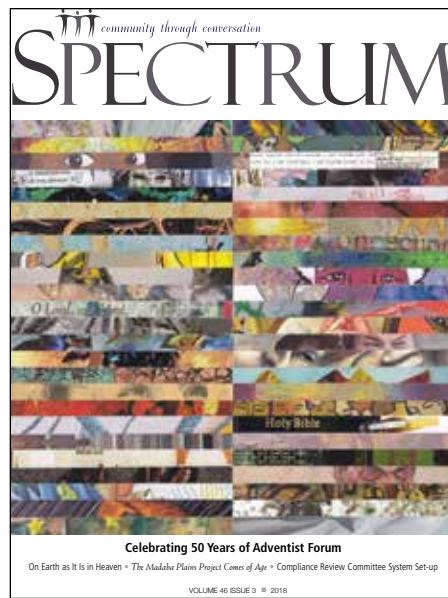
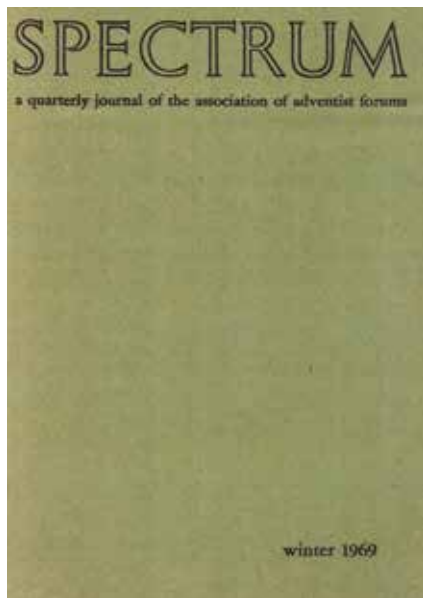




Adventist Forum: The Importance of Independence Marks the First Fifty Years

BY BONNIE DWYER



Spectrum covers from Volume 1, no. 1 and the current Volume 46, no. 3.

As the tumultuous year of 1968 came to a close in the United States, after race riots across the country and political riots at the Democratic Convention in Chicago, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, plus the unrest surrounding the ongoing war in Vietnam, what was happening within the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Well, for one thing, a new independent lay organization, the Association of Adventist Forums (AAF), was being birthed, an organization originally of and for Adventist graduate students.

Remembering our story of origins is an important exercise. To that end, we will gather September 14–16, 2018, on the campus of La Sierra University, to share not only Forum stories, but to discuss some of the issues that have marked our conversations over the past fifty years and to look ahead to where we go from here. In this short essay, the high points of our history are briefly noted. We will leave a fuller telling of our story to Adventist historians.

A year of conversations between church leaders, graduate students, and scholars preceded the actual incorporation of the AAF in 1968. In major educational centers such as Cambridge, Massachusetts; Ann Arbor, Michigan; and the San Francisco Bay area, informal groups of graduate students had formed and held discussions about various societal and church issues. Two meetings in Southern California in 1967, in particular, helped to crystalize the formation of AAF and the publishing of *Spectrum*. The first was the March 1967 Constituency Meeting of the Southern California Conference where Reinhold R. Bietz, the president of the Pacific Union Conference, mentioned that the church needed a journal for college students. Roy Branson, then a graduate student at Harvard University, happened to be at the meeting and spoke with Bietz about his proposal. Branson had also articulated a need for a journal as an undergraduate student at Atlantic Union College and had been talking it up since then at

