

 community through conversation

SPECTRUM



Colorful Quadrantids Meteor Shower

2020: MORE BEAUTIFUL AND MORE TERRIBLE

A Text of Tyrants: Fresh Thinking on Romans 13:1–7 | **WANTED: A Relevant and Responsive Church**
Adventist Schools, COVID-19, and the Big Government Bailout: Is the Funding in Jeopardy?
F is for Forest: A New Kind of Kindergarten | *The Adventist Church and its LGBT Members*

community through conversation

SPECTRUM

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ABOUT THE ART
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ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST: TOMÁŠ SLOVINSKÝ

Tomáš Slovinský is a photographer in Slovakia. As a child, he became fascinated by the night sky, space secrets, and astronomical events like eclipses and meteor showers. When he first pointed the lens of an old camera toward the night sky, he was fascinated to discover how many objects the camera had captured compared to the naked eye. This brought him into the world of astrophotography.

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EDITORIALS

2020:

MORE BEAUTIFUL AND MORE TERRIBLE

BY BONNIE DWYER

Mani Perry's book, *More Beautiful and More Terrible*, proved to be the most consequential book that I read this year. Not that I wanted to read it. I had never heard of it, until it was recommended as a selection for the Friday Forum Book Group by Andy Lampkin. In the preface, Perry speaks to the importance of inspiration for scholarly projects and of her inspiration, firstly by James Baldwin, whose words are quoted in the book's title, and secondly from jazz, specifically the recording of "Tenor Madness" by Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane. Intrigued, I found the recording on YouTube and listened while I read Perry's account of racism in America, written in 2011. The music changed everything for me, altered the tone for the topic. It provided an upbeat and energetic melody in the midst of the terrible things that I was learning and watching play out in 2020 with regard to race. Looking for beauty in the midst of tragedy can seem to be inappropriate. It shouldn't be a way of ignoring or glossing over terrible things. But it can be a very helpful coping mechanism, as well as a way to move towards change. Back to that prompt that led me to read something different, something not of my own choosing; I consider it to be a major blessing of a book group, because it provides wonderful surprises and opens my mind to new ideas and stories.

This issue of *Spectrum* is filled with such surprises. If you think you know everything that you need to know about what happened at Glacier View forty years ago, Gil Valentine makes good use of new sources to retell the back story to this important event in Adventist history. Ronald Lawson also looks back over the past forty years to trace the relationship of the Seventh-day Adventist church with its LGBT members, and demonstrates the importance of perspective. Nancy Hoyt Lecourt gives us the story of

an Adventist college that may be new to you—California Preparatory College.

We're grateful to Alva James Johnson and her journalism students at Southern Adventist University for their excellent reporting on the government bailout funds that are being utilized by Adventist schools to get through this challenging time of COVID. And it is that terrible pandemic that has inspired several writers to ask about what comes next for Adventism? What church innovations will grow out of this strange and awful time.

What a year it has been! Our cover artist, photographer Tomáš Slovinský, found the beauty of this year in the night sky, in the appearance of the NEOWISE comet. More of his photographs can be seen in the new book that Adventist Forum is publishing by Hanz Gutierrez, *In the Time of Coronavirus: Chronicles of a Pandemic*, a collection of his writings that appeared on our website during 2020. The book will be available on Amazon.

As the year 2020 comes to a close, it seems that America is turning a corner in its politics. Will 2021 be more beautiful or more terrible or both? I think the answer to that question lies with each of us. We all have a role to play in bringing our divided country and church together, in creating change, in making things beautiful. May we each do our part, and be surprised by joy.



BONNIE DWYER is editor of *Spectrum*.

Searching for Shalom in Alabama

BY CARMEN LAU

In early October, on Sabbath, a group of two dozen trekked through Alabama to seek a robust peace, or Shalom. We were enriched with the knowledge that Adventist Forum founder and long-time *Spectrum* editor, Roy Branson, had journeyed to Alabama in 1965 to participate in the effort for the right to vote, including being a marshal in the sentinel Selma to Montgomery march.

Masked, temp-checked, social-distanced, with hands slathered in sanitizer, the group visited the Legacy Museum and National Lynching Memorial in Montgomery before driving to Selma to walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, which has become a symbol for the push for the right to vote.

Travel time passed quickly as a variety of speakers enriched and fed our souls. Dr. Ramona Hyman, chair of the Department of English and Foreign Languages at Oakwood University, shared stories about the Montgomery bus boycott and her encounter with White civil-rights activist, Virginia Foster Durr, that resulted in a call to a life-long mission to reimagine American citizenship. Dr. Gilbert Ojwang, chair of religion at Oakwood University, invited the group to apply Noah's faith, as described in Hebrews 11:7, as a basis to condemn injustice now and invite folks to safety, as in his time Noah invited people to the ark. Dr. Lisa Diller, chair of history at Southern Adventist University, provided a framework to help attendees grapple with an array of facts to decide what should, and should not, take featured space in communities and in the minds of individuals. Marci Corea represented Adventist Peace Fellowship, a co-sponsor of the event, and spoke of the important work of this organization with the help of passionate Adventist college students. Board member Ken Peterson reflected on the production of the documentary *J.E.S.U.S.A.*, a film examining Christian nationalism and violence. Alexander

Carpenter, board member and host of the *Adventist Voices* podcast, moved all with a reading of Psalm 7 from The Message.

On Sunday, the group gathered on the steps of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church to walk the route where the Children's March had occurred in Birmingham. Along the way, we stopped in a large circle under the trees at Kelly Ingram Park to allow each participant to share aloud specific passages from Dr. King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

On Monday, a visit to Oakwood University provided me with a spiritual highpoint of the journey. I was reminded that in order to heal, a person or group must acknowledge a wrong and repent. Oakwood thrives, and has been a place for growth, because it has spoken truthfully about the past. It is believed that Dred Scott's wife and two sons are buried on the Oakwood property. By the grace of God, a space where the evil of slavery had ruled has become a place where African Americans can thrive and be prepared to contribute to society in fantastic ways. I believe every Adventist would benefit by spending a day at Oakwood to learn, in humility, how God has worked in the African American context. It is my hope that *Spectrum* can be one of the conduits to assist in this pursuit. In this moment, I see again that God's way is to elevate premiere leaders from a group that dominant culture considers to be the "least of these."

