through official channels. The crisis helped demonstrate a new array of communication media developed over the previous few years, and the commitment of the Adventist Church to communication. The Internet became the main source of regularly updated news through ANN e-mail and postings on the General Conference Web site.⁴⁸ This crisis established ANN as an important news source within the Church.⁴⁹

Useful comparisons can be made from these two cases, but it is important to note first the most significant difference. Ford was perceived as challenging foundational beliefs of the Church, and in that sense the Church itself. For Folkenberg, the suspicion of mismanagement had little long-term impact on the Church due to his resignation and replacement—



and the perceived danger was smaller.

To gain further information during both crises church members could go outside official church sources. In Ford's case, it became a growth industry. For the Folkenberg case, the complexities of legal agreements and confidentiality clauses made it difficult reading. The response to Ford was print driven; to Folkenberg it was multimedia, featuring the latest technology. Significantly, Ford had no voice in official church sources after Glacier View, whereas Folkenberg

the 1920s, and "Faith for Today" and "It Is Written," produced for television in the 1950s.

Dispersing Adventist Media Centers around the world in nine countries encouraged continuation in media usage. The first evangelistic Net programs covered more countries than ever attempted by any organization. To illustrate their programs, public evangelists moved from the use of printed charts to magic lanterns to slide and movie presentations, and from there to hi-tech, computer-controlled, multimedia pro-

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not only had a voice, but also a voice of protest.

The twenty-year period between these two events had seen dramatic growth in the availability of different media that could share information quickly. There is a sense that in 1999 it was felt imperative that these be used to get the Church's viewpoint out before others did. By 1999, the Communication Department of the General Conference had been strengthened and expanded and those working in it had a good understanding of communications and ready access to church leaders.

In its print, the Church showed a dramatic difference in its approach to the two crises. The first was handled with minimal and unsatisfying levels of information. The Church handled the second with more openness and enough information for the decision to be accepted. Twenty years had made a difference, but the real test would have been another Ford-type situation that would have brought a far greater sense of danger to the Church than the Folkenberg crisis did.

Adventist Fascination with Media

Having accepted the commission to carry "the everlasting Good News ... to every nation, tribe, language, and people" (Rev. 14:6 NLT), the Adventists' *raison d'être*, the Church naturally developed fascination with new communication methods as they became available.⁵⁰ Most of those who experimented with the new media were individuals or groups within the Church rather than church leaders operating on an official level. Among such initiatives were the radio program the "Voice of Prophecy," well under way by the end of

grams and satellite downlinks.

The lesson from print is that, although proclamation of the gospel may lead the Church into the use of a variety of media to reach those outside its community, in the long term it tends to be used more for the nurture and education of those within. Even a cursory look at current English-language Adventist print around the world shows that the vast majority of printed products are aimed at an Adventist audience.

Gaining the support of members is a valid and worthy aim for any media use within an organization. In the Adventist Church, though, it tends to demonstrate a shift from the original enthusiasm and purpose. It would be interesting to do an analysis of the two worldwide Adventist television broadcasters—the unofficial 3ABN and the official Hope TV—to discover if this is already their destiny. Such orientation is measured better by who watches rather than what is broadcast.

In contrast, the Church has officially used the Internet mainly for informing members, ANN being a prime example even if its releases are also available as a secular news resource. Although Adventist Web sites tend to have a section for biblical and church teachings, their main role is to inform and nurture.

Unofficially, the Internet has been used by individuals and organizations in the Church for evangelism. Currently the Discover Bible Schools for the "Voice of Prophecy" receive 1.5 million hits a month and support 140 Bible schools in 80 languages. "It Is Written," which recently added BibleInfo.com under its umbrella, dreams "of the day when we get 3 million visitors a year, with 5,000 to 10,000 lay members serving as Bible instructors online."⁵¹

It is no surprise, then, that a Global Internet Evangelism Forum met at the General Conference offices in October 2004, to consider reaching the so-called iGeneration—"a new generation of seekers, one that may not be easily challenged by a book or tract." According to Timothy Korson of Southern Adventist University, the Church needs to move beyond the tactical use of technology to "achieve strategic advantage."⁵²

The Centralization of Media Production

Perhaps the greatest shift in Adventist media in the past couple decades has been the growing centralization of media production. This is understandable given the need for efficiency in both cost and production, and to have one voice, but inherent dangers must be addressed if the Church continues to adopt the "Jehovah's Witness model" of centralized production as opposed to the "Ellen White model."

Using print as an illustration, a new *Adventist Review* publication, *Adventist World*, is planned for introduction at the end of 2005. Announcing this publication, General Conference president Jan Paulsen said, "We think it is critical to the church, to the church's witness, to the unity of the church that we have a voice that can speak to the whole world church, with the same message to all."

Adventist Review editor William G. Johnsson said that *Adventist World* was designed to "foster the unity of the world Adventist family." The aim is to build faith and understanding of church doctrine and mission with regular articles covering doctrinal topics. Importantly, and recognizing one of the problems of a centralized production, he said contributors would largely be drawn from outside North America.⁵³

Despite this precaution, it is difficult to produce any media product where "one size fits all." The world and the Seventh-day Adventist Church are too diverse in a cultural sense, particularly with existing ethnic differences and with tribalism on the increase. Use of a common language will not overcome these differences. The Church may have the same "message to all," but the voice that currently speaks to its members through centralized media tends to have an American accent, without cultural roots in the many places it is received.