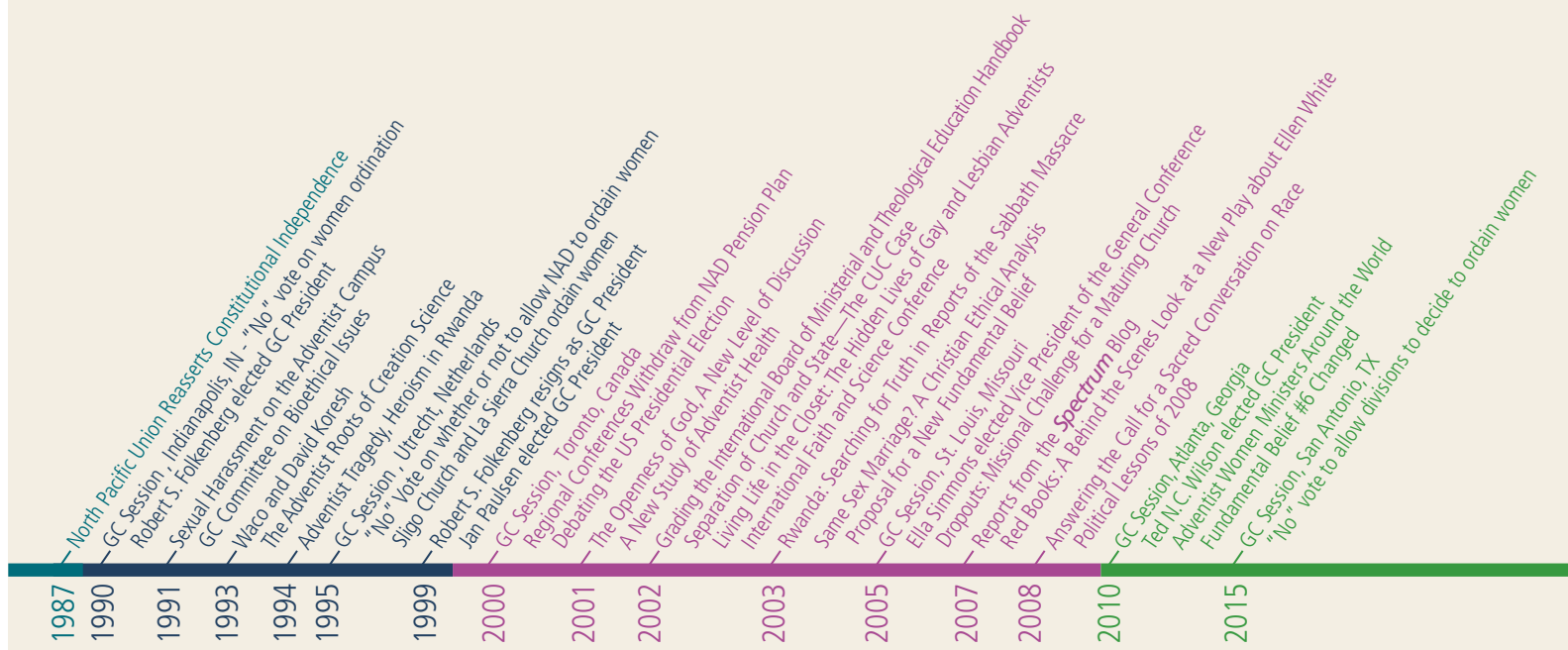
Timeline of Adventist History through the Pages of *Spectrum*

the meetings of graduate students. He went to Bietz and discussed the journal idea further, noting the potential problems if the denomination published an official journal, thereby limiting the possible openness in the articles. A few days later, at a weekend retreat at Camp Cedar Falls, where the need for a journal was again being discussed, Bietz suggested that an organization tying together the various graduate student groups that were presently meeting might publish a journal. The church could approve of the association, but would not be the publisher of the journal, giving it the needed independence for credibility. Roy Branson and Tom Walters were in attendance at that meeting and they took the next step of drafting a written proposal for a Society of Adventist Scholars or an Association of Adventist Graduate Students and a journal. Branson and Walters presented their proposal to Bietz, who supported it by sharing it with General Conference President Robert Pierson and North American Division President Neal Wilson and other church leaders. Branson stressed that the proposal would “be a means of building

up the church. If it didn’t, I wouldn’t waste my time on it.” Bietz and Wilson took the proposal to several church committees and Wilson ended up becoming the key church contact and liaison for the association’s beginning and throughout its first decade. In fact, some have suggested that without Wilson’s support there would have been no association.

There also would have been no association without Alvin Kwiram, an Adventist who was on the faculty of Harvard University and who became the spokesperson for the group of graduate students and scholars in the meetings with official church leaders. Kwiram helped expand the conversation past just graduate students and also helped the church understand the importance of independence for the organization’s board and journal. That independence included financial separation. No financial support from the church for the journal would be requested, Kwiram told Wilson.

According to an article on the history of AAF published in *Spectrum* in 1980:



On October 25, the Autumn Council through a session of NADCA approved the plans of the committee for an association of graduate students with a local and regional organization and a magazine to serve as a forum for the students. The church leaders no longer demanded official representative on either the association board or journal. Rather, they agreed to serve in an advisory capacity at the invitation of the association.

So, fifty years ago, in 1968, the Board of Directors drafted a constitution and organized the Association of Adventist Forums. Meanwhile, the newly selected editor of *Spectrum*, Molleurus Couperus, spent the year soliciting articles for the journal. In the constitution, the audience for the organization was already being broadened past just graduate students. The constitution stated the association's objectives as: ". . . to encourage thoughtful persons of Seventh-day Adventist orientation to examine and discuss freely ideas

and issues relevant to the Church in all its aspects and to its members as Christians in society."