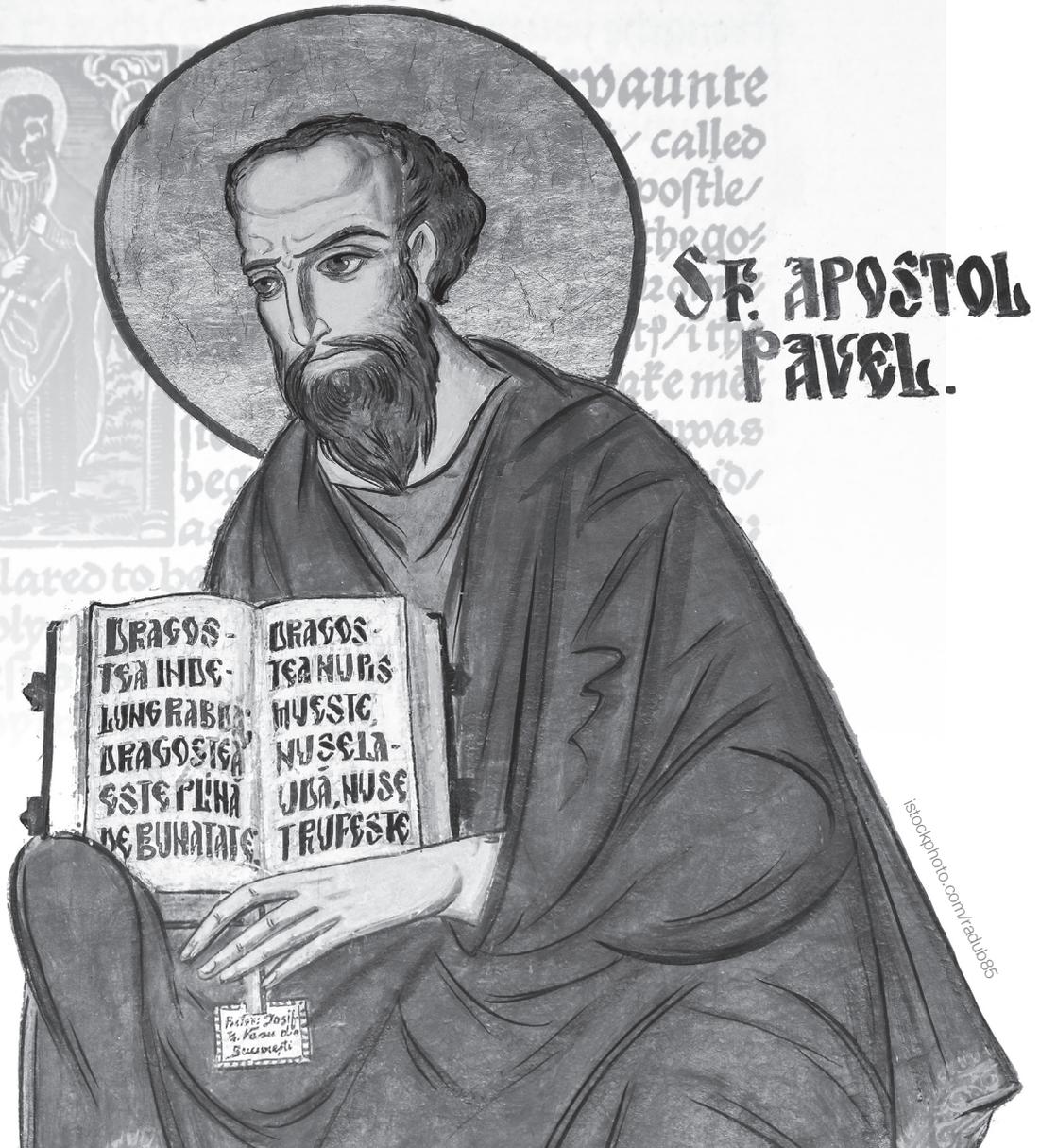


CARMEN LAU is board chair of Adventist Forum.

BIBLE LESSONS

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■ The Epistle off the
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(Above) Title page from the book of Romans in a facsimile of William Tyndale's 1525 edition of the English New Testament. From the Reed Rare Books Collection in Dunedin, New Zealand. (Right) Painting of St. Paul in St. George Cathedral, Tecuci, Romania (July 24, 2015).

A TEXT OF TYRANTS:

Fresh Thinking on Romans 13:1-7

BY WILLIAM G. JOHNSON

Funny, isn't it, how you can read a passage of the Bible many times and figure that you've got it down pat until one day, *Bam!* Something explodes your ideas.

That happened to me recently. I was writing a book on Paul's letter to the Romans—not a verse-by-verse commentary, but a work that attempts to trace Paul's developing line of argument and explain how it applies to Christian living today. I worked my way forward, struggling a bit on tough areas of chapters 9–11, but eventually became satisfied with progress. Then I hit 13:1–7 and it was *Bam!* Try as I might, I couldn't see how the passage fit with what preceded and what followed.

After several weeks I still cannot. In the logical flow of the letter, Romans 13:1–7 is an interloper.

Focused study led me to take a hard look at the content of the passage. It's one familiar to Seventh-day Adventists—we build on it our understanding of the

Focused study led me to take a hard look at the content of the passage. It's one familiar to Seventh-day Adventists—we build on it our understanding of the Christian's relationship to civil authorities.

Christian's relationship to civil authorities. For many years I had accepted the well-worn understanding—that it teaches that the authorities are put there by God and that we should submit to them. Now, however, as I indulged in a little “out of the box” thinking and read up on the passage, my views underwent a transfiguration.

In this paper I shall point out my new understanding and the evidence that led me there. The conclusions at which I arrived surprised me; to a degree they were unwelcome. I present them here, not as established beyond

all challenge, but to arouse curiosity and inspire others to research the matter more deeply.

Here in America, only a couple of years ago, Romans 13:1–7 came to the fore, when an uproar arose over the government policy of separating children—some only infants—from their parents at the border with Mexico.



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McAllen, Texas, USA - September 21, 2016: A group of Central Americans walks down a road prior to being picked up by the Border Patrol for illegally crossing the Rio Grande River into the US in deep-south Texas. There has been a flood of mothers with children and unaccompanied minors from Central America, fleeing gang violence, crossing illegally over the past several months.

The passage, it turns out, has been a conundrum of scholars for many centuries. By its teaching, all authority comes from God, so that to disobey incurs not just punishment from the state, but divine displeasure; it has long been a favorite of tyrants.

The Passage

Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished. For the authorities do not

strike fear in people who are doing right, but in those who are doing wrong. Would you like to live without fear of the authorities? Do what is right, and they will honor you. The authorities are God's servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the power to punish you.

They are God's servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong. So you must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience.

Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons. For government workers need to be paid. They are serving God in what they do. Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and government fees to those who collect them, and give respect and honor to those who are in authority (Rom. 13:1–7).

The words come without qualification: *all* authority. Not a matter of good government or bad government—we must submit to *all* civil authorities.

Monarchs have loved this passage. King James of the renowned King James Version liked to quote it. Tyrants of various stripes have used it to support unjust laws.

Followers of Christ in Hitler's Germany bowed to the evil Third Reich because of this passage. German Adventists went along. Only a small number of Christians, notably Dietrich Bonhoeffer and those with him, refused to permit the state to usurp the authority that belongs to Christ alone.

