



Seeing Adventism Whole | BY BONNIE DWYER

**What is
the cost of
orthodoxy?**

You really need to write a story ... the caller launched into the latest water cooler talk from the General Conference concerning GraceLink, the Sabbath School curriculum for children seemingly being thrown out the window. The General Conference Administrative Committee had just voted for the creation of a new curriculum, one that more heavily emphasizes the beliefs of Adventism.

I started making phone calls to learn more. While those who developed GraceLink were happy to describe the wide-ranging scholarly and artistic efforts that went into its creation, nobody wanted to talk on the record about the politics that seemed to undergird the change to a new curriculum. Was the story the change in the curriculum, or the politics? Or should we be following the money to determine the amount that had been invested over a decade in creating Grace Link, plus the cost of developing new materials to replace it. Repeated requests for just the publishing figures went nowhere. But then, how do you accurately quantify development costs when they are spread across a decade of time as well as all the world divisions? Hmmmm. The vote for the curriculum change centered on an intent to put a greater emphasis on Adventist doctrines, on orthodoxy. What is the cost of orthodoxy?

That is where we begin our efforts to see Adventism whole in this issue. We also attempt to view Ellen G. White whole. It is from historian Terrie Aamodt that I borrow that concept of seeing something whole. She explains in her "Confessions of an Ellen White Biographer" (see p. 57) that seeing a person whole is the challenge

for a biographer who wants to produce more than hagiography.

During the month of May 2016, seeing Adventism whole included incredible stories from Rwanda, where, according to reports in the official press, evangelistic efforts added to the work done by local church members, yielding approximately 100,000 baptisms. Meanwhile, in South Africa there was a major kerfuffle over the legitimacy of the degrees held by the Division president who resigned, but was then encouraged to reconsider his decision by General Conference President Ted N.C. Wilson. But with essentially a vote of no confidence from the Division Executive Committee, Division President Paul Ratsara asked for reassignment as a local pastor. The story extended past Ratsara and included the Division vice president, who confessed to ghost writing a majority of Ratsara's doctoral dissertation, as well as the Division communication director, whose two doctorates turned out to be from diploma mills. This drama unfolded day-by-day on our website and eventually in other Adventist media, too.

Seeing Adventism whole can be challenging; maddening, even. And yet, as in seeing Biblical characters like David and Moses whole, it is that wholeness that captures our hearts. ■

Bonnie Dwyer is editor of *Spectrum* magazine.

Correction: An incorrect image of William Foy was used to illustrate the article of "Let the Slave Reply" (*Spectrum*, Vol. 44, No. 1). There are no known photos of this pioneer prophet.