The imperative for Adventist church members was to recognize the emergence into a new, almost imperceptible era in Adventism, said Kwiram, who was elected the first president of the Association of Adventist Forums Board.

The exponential increase in factual information, the explosive proliferation of issues and ideas, the impersonal dominance of technology, the sophistication of today's communication techniques, the shrinking of the world and the changing of its features—these factors, with their complex and subtle interactions, characterize this new era. The advent movement is confronted by an array of new challenges and unparalleled even by those of the formative years.

Kwiram's statement appeared in the first issue of *Spectrum* in 1969, alongside other articles about the Christian

scholar and the church, the future of Adventist higher education, the Christian and war, problems in Darwinism, and a new role for eschatology. For his part, Editor Molleurus Couperus offered a challenge as *Spectrum* was launched.

Even though new views and solutions often may be futile and unrewarding and may end in blind alleys, striving for change and improvement has ever been the way of man's growth. The questing quality of the human spirit is evident in the bitter struggles for truth, and for the freedom to express it, that are part of the history of every area of human knowledge and endeavor. . . . It is in this search for new visions and better answers that we feel impelled to participate. *Spectrum* is dedicated, from a Christian viewpoint to proving the questions that trouble minds of modern man and to examining the illnesses that sicken our society. We are much concerned about God's relation to the human situation, about what the truth is about God, and about how to speak the truth in language that is fresh and pertinent to today.

And there were results from those early journal issues and chapter discussion sessions. For instance, Charles Hirsch's article in the first issue about the need to coordinate Adventist higher education prompted conversations that eventually helped the General Conference establish the Board of Higher Education. Kwiram became a member of that board, too, as a result of requests by AAF to have representatives on the board.

General Conference President Robert Pierson, at an Andrews University Faculty-Board Retreat in 1969, pointed to *Spectrum* as proof the church did have channels of communication for divergent views.

In 1970, AAF presence at the Atlantic City General Conference Session included a table with issues of *Spectrum* displayed, located at the GC Department of Education booth, plus a hospitality suite in a local hotel. At the request of Neal Wilson, copies of *Spectrum* were distributed to North American Division delegates.

Later in the 1970's, AAF participated in the development of a statement on race relations that was adopted in the Southern New England Conference and later taken to the Division.

The First National Meeting of AAF took place in April 1974, in Takoma Park, MD. A resolution was passed in



With the transcribed record of early Adventist church leaders discussing Ellen White and her writings, this issue became an instant classic.

support of migrant farm workers. A vice presidential structure was created for the Forum with individuals taking responsibility for AAF efforts in academic affairs, development, finance, international relations, and outreach. A Forum monthly newspaper was to be created with Tom Dybdahl as editor, and a technical assistance journal for witness and ministry was to be created and paid for by advertising with Monte Sahlin at the helm.

In 1975, Couperus announced his plans to retire as editor, and the Board had difficulty finding a replacement. So, a Board of Editors was created that included Gary Land, Otilie Stafford, Molleurus Couperus, and Alvin Kwiram, plus Roy Branson and Charles Scriven, who were the editors selected to oversee the journal. Alvin Kwiram finally accepted chairmanship of the Editorial Board, after others turned down the position.

Not long after this arrangement had been put in place, Ron Numbers published *Prophetess of Health*, a book about Ellen G. White that drew national attention. Several people were asked to write reviews for *Spectrum*, including representatives from the White Estate, Fritz Guy, and Adventist historian Richard Schwartz, but it was the review by the well-known historian Fawn Brodie that created trouble. Rather than a regular review of the book, Brodie took the occasion to speculate about Ellen White's mental health, drawing the ire of many church

members. The *Spectrum* Editorial Board split over whether or not to publish the review by Brodie. Kwiram was against publishing it, but did not use his veto to prevent it, since he had pledged to himself never to do such a thing. In the ensuing debate over the role of the Editorial Board, Kwiram resigned as its chair. But he did continue to contribute to the efforts of AAF, preparing a major report on how the church could reach intellectuals.

The AAF Board then voted to return to a single editor, or co-editors, and the Editorial Board concept was disbanded. Branson and Scriven redesigned the magazine and transformed it from its academic-journal roots into more of a general interest publication. When Scriven resigned his co-editorship in order to complete his doctoral studies at Berkeley, Richard Emmerson stepped in for a short time as Executive Editor. Branson continued as editor for the next twenty-four years.