And here in America, only a couple of years ago, Romans 13:1–7 came to the fore, when an uproar arose over the government policy of separating children—some only infants—from their parents at the border with Mexico. Then-Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, rolled out these words in an attempt to justify the harsh actions.

Ellen White likewise predicted that this passage would be used in conjunction with persecution. “And there will be some who will even urge such a course [persecution] from the Scripture: ‘Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. . . . The powers that be are ordained by God’” (*Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 5, 712).

Ron Cassidy, in a 2010 article in *Expository Times*, noted: “These words have caused more unhappiness and misery in the Christian East and West than any other seven verses of the New Testament by the license they have given to tyrants” (quoted by Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Letter to the Romans*, 309).

The passage has had a huge influence on the thought and practice of Seventh-day Adventists. With very few exceptions, we have kept clear of involvement in issues of social justice. When other people felt conscience-bound to protest publicly, Adventists remained silent. The state was there by divine authority; it wasn't our place to question it. To challenge its laws would be, in fact, fighting against God.

This quiescent approach, so well established and taken for granted for many years, runs contrary to that of the pioneers of our movement. They were abolitionists; they saw slavery as evil, a blot on America that should be expunged by whatever means. The Fugitive Slave Act (1820) stipulated that runaway slaves were to be apprehended and returned to their masters. The early Adventists called for believers to defy this unjust law, even though such activity could result in fines or imprisonment. The church paper, the *Review and Herald*, boldly called for civil disobedience.

We have come a long way from our roots. Motivated by Romans 13:1–7, Seventh-day Adventists have often

become comfortably compliant with unjust rulers with whom we became acquainted through our institutions. Of course, when the tide turned and despots were overthrown, Adventists suddenly were out of favor also.

Recent events in the United States demand that we take a hard look at our understanding of Romans 13:1–7 and our relation to the state. The passage is startlingly relevant to what is happening on the streets of this nation.

Key Issues

Three issues underlie this study:

1. How did the original recipients of Paul's letter understand these words? Did they accept them without question, or did they reply: “Paul, you've got to be kidding!”?
2. Can this passage bear the weight that Seventh-day Adventist interpreters have given to it?
3. Does Romans 13:1–7 force upon us cognitive dissonance (when a long-held conviction confronts overwhelming reality)?

Without doing violence to the original Greek, we can change the translation of one word—from “authorities” to “police”—and at once the words leap off the page with startling contemporary meaning.

Everyone must submit to *the police*. For *police* authority comes from God, and *the police* have been placed there by God. So anyone who rebels against *the police* is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished. For the *police* do not strike fear in people who are doing right, but in those who are doing wrong. Would you like to live without fear of the *police*? Do what is right, and they will honor you.

The *police* are God's servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the power to punish you. The *police* are God's servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong. So you must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience.

Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons. For

government workers need to be paid. They are serving God in what they do. Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and government fees to those who collect them, and give respect and honor to the *police*.

Try to put yourself in the shoes of a Black person, especially a Black man.

The police placed there by God?

Police authority comes from God?

Do what is right, and you have nothing to fear?

George Floyd!

Police are God's servants, for your good?

Really? Black Lives Matter!

The pattern is achingly familiar:

Unarmed Black man leaves home.

Unarmed Black man encounters police.

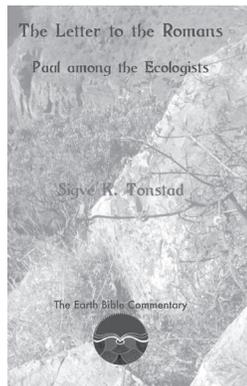
Unarmed Black man never comes home. He's dead.

The evidence stacks up. Reality shatters our well-rehearsed conclusions. *Cognitive dissonance!*

The Christians in Rome

The oldest and most widely accepted understanding of Romans 13:1–7 is that Paul meant just what he said:

The authorities are placed there for our good by God. Sigve Tonstad comes down on this position in his recent commentary, *The Letter to the Romans: Paul Among the Ecologists* (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2016). He argues that bad government is better than no government, which means chaos.



I think Tonstad's commentary is excellent, but part company with him on Romans 13:1–7. I find it too big a stretch to accept that Christians living in Rome of all places could accept the passage.

The Roman Emperors of Paul's day were a vile line of despots. Murder, rape, incest, dissipation, cruelty, sadism, extravagance, gambling, perversion—you name it, they did it.

Caligula (37–41) was a half-crazy monster who murdered on a whim. He delighted to watch executions; if the number of prisoners was low, he would simply add victims from among the onlookers. Disgusted by his despicable conduct, the Praetorium Guard assassinated him and installed his uncle, Claudius.

Claudius (41–54) was a cruel despot, immoral and blood-thirsty, who loved to gamble.

Nero (54–68) murdered his mother, his wife, his brother, and countless others. He castrated a young slave and married him. When rumors implicated him in the Great Fire that destroyed one-third of Rome, Nero found a scapegoat in the Christians. They were crucified, covered in oil, and set ablaze to make light for the emperor's garden, and thrown to wild animals. So great was the terror inspired by this monster, after he died by suicide rumors persisted for years that he had come back to life.

Romans 13:1–7, addressed to followers of Jesus in Rome, asserts that all authority comes from God and should be obeyed; that the rulers are agents of the divine who will punish the law-breaker and protect those who do well.

Caligula? Claudius? Nero? I find it impossible to accept that these words were meant to be read literally.

Code Language

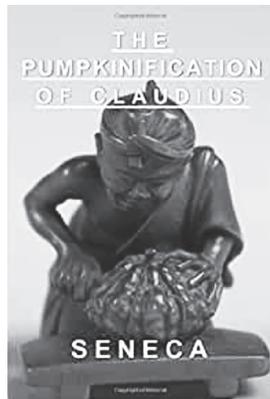
An alternative explanation is that the words were code

The Fugitive Slave Act (1820) stipulated that runaway slaves were to be apprehended and returned to their masters. The early Adventists called for believers to defy this unjust law, even though such activity could result in fines or imprisonment. The church paper, the *Review and Herald*, boldly called for civil disobedience.

language; the passage was a parody which the Christians who read it quickly recognized.

At first reading the idea appeals, but supporting evidence is lacking. The passage provides no hint that it is a parody. Even more telling is its subject matter—relation to civil authorities—in a letter focused on the Good News. And if it were a parody, what would be its point?

To suggest that Paul wrote in code out of fear of reprisal is falsified by an actual parody written around the time of the letter. By this time in the Empire, the practice had arisen that, after the emperor died, the Senate declared that he had been deified. Following the death of Claudius, Seneca, a philosopher and senator, wrote a scathing parody that in large part has survived to our times. Titled *The Pumpkinification of the Deified Claudius*, it plays on the word apotheosis (deification) to lampoon the departed despot. It portrays Claudius at the moment of death: old, infirm, unable to control his bowels. He dies and departs to gain a place among the gods, but they are none too pleased to accept him into their number. He is shunted from god to god until he finishes up in Hades. There he is sentenced to gamble by playing dice with a cup that has no bottom. Claudius endlessly throws dice which endlessly fall to the ground.