The exception to this caution may be with the Internet, where "people are more tolerant and open; there are no border lines."⁵⁴

A Future for Print?

Adventist print is currently in trouble. In 2004, Pacific Press halved its annual production of books from sixty to thirty. At the same time, Review and Herald laid off forty employees. Literature evangelism is struggling in most English-language areas, and sales of Sabbath School *Bible Study Guides* have dropped, in some cases dramatically.⁵⁵ *The Adventist Review* has for several years struggled to reach fifty thousand subscribers in its regular English-language editions.

Print cannot compete with the speed of the Internet or with other electronic media. This is obvious. Furthermore, production costs can be significantly lower with Internet products. However, print is not dead in the Adventist Church. The 2004 Sow 1 Billion project saw a billion invitations for Bible studies printed, which proved a boon for correspondence schools and online Bible schools. The 2004 Annual Council announced a plan to distribute two million Ellen White books over a five-year period, with an intermedia approach that involves study guides, CD-ROMS, and the Internet. The proposed *Adventist World* shows that the Church maintains its interest in print.

Each of these initiatives will keep the presses turning, but they are driven and financially supported by the corporate church body. Church member support, in purchasing Adventist print products, has lessened. Perhaps the way of the future, cross-media products, is already upon us with the best-selling Adventist books being written by evangelists who have achieved celebrity status through television programs.⁵⁶

The Adventist Church, as an organization with a message to proclaim, has a history of taking the latest media forms to assist with this proclamation. The electronic media may surpass the impact of print, but it is difficult to imagine the Adventist Church without print as part of its armory.

Print maintains several advantages. It has a reputation as a reliable tool for information—unlike the Internet. Print tends to be a better way to deliver information that reaches the intellect, whereas the audio and visual media are more useful for producing an emotive response. Perhaps the most significant advantage is the user friendliness of print—no



technology is needed to read it, one need not add batteries, and it is so portable that a person can easily take it to bed.

The fact that print still has a place can be seen on college campuses in the United States, the most wired places on our planet, where printed versions of school newspapers are far more popular than online editions.⁵⁷ Besides, newsagents continue to stock a plethora of magazines, with more being regularly published. The demand for print remains.

Print has been a part of the Adventist Church since its beginnings. Print has a future in the Church, but most likely in partnership with other media, and, to be successful—particularly for evangelism, it may look different from anything the Church has published in the past.⁵⁸

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46. Colleen Moore Tinker, "Folkenberg Business Details Revealed," *Adventist Today* (Mar.-Apr. 1999): 22, 24.

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48. Adventist News Network was established in 1994 and received an "on-line face" with an Adventist Forum. In 1996, it became part of, and helped establish, the Internet Web site <www.adventist.org> and then an e-mail bulletin.

49. That is a claim that Ray Dabrowski, the communication director for the General Conference (in private correspondence), denies. He believes ANN had been well established by then to be the "primary carrier of news during that time. Our 'openness' approach from the outset has built interest in its viability among

our audiences and among the external media."

50. There has to be a Dukane heaven (next to sock heaven) where Dukane projectors, those filmstrip and cassette tape machines used for evangelism, have gone. They had a brief life just before being overrun by video technology and disappearing. Another evangelistic tool that has also disappeared—in this case an Adventist invention, a finger-powered record player—was used for a time in Pacific island countries.

51. "'iGeneration' Evangelism Requires New Focus, Leaders Say," ANN, Oct. 5, 2004.

52. Ibid.

53. Ray Dabrowski, Mark A. Kellner, ANN Staff, "Annual Council: Mission Initiatives Dominate Meeting; Mission Statement Revision, New Values Statement Voted," ANN, Oct. 10, 2004.

54. Miroslav Pujic, "'iGeneration' Evangelism Requires New Focus, Leaders Say," ANN, Oct. 5, 2004.

55. An exception is in Australia and New Zealand, where a restructured program has brought growth in book sales by literature evangelists. The increase has averaged 10 percent per year over the past ten years and has breathed new life into something that was dying.

56. The October 7, 2004, appearance of Dwight Nelson, senior pastor of Pioneer Memorial Church, on a two-hour Trinity Broadcasting Network program with the potential of several million viewers was an "important milestone," said Dale Galusha, vice president for sales at Pacific Press. Nelson's book *Outrageous Grace*, published by Pacific, was offered.

57. Marcin Skomial, "Wired Students Prefer Campus News on Paper," *New York Times*, Apr. 19, 2002 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/19/technology/19PAPE.html?todaysh headlines>>.

58. *Life.Info* is a brave attempt at soft evangelism by the Church in England, an excellent example of what could be attempted. Unfortunately, its greatest strengths in its modern (make that postmodern) look and popular appeal will not gain support from those who prefer traditional forms of evangelism in whatever media. This means it is in danger of being lost if its funding is demanded for "real" evangelism.

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