To meet the financial needs of the journal, an Advisory Council was created in 1979 with Ray Damozo, a dentist and businessman in Seattle, as chairman. Members pledged annual gifts of \$500 or more and were promised an annual meeting to share their views with the editors of *Spectrum*. During that first decade, the supporters of AAF said they felt that the organization was helpful in creating an open environment in the church. Meanwhile, local AAF chapters were writing their own histories in San Diego, Boston, New York, and Michigan. (See New York story on p. 22.)

The Second Decade

Glenn Coe stepped up to the plate as the chair of the Adventist Forum following the departure of Kwiram and led the organization through a very busy and productive period.

For the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the 1980's were a challenging time. The GC had created a committee to study Ellen White's sources after some historians began questioning her use of published materials. Des Ford raised questions about the sanctuary doctrine and the investigative judgement. And then there were lawsuits: at Pacific Press, a lawsuit over equal pay for women; a class action suit following the bankruptcy of Donald Davenport and the conflicts of interest it exposed in the investments of many church leaders. There was also a new statement on the fundamental beliefs, and concern about the lack of lay representation at union constituency meetings. Discussion of all of these issues in the

pages of *Spectrum* made for fascinating reading that could be found nowhere else. The first article on Adventism and homosexuality appeared in *Spectrum* in 1982. That was also the year that AAF formed a taskforce on the structure of the denomination that called for open elections, freedom of information, and a democratic church. Soon there were stories to write about the merging of unions and conferences in the Mid-America Union. And the rewriting of the constitution in the North Pacific Union.

In 1984, the first National Forum Conference was held in Washington, DC. The following year, a traveling conference on geology and the Biblical record was sponsored by AAF. Attendees at the geology conference raved about it for years and pushed for the publication of the papers that had been presented.

The popularity of a special issue of *Spectrum* on the Sabbath led to its being republished in paperback book format in 1985, and the following year similar treatment was given to a collection of articles about the delay in Christ's second coming.

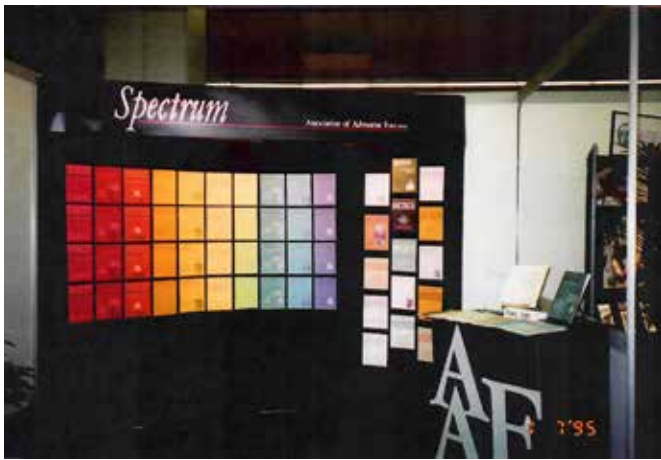
In their book *Seeking a Sanctuary: A History of Adventism*, authors Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart credited *Spectrum* with pioneering the idea of a free press within the church. The journal's use of trained journalists reporting objectively on the affairs of the church opened the door for changes at the *Review* and *Ministry* as they adopted similar reporting methods, the historians said.

The Third Decade

Stories of Adventism beyond North America began to be featured in the journal in the third decade. Charles Teel, Jr. wrote about the radical roots of Peruvian Adventism. David Lin, billed as the best-known Chinese Adventist, told his story. Albania, Czechoslovakia, Croatia, and Yugoslavia were featured in a 1992 issue that included a special section on Eastern Europe. There were reports from Africa, discussion of Muslims and mission. The Waco tragedy in 1993 brought reflection on the connection between Branch Davidians and Adventists. The next year the genocide in Rwanda brought new kinds of reflections.

In 1995, the General Conference met in Utrecht, Netherlands, and the agenda included a proposal to allow North America to proceed with its plan to ordain women for the ministry. The "no" vote that took place created a sense of limbo, because the church had already given women permission to serve in ministry. The ramifications of the vote continue to this day.

For Adventist Forum, perhaps the most significant event



The Spectrum booth at the 1995 General Conference in Utrecht, Netherlands.



Neal C. Wilson and Les Pitton at Roy Branson's farewell from Spectrum in 1998.

of the decade was the heart attack that Editor Roy Branson suffered in 1998. It brought to a close his twenty-four years as editor of the journal that he had helped to create. He resigned his editorial position and, after recovering his health, joined the faculty at Washington Adventist University.