Seneca's parody of Claudius is a relentless, merciless lampoon. It goes way beyond any "roast" of the president of the United States.

The apostle Paul was a Roman citizen and proud of it. On occasion, he didn't hesitate to let authorities know this, reminding them of the privileges it entailed. Alongside Seneca's mocking *Pumpkinification*, Romans 13:1–7 is weak gruel indeed!

So, if we can't accept the passage in literal terms and it isn't parody, *what is it?* Let me share the evidence that leads me to a surprising conclusion.

The Evidence

The evidence is two-fold: the logical train of thought in chapters 12–13, and the content of the passage itself.

Paul's wonderful letter develops masterfully in three stages:

Chapters 1–8: Exposition of the Good News;

Chapters 9–11: Israel's failure to accept Christ;

Chapters 12–16: Life in the new community of Christ's followers.

Chapter 12, which begins to elaborate the "so what" of the Good News, begins with a call for Christians to consider themselves "living sacrifices" to God and warns them not to think that they are better than they really are. Then, beginning with verse 9, Paul launches into a long description of how genuine love, *agape*' manifests itself. The passage is powerful and compelling, although not as well known as the famous "love chapter," 1 Corinthians 13.

In words reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount, Paul counsels a course of treating enemies well. The passage reaches a climax with the words: "Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good."

Suddenly, as we move into the next chapter, tone and subject change abruptly: "Everyone must submit to governing authorities . . ." Gone is discussion of *agape*' in action; the mood switches to "must" and threat of punishment. The change comes without transition; it is startling. The calm waters of the lake are suddenly roiled by a windstorm.

Then, just as abruptly, the storm is past and the discussion resumes—on what theme? *Agape*! "Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another" (verse 8). Then the argument proceeds to a breath-taking conclusion that wraps up Paul's long discussion of law, grace, and freedom in chapters 1–8. "If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law. . . . These and all such commandments [adultery, murder, stealing]—are summed up in this one commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself. . . . love fulfills the requirements of God's law."

Judaism emphasized the 613 commandments found in the Torah.

Sinai emphasized the Ten Commandments.

Jesus emphasized the Two Great Commandments—love to God and love to neighbor.

Paul emphasizes only one commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Bold! Breathtaking!

There is at least one ancient tradition that calls into question the authenticity of Romans 13:1–7.

But here's the point: if we begin at 12:9 and read to 13:10, the train of thought flows without interruption—if we omit 13:1–7.

What is going on? 13:1–7 seems to be an interloper. Could it be an interpolation?

Not Like Paul

These suspicions are taken further when we take a close look at the content of 13:1–7. Its ideas are unlike those we find elsewhere in this letter or elsewhere in Paul's writing. And not just unlike Paul—contrary to Paul!

Here is a startling fact: the passage isn't specifically Christian. It could have been written by a pagan philosopher. It sounds obsequious, politically correct, boot licking.

How different from what Paul wrote at the outset of the letter: “Paul, a *doulos* (slave) of Christ Jesus. . . . May God our Father and the Lord (*Kyrios*) Jesus Christ give you grace and peace” (Rom. 1:1–7).

So common are these words to us that we fail to grasp their heavy weight in Paul's time. Then, Caesar wasn't just the head of state, he was *Kyrios*—Lord. And terms like “Good News,” “peace,” and “power” already were current as part of the imperial cult. (Recognition of this dynamic has gained acceptance in recent years by expositors like N. T. Wright.)

Paul was fearless, not mealy-mouthed. Political correctness was utterly foreign to his thinking. This is the man who proclaimed unabashedly: “There may be so-called gods both in heaven and on earth, and some people actually worship many gods and many lords. But for us,

There is one God, the Father,
by whom all things were created,
and for whom we live.
And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ,
through whom all things were created,
and through whom we live” (1 Corinthians 8:5–6).

The ideas of Romans 13:1–7 run counter to those of Jesus. In the judgment hall, Jesus confronted Pilate with the sharp divide between the kingdoms of this world and his kingdom: “My kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. . . . My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). He drew the same distinction in his reply to the Pharisees who endeavored to ensnare him over the issues of paying taxes to Caesar. “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give to God what belongs to God” (Luke 20:25). By this answer Jesus refuted any idea that civil authorities stand in a God-ordained role alongside His Kingdom.

Even more damning is the manner in which John the Revelator portrays the Roman Empire and other earthly powers: marauding, rapacious, Satan-inspired beasts that persecute the people of God—not beneficent authorities appointed by God for the good of those who do well (Revelation 12–13, 17).

An Unsettling Conclusion

My reflection on Romans 13:1–7, based wholly on the internal logic of the letter and the content of the passage, pointed in a direction that in many ways was unpalatable to me: the passage is not from Paul; it is an interpolation. Holding a high view of Scripture, I found this conclusion troubling.

My field of studies is New Testament exegesis and theology; apart from New Testament Greek, I am not versed in the ancient languages of the period of Paul's writings. I turned to a friend and scholar who has made a lifetime study of the ancient manuscripts—Dr. Abraham Terian. Terian, recognized as a foremost scholar of ancient Armenian, has taught at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary and the University of Chicago. He is completing a forty-year, definitive work on the writings of Philo Judaeus, a Jewish contemporary of Paul.

Dr. Terian compared Romans 12–13 in Greek, Syriac, and Armenian. In each case he was impressed by the change in mood from chapter 12 to chapter 13. He

also noted subtle differences in word-use and style as the text moves from chapter 12 to chapter 13. On the basis of his investigation, Dr. Terian became convinced that Romans 13:1–7 is an interpolation.

Could it be that so many centuries of study and scholarship has failed to recognize what was becoming more apparent?

The theory had a big weakness—it totally lacked support in manuscript evidence. When I was invited to make a Zoom presentation of my ideas, I frankly acknowledged this major problem with the interpretation.

My presentation brought a couple of unexpected responses from the wonderful world of the Internet. Two listeners became curious and came up with the same result; there is at least one ancient tradition that calls into question the authenticity of Romans 13:1–7. The Sahidic (Southern) Coptic version of the Bible omits Romans 13:1–6 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920; Coptic text with English translation by G. W. Horner).

What About Ellen White?

I was curious to find what Ellen White had written on Romans 13:1–7 and turned to Dr. Ron Graybill, scholar of Ellen White history and writings, formerly associate director of the Ellen White Estate. He reported the results of his research:

The Ellen G. White Estate, in the process of putting all of Ellen White’s writings online, went through and inserted the scriptural references for all of the places where she quotes scripture. This enables us to search for references to Romans 13. If we limit our search to her “Lifetime Words,” that is, all the books, articles, and pamphlets she published during her lifetime, plus all the letters, diaries, and manuscripts she produced prior to her death in 1915, we find a total of 47 quotations from Romans 13. By limiting our search to “Lifetime Words,” we avoid all the duplicate instances that may have appeared in various compilations created after her death. . . .

So there you have it: two references to the first seven verses of Romans 13, one a partial

quote of a single verse, the other an ambiguous reference. Now there are probably other quotes from the Bible that Ellen White used to urge good citizenship and obeying the law of the land, but obviously she didn’t rely on Romans 13 much to make that point.

A Possibility and an Invitation

Could it be possible that Romans 13:1–7 is an interpolation? Yes. This would not be the only interpolation in the New Testament. The ending of the Gospel of Mark, 16:9–20, is not found in the oldest manuscripts of the Gospel. It likewise has content of a dubious character—it mentions taking up snakes, which is the basis for the practices of the snake-handling cult of east Tennessee.

While I would not go so far as to suggest that Paul could not have written Romans 13:1–7, I think it highly unlikely that he did so. The passage was possibly a detached writing on a small piece of papyrus that early on became inserted among the other papyrus sheets of the letter. Interestingly, Dr. Terian observed similarities between the passage and philosophical writings from the time of Philo.

Regardless of one’s conclusion as to the authenticity of Romans 13:1–7, the passage needs to be considered in light of Jesus’ teachings and the portrayal of the state by John the Revelator.

And the invitation: I find these conclusions intriguing, but I share them in tentative fashion. I hope this paper will encourage someone, somewhere—someone who is conversant with the history of the Coptic and who can work in its languages—to take the exploration further.



Prior to connecting with the *Adventist Review*, WILLIAM JOHNSON was professor of New Testament theology and exegesis at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. His most recent scholarly work, *Defilement and Purgation in the Book of Hebrews*, was published in 2020 by Fontes Press in their Studies in Jewish and Christian Literature series.

CHURCH IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS



TIME TO START OVER: *First, Face Delusion*

BY CHARLES SCRIVEN

Two facts make any remaining Adventist self-satisfaction delusional. One concerns burgeoning disgust with religion, or at least indifference to it. The other concerns the collective Adventist rejection of doctrinal humility; by refusing to grow, we cut our connection to reality and become irrelevant. These are both threats to our future. It is no idle question, therefore, to ask: Over the long run, can this community be saved? The COVID-19 crisis, with its disruption of church life, is as good a time as any to think this through. We may suppose that religions are hard to kill, but failed communities that now seem like mere outcroppings of fanaticism suffuse Christian history.

For a dozen years, Ronald F. Inglehart, of the University of Michigan, has been studying “religious trends.” Reflecting “data on religious trends in 49 countries,” he

and a research colleague concluded that between 1981 and 2007, the thesis that industrialization and the spread of scientific knowledge would undermine religiosity appeared to be false, or at least unproven. Although

“most high-income countries became less religious” during this period, in thirty-three of the forty-nine countries, people became “more religious.” But now, in a just-published *Foreign Affairs* article that anticipates a forthcoming book, Inglehart presents evidence that, for the period 2007–2019, religiosity has declined in all but five of those forty-nine countries. The “most dramatic shift away from religion” has occurred in America. Survey response shows that on a scale of one (“Not at all important”) to ten (“Very

Survey response shows that on a scale of one (“Not at all important”) to ten (“Very important”), the “mean rating” Americans give to the “importance of God in their lives” dropped from 8.2 to 4.6.

important”), the “mean rating” Americans give to the “importance of God in their lives” dropped from 8.2 to

4.6. Inglehart calls this an “astonishingly sharp decline.” At a minimum, it tells us that religious belief faces, at least for the present, an increasingly indifferent environment.

I need not belabor the threat to Adventist life. It’s a commonplace now that many members, and especially many young people, are losing interest in the church of their mothers and fathers.

As to the rejection of theological humility, consider just five Adventist convictions that are now breaking under the weight of our own stubbornness and self-deception.

First, Ellen White. The evidence for her insight and prophetic leadership is overwhelming; her achievements outrank any of our own. But the evidence that her perspective should settle all disputes—an assumption still upheld, at least in practice, in leadership circles—is nonexistent. Conventional obeisance to her every word scorns common sense, even her own common sense, and if we don’t face this, and move on, we cannot flourish. Those who cannot face it threaten our future.

Or consider the genesis of things. Evidence for “creation,” not sheer happenstance, as accounting for the universe is at least suggestive. Our world evokes wonder; no one, certainly, can explain, on purely naturalistic grounds, consciousness or agency, or even physical matter and the laws that govern it. But evidence for “young earth” creationism is, once more, nonexistent, nor is it required by scripture. Again, conventional orthodoxy scorns common sense. The Bible bears indispensable witness to the sacredness of human life and the plausibility of hope, yet we sully that witness with contentious speculation. How long can that continue to work?

Evidence for the risen Christ’s relocation, in 1844, to the heavenly sanctuary’s most holy place depends on

tortured exegesis that no one, outside our own circle, takes at all seriously. What is more, the accompanying view that Christ then commenced a final “investigative” judgment denies divine omniscience and creates, among the faithful, debilitating insecurity. Under this doctrine’s alarming light, you either wallow in fear and self-loathing or lapse like a fool into self-adulation; or maybe you suffer from a weirdly conflicted mishmash of both. At the same time, the literalism of this view distracts from the New Testament conviction that the living Christ is present *in* the church and *in* the world, not ensconced away in a needless bookkeeping exercise. But influential leaders and evangelists persist in regarding “1844” as rock-bottom Adventism. Even if some people do, by personality, gravitate to self-bracing apocalyptic speculations, for anyone who is thoughtful the persistence of this doctrine can only sharpen the swerve into religious indifference.

Apocalyptic consciousness pervades much of holy writ, and protects any attentive community from uncritical veneration of worldly authority: political or ecclesiastical or otherwise. Such consciousness is a reminder that the divine kingdom is nowhere fully embodied, least of all where self-satisfaction disdains repentance and distorts all seeing. But the dominant Adventist eschatology has blunted the moral point of biblical apocalyptic. It has made Daniel and Revelation a repository of secret knowledge instead of a stimulus to renewal and lived hope. It has reduced spiritual life to a means of escape and church mission largely to talk. At its most extreme, this eschatology makes the divine creation less a garden to care for than a bus stop to elsewhere: earth’s future is fixed; no initiative can bend its arc. Under the sway of such deadening divine determinism, peacemaking, which Jesus

The first statement in our official account of Adventist beliefs declares that the Bible is the “written Word of God,” but the statement never acknowledges that the *living* Word of God is Jesus Christ.

put at the center of Christian mission, is, in fact, pointless. Some may say, of course, that I am here painting with a brush too broad, but the portrayal is recognizably Adventist. This eschatology dominates in conventional evangelism; it dominates at most General Conference sessions. While the biblical way of being Adventist could renew religious conviction, the dominant one fosters resignation—and irrelevance.