The Fourth Decade

No sooner had new editor Bonnie Dwyer gotten a redesigned version of *Spectrum* out to readers, than a crisis in church leadership erupted. General Conference President Robert Folkenberg was being questioned about his connections to a developer in California and Folkenberg's misuse of his office on the developer's behalf. The *Spectrum* editorial team prepared stories about the lawsuit against Folkenberg and the General Conference Corpo-

ration, as well as the work of the Ad Hoc Group that was evaluating the issues in the lawsuit.

In addition to this crisis in the church, there were also changes underway in the media world in general as more and more material was moving to the internet. On the newly organized Adventist Forum Board, under the direction of Chairman David Larson, the younger Board members were pushing Adventist Forum to create a website. By the time of the 2000 General Conference session in Toronto, *Spectrum* had a functioning website. That year also saw the publication of *Creation Reconsidered*, a book containing the papers from that 1983 geology conference that had been so highly valued.

Two years later, AAF took upon itself the publishing of a manuscript by Richard Rice that was an expansion of an article he had first written for *Spectrum*. The book *Believing, Behaving, Belonging* was an immediate hit in helping people understand the church as a family where belonging holds real significance and can often come before believing.

In 2003, theologian Marva Dawn spoke at the Adventist Forum Conference in Hope, British Columbia, marking the sixth national conference. Since then such events have been held on an annual basis.

In 2006, blogging had taken the internet by storm. Alexander Carpenter launched a *Spectrum* blog that brought a new generation of readers to *Spectrum*. The topic of homosexuality in the church continued to attract readers and Adventist Forum partnered with Kinship International in sponsoring a conference on the topic, and then, in 2008, the papers were published in the book *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives*.

The Fifth Decade

Charles Scriven returned to Adventist Forum, this time as chairman of the Board of Directors, and helped the organization capture its past and future mission with the adoption of the phrase "Community through Conversation."

For the church, the most significant issue of the decade began with the creation of a Theology of Ordination Study Committee in 2010 that met over multiple years, prepared a theology of ordination, and discussed significantly the issue of ordaining women, only to be brushed aside in 2015 when the motion presented to the General Conference Session was whether or not divisions should be allowed to decide to ordain women in their territory. The motion was defeated, but the fallout from the motion continues with the General

Conference proposing new sanctions each year for those entities that have ordained women. Church authority has emerged as the new issue.

For the 2010 General Conference Session in Atlanta, *Spectrum* put together a team of reporters and analysts to post stories on the website. Alex Carpenter was pleased when it was his tweet that was picked up by the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* announcing the election of Ted N. C. Wilson as president of the General Conference. At the 2015 General Conference session in San Antonio, tweeting and periscoping by the *Spectrum* team set a new bar for what it means to cover a church meeting. Originally, the church only planned to live-stream the evening devotional sessions. There was no plan to share any of the business meetings, not even the meeting where a vote was scheduled on whether or not divisions should be allowed to decide on ordination of women in their territories, the most controversial item on the agenda. When *Spectrum* began periscoping that session from the press booth, the church communication staff made the decision to open up live-streaming for all. In the following years, as the General Conference made secret plans to discipline church administrators whose territories were not in compliance with GC-voted actions, the revelations of their plans on *Spectrum* played a role in the proposed actions being sent back to the committee for further work.

The success of the website coverage led the Adventist Forum Board to create a full-time position for a managing web editor, first filled by Jared Wright, followed by Alisa Williams, the current editor.

A trilogy of books by Fritz Guy and Brian Bull, *God, Sky & Land*, about hearing the story of Genesis the way the original audience heard it, is the latest publishing effort of Adventist Forum. Books I and II have been well received. Book III will be published in 2019.

Through the years, whether in the journal, on the website, or in books, the importance of an independent



Skulls from the Rwandan massacre in a photograph by Alita Byrd, Spectrum author who travelled to Rwanda to cover the trial of Adventist pastor Elizaphan Ntakirutimana.



Renowned San Francisco Symphony conductor Herbert Blomstedt (center front) with members of the Spectrum Advisory Council.

church press has continued to grow, and *Spectrum* has grown with the demands of the times. It continues to build community through conversations at local chapters, national meetings, on the website, in the journal and books. All of those mediums have changed significantly in the past fifty years. The number of local chapters has gone up and down, as have the attendees at meetings and readers of the journal and website. But there is always a new challenge that brings us together, encouraging, and sometimes demanding, new conversations that help us create an open church community where all can thrive.

BONNIE DWYER is editor of *Spectrum* magazine.