One more example of doctrinal stubbornness and self-deception is what we say, or don't say, about the Bible. The first statement in our official account of Adventist beliefs declares that the Bible is the "written Word of God," but the statement never acknowledges that the living Word of God is Jesus Christ. The two testaments are the gift of divine inspiration, as 2 Timothy 3:16 declares, but an "inspired," or "God-breathed," document is not itself divine. Christian scripture nowhere attributes divinity either to inanimate ink and paper or to inspired authors who are themselves human. As Bible texts well known within Adventist life unmistakably attest, final authority rests with the risen Christ (Matthew 28:18); Christ alone, by explicit contrast with other contenders, is the "exact imprint of God's very being" (Hebrews 1:3); Christ alone is the Word made "flesh" (John 1:14); Christ alone the church's "head" and "measure" (Ephesians 4:13, 15).

To Bible-believing Christians, then, the Bible truly *is* "the written Word of God"; all of it truly *is* profitable for "teaching" and "training in righteousness." But Christ alone is God's human face, Christ alone the *living* Word. Overlooking this has facilitated the use of scripture to validate misogyny, apartheid, and genocide. Yet we now, at least officially, do overlook it. When the sense of religion's moral failure exacerbates indifference to God, that mistake threatens not only our witness but also our very future. Adventist attention to Psalm 127 could hardly matter more: "*Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.*"

I intend over the next several months to offer occasional, brief reflections on what it might mean for

Adventist doctrine to undergo a desperately needed reset. I sally forth not as a vandal but as a part of the family. For some five years now, I have belonged, indeed, to a tiny congregation whose members, unlike me, regularly consult Doug Bachelor. But they continue to welcome and watch after my wife and me. Now and then I am their

Sabbath-morning preacher. I allow that I have always taken care to bear my witness in a way that builds up and does not tear down. Perhaps I have been careful to a fault; I do grasp, certainly, the difficulty our theological problems put in front of us. Still, I think, or at least hope, that if we commit ourselves to unity, and if we acknowledge that doctrinal inertia cannot disappear as if by magic, God's grace can shift us toward humility and fresh understanding. I think, or at least hope, that so far

from edging toward irrelevance, we may recover and bear, even amid secularizing drift, a witness that truly matters.

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CHARLES SCRIVEN is the former board chair of Adventist Forum, the organization that publishes *Spectrum*.

WANTED: *A Relevant and Responsive Church*

BY ADMIRAL NCUBE

Globally, the Adventist Church is enjoying phenomenal growth, with membership now in excess of 22 million. While acknowledging that numbers are not an indicator of spirituality, the numerical growth of Adventism should be celebrated. Archivist David Trim, in his report¹ to the 2020 General Conference Annual Council, revealed that since 1965, out of the 40,421,554 people who became members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 16,240,069, or 40%, left the church during the same period. He further added that, “we are not having the evangelistic success that might be expected. . . . We have more members than ever, but they are not winning noticeably more souls for Christ as our success in soul-winning seems to be plateauing,” meaning that even though membership is growing, the church is experiencing a leveling off of growth rates. The continued hemorrhage of two out of every five members has less to do with doctrinal disagreements than with social and relational factors,² which means reasons for leaving the local church fellowship lie in the realm of relationships, the absence of a sense of belonging, and the lack of meaningful engagement in the local congregation.

As this attrition is taking place, calls for more focus on retention and nurture, discipling and discipleship are commendable. On the other hand, mission continues using

the same methods, based on our traditional model borrowed from the nineteenth century. This is characterized by bringing people to some public venue, where we churn out doctrinal messages and prove the correctness of what we believe in, while revealing the error in others. Our role as members is to entice and “lovingly” coerce people to come to our venues where we have a preacher ready to pounce on them with our beliefs. However, the landscape is changing; faced by secularism and post modernism in the Global North, and religious congestion, Pentecostalism, and syncretism in the Global South, our approach to mission needs rethinking. It is at the local church where change has to take place. As long as we ignore the need to “disinfect” or “detox” the local church environment of repulsive practices we may as well brace ourselves for high attrition rates in the near future.

Captives of Tradition

Typical of Adventism is an inherent fear of the new. We are captives of tradition, as many of us look at the past with nostalgia, filled with a longing for a return to where things were. For them, the present represents apostasy on a grand scale as they associate the past with commitment and faithfulness. As that which is different is viewed with suspicion, efforts are exerted in trying to recreate the past,

often through reminiscing about the 1950s version of Adventism, characterized by a love of the KJV, addictive eighteenth-century hymns, Anglocentric dress styles with suffocating formality, and overwhelming ritual typical of a bygone era. Added to this is the program-centric model, characterized by a rigidity that we all loathe but cannot do without. This glamorization of the so-called “old time religion,” misconstrued as faithfulness, blinds us to opportunities for relevant ministry. By being allergic to new ways and things, we make compliance to tradition an end in itself.

Sadly, the implication is that the church becomes more institutional than communal, industrial than intimate, where focus is on regulating rather than facilitating. In a church where nothing grows organically but is program driven, worship or praise turns into a mere performance, creating a toxic attachment to preachers and other pulpit celebrities. When a church finds itself head-over-heels in love with a past era, doing everything to replay it, rigidly clinging to tradition at the expense of practicality, then idolatry is loading. We are no better than the children of Israel who, about 700 years later, ended up worshiping the bronze serpent Moses had made for them to look at to live. But a new generation is emerging, and our relevance will lie in rekindling the essence of worship and community. This entails making church a place where members are producers rather than perennial consumers of rigid programs, where worship is organic, creativity is celebrated, and focus is genuinely on people.

Sinners Beyond Scrutiny

Membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church includes adherence to a lot of prescribed and proscribed behaviors usually defined in the fundamental beliefs, baptismal vows, and the *Church Manual*, as well as Adventist tradition (be it local, regional, or global). The assumption is that all these are rooted in the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White, which is contestable of course. In many places, what is often regarded as true Adventism often betrays some

Since 1965, out of the 40,421,554 people who become members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 16,240,069, or 40%, left the church during the same period.

sort of perfectionism that breeds superficial compliance and pretense, since all of us often fail to meet the same standard. The emphasis on certain behaviors means that it is difficult for someone to openly confess their struggles or admit spiritual failure in our local churches. We all try to portray an “I am okay” attitude. Hidden behind our polished Sabbath look, dignified demeanor, empty Sabbath smiles, are struggles with bad habits, jealousy, pride, drug abuse, lust,

etc. Because struggle is not seen as a sign of life, we regard those openly struggling with sin as candidates for church discipline rather than encouragement or affirmation.

As long as we entertain such attitudes, the local church environment becomes brutal and judgmental to those whose sins have been exposed. The stolid response to each other’s struggles not only breeds hypocrisy but works against creating an authentic church community. Practically, this means you are alone in your struggles; as someone said to me, “your survival in the Adventist church hinges on your ability to sin without scrutiny.” Since members cannot be vulnerable, conversations become superficial and meaningful connection is stifled. Many become scared of asking uncomfortable questions or confessing their struggles with the so-called obvious and settled issues in Adventism. As long as members cannot be vulnerable, or freely ask questions that appear basic but consequential, they may disembark faster than they came in or join the band wagon of sophisticated Adventist pretenders and actors.

Compliant but Not Converted

Another equally important concern relates to how messages in some pulpits frequently emphasize our personal role in modifying behavior and not the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice. The sermons tend to focus on moralism and legalism with little or no attention on the primary role of the Holy Spirit in transforming lives. Instead of clearly articulating God’s work in our lives, struggling Christians are simply told to try harder. Sadly, the Christian experience is portrayed as a set of behaviors meant to avoid hell and go

to heaven, rather than a genuine encounter with Jesus. We tend to follow Jesus not because of who He is, but driven by a fear of what will happen if we do not choose Him. Devoid of love, sermons terrorize listeners into repentance through appealing to the shortness and uncertainty of time. Because we are used to toxicity in the pulpits, a powerful sermon is characterized by explicit depictions of sin and portrayals of God's wrath, while anything less than this is a cheapening of grace.

In all this, we have adopted a “convince-conform-co-opt” approach to mission where attention is on convincing them, winning the argument, exposing error, and proving the correctness of our position. Mission is reduced to an intellectual conquest where, after convincing them that ours is the real deal, we make them conform to certain prescribed behaviors (most of which are non-salvific). By conflating conversion to Christ and church membership, we have departed from Christ's way of working, where He focused firstly on co-opting through love, then convincing/believing, and lastly conforming to expected behaviors (see John 4—the Samaritan woman; Luke 19—Zacchaeus; John 9—the blind man).

Our Challenge

While the West contends with secularism, biblical illiteracy, and post modernism, the brand of Adventism prevalent in many parts of the world, under the guise of old-time religion, is also losing its efficacy in mission. In whatever context, Adventist mission faces unique challenges. For example, Africa, where we have celebrated growth, is a congested religious space, with Catholics,³ Methodists,⁴ and Pentecostals⁵ among the many groups also recording substantial growth. This means Adventism is not alone, as high fertility rates that translate into population growth have been cited as a major driver of Christian growth in Africa, where Christians are younger and have more children.

Secondly, for an African, religion is a potent force permeating every aspect of life and is often practiced in a community instead of being an individual or personal affair.⁶ Thus, life for an African cannot be compartmentalized, where religion is divorced from daily life. Religion has great meaning for the African, such that whenever there is a crisis or calamity or any problem, the first response is not to do a physical analysis of the situation, but a spiritual diagnosis of the spiritual powers that have

been offended. Conversely, success in any endeavor is not attributed to a person's acumen but the special favor of the ancestors or spirit powers⁷ or some higher Being. This means that Africans are notoriously religious; Adventism finds religiously inclined communities whose beliefs provide a ready-made template to build on. But the challenge lies in the “quality” of Adventism on a continent where poverty remains prevalent, syncretism is still rife, Pentecostalism is more appealing, and fundamentalist undertones are still pervasive.

COVID-19 means not only more attrition but that our traditional evangelistic series model is now difficult to implement. Online services have done their part; their limitation is a lack of community and belonging, which many long for. As we invest resources on mission, new approaches are needed to attract and retain new members. How accessible, available, and approachable your local church is will determine success or failure in mission. Powerful preachers, polished musicians, colorful posters, and rehearsed arguments won't be enough in the COVID-19 era. As Ellen White sums up succinctly, “There must be no fixed rules; our work is a progressive work, and there must be room left for methods to be improved upon.”⁸

Endnotes

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IS INNOVATION NEEDED?

If So, Then Where?

BY EIRIKUR INGVARSSON

Innovation is not a new construct in organizational circles and has continually reared its head in one way or another. Rapid changes in society demand innovation and renewal, such as in commerce, production, transportation, and interaction between individuals, to mention but a few examples. It is important to recognize that innovation and renewal is not a luxury option, but a necessity in order to maintain a system irrespective of where it is found or its nature. This is true for economic systems, sociological movements, and religious institutions. This is true because innovation is woven into the very fabric of culture, society, and economics. Innovation and renewal are foundational for growth and quality of life. This has been true in history, remains true today, and will be proven true for the unforeseen future.

Need for Innovation

While Coca-Cola is a well-known company, few may think of it in relation to innovation. It is a 130-year-old company, that needs no introduction. But when their senior vice president of global talent and development, Stacey Valy Panayiotou, speaks about innovation in their search for human resources, it is wise to pause for



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May 5, 2020: A woman wearing a face mask walks in front of graffiti of Coca-Cola soda, painted on a wall in the city of Valencia, Carabobo state, Venezuela.

a moment and listen to what she has to say. In a recent interview with CBS News.com, Panayiotou said, “We need candidates who understand Coke’s new approach. It’s not a specific skill set but a mindset about change. We want people who know how to solve problems, people that can help us be disruptive and win at that.”



Raufarhólshellir, located in Iceland, is one of the largest lava tubes in the country, and features rainbow-colored walls and stunning rock formations. The lava tube is located on the property of an Adventist academy. This natural resource has become a popular tourist attraction generating income for the church.

History has shown them that they need to avoid stagnation and the trap of celebrating former success. Coca-Cola does this through constant innovation. It is well known that beverage companies have their ups and downs, but today there is a generally negative attitude towards sugary soda drinks; thus it is imperative to go outside the box and respond to consumer demand. It is imperative to respond to their demand in a different way than in the past.

One of their innovative actions is to recruit employees from a different perspective. It is not enough to seek individuals with good ideas and great team-building skills; rather, they need to seek employees who are intent on learning new things and new methods, who are keen on continual learning, who are willing to listen to society and adapt to present demands.

She mentioned the following example as an illustration: “A group of our marketers were recently working on a project, and, rather than sitting at a conference table, they decided to go to Chicago, where they spent the day with musicians and artists, visiting museums, looking for inspiration. It was very effective.”

Her interview was widely noticed, with media

History has shown them that they need to avoid stagnation and the trap of celebrating former success.

outlet Innovation Excellence pointing out that this shows the importance of being always ready and to be always looking to learn something new, and that this skill

should be expected to be ever present. This is especially true for individuals wanting to be in development and production of new products.

Is There a Need for Innovation in the Church?

No matter what we think about the work and message of our church, we must consider

innovation in similar ways as Coca-Cola. It does not mean that we change our core message, or that the Three Angels’ Message needs to undergo product development. Rather, it is how we approach and handle our message that needs review. The foundation of Coca-Cola is still to satisfy customer thirst, but how they go about fulfilling that thirst will change. In the same way, the church will continue to seek to satisfy the spiritual thirst of society. Spiritual thirst still exists, and it is the living water that the church has that will satisfy this thirst. It is the same living water the church has presented for decades and centuries. The foundation, the living water, will not change, but how it is presented to society must adapt to present-day needs.

It is imperative that church leaders and professors at higher-learning institutions be aware that the world is not so much interested in what the church knows as they are interested in what the church is doing and how it is done.

Seventh-day Adventists are familiar with innovation. Most church members are familiar with the story of how Will Keith Kellogg and Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, in effect, changed the breakfast habits of American society. Dr. Kellogg also changed the taste buds of all nations with the introduction of peanut butter.

A Modern Encouragement

It is interesting that the Kelloggs' innovation became contagious and improved the life of millions worldwide. How does one measure up with innovative actions and thoughts? When one performs an online search for "Innovation and Adventist," very few hits emerge. The ability to innovate and generate new value is still a fundamental necessity of society. This involves not only generating increasing financial value but being at the forefront of encouraging and welcoming innovation in order to create new opportunities. The greatest treasure the church has is human resource. God did not create us with half-empty cups; rather, our cups are brimming and overflowing with talent and gifts from the Creator.

It is possible that the church's treasured foundations and valued history blinds her from seeing that current treasures are handed down from previous generations, and with the soon-coming of Jesus, the church is preaching the end of time with no option, or urgency, to innovate and re-evaluate the church's life and methods.

It is imperative that church leaders and professors at higher-learning institutions be aware that the world is not so much interested in what the church knows as they are interested in what the church is doing and how it is done. This is demonstrated by the experience of the Kelloggs. Thus, it is important that the church approaches its work and ministry from a perspective of innovation. Innovation

is not a reserve for difficult times; it is a prerequisite for progress all over the world and it always applies. Without new approaches, the church leaders of the future will have neither the ability nor the opportunity to make critical decisions to impact a complex and modern society of the future. There is a need for a new vision. The church needs to prepare the Seventh-day Adventist movement to be ready to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future by creating a foundation of innovation in every area. The church can bring together individuals from various sectors such as business and commerce, as well as arts and culture, along with pastors and professors. The church members are all in this together; thus, a conversation for creative innovation must begin now. There is no time to wait.



EIRIKUR INGVARSSON is a husband, father of two, business owner, and entrepreneur and is passionate about equality and the welfare of the church.

EDUCATION IN THE TIME OF COVID

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ADVENTIST SCHOOLS, COVID-19, AND THE BIG GOVERNMENT BAILOUT:

Is the Funding in Jeopardy?

BY ALVA JAMES-JOHNSON, JOEL GUERRA, AND PAOLA MORA ZEPEDA

For two years, schools in the Chesapeake Conference of Seventh-day Adventists received scholarship funds from the state of Maryland for low-income students. The funding, administered through the Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST) voucher program, helped disadvantaged families afford a private school education.

However, in 2019, the state launched an investigation into the written policies of private schools that received the allocations, eventually concluding that Adventist schools in the Chesapeake Conference were in violation of state guidelines prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Based on that investigation, the state of Maryland not only rescinded scholarships that had already been granted for the 2019–2020 school year, it also demanded that the conference refund money allocated for scholarships the previous two years, according to Janesta Walker, superintendent of schools for the Chesapeake Conference.

With that painful scenario in mind, the Chesapeake Conference recommended that schools

under its auspices not accept federal funds made available through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the biggest government bailout in US history, which includes millions of dollars set aside for private schools. *Spectrum* found only one Chesapeake school—Highland View Academy—listed in a US Treasury database that identifies organizations that received amounts of \$150,000 or more.

“We’re concerned about the religious liberty implications of accepting those funds,” said Walker, in a recent interview.

We, here in Maryland, have had a very difficult and complicated situation in the last couple of years with the state and government funding that we have received for scholarships in the past.

The government actually came back and withdrew funding that we had been granted and went back two years and clawed back funds that had already been



Janesta Walker

Gay SDA Teacher in Florida Threatens Lawsuit Over Termination

BY TAYLOR DEAN

Steven Arauz was allegedly fired on June 23 from his job at Forest Lake Education Center (FLEC), a Seventh-day Adventist K–8 school located in Longwood, Florida. Arauz said the Florida Conference informed him of his termination after he had been featured in an article, published by an online magazine, called “Gays with Kids,” highlighting his life as a single foster and adoptive parent.

On Oct. 21, the *Orlando Sentinel* reported about the controversial firing in an article, which was picked up by *Newsweek* and other media outlets. In an October 27 interview with *Spectrum*, Arauz said his termination is unfair because FLEC and the Florida Conference have received government aid in the form of scholarships, as well as CARES Act stimulus relief funds. Arauz said he is considering legal action against what he believes is a violation of government guidelines.

“Any organization that is wanting to receive government funding, or even state tax funding, should be held to some strict guidelines when it comes to discrimination laws, whether that is not just sexual orientation, but also race, girl or boy, or age,” he said. “I understand that in our country we have religious freedom, and I’m absolutely all for religious freedom. . . . But none of us gets to choose if we’re born a boy or a girl. None of us gets to choose black or white. None of us gets to choose gay or straight. Those are things that we have no choice over.”

Frank Runnels, vice president for education and superintendent of schools for Florida Conference, responded to questions submitted by *Spectrum* regarding the controversy, disputing Arauz’s accusations.

“Mr. Arauz’s contract had expired and was not renewed,” he wrote in an email. “Each year, we carefully consider our staffing needs for the upcoming school year. Contributions and other sources of school funding are unrelated to such annual evaluations.”

spent. And so, of course, that weighed heavily on our minds as we were thinking about accepting [CARES Act] government funding. We also know that the assurances that [we often] sign to accept the funding sometimes get into the area of religious liberty and could have an impact on how we operate our schools, and we do not want to be put in a position to where we are forced to compromise our faith values for the sake of money.

The Chesapeake Conference is not alone. As the United States government doled out trillions of dollars to shore up an economy brutally battered by the novel coronavirus pandemic, many K–12 Adventist schools in the North American Division grappled with whether or not to accept government funds.

Some, like school administrators in the Chesapeake

Conference, opted to heed counsel provided by the North American Division, which recommended that church entities abstain from pursuing the money. At the same time, schools in other conferences applied for, received, and accepted the funds in an effort to withstand the challenges of COVID-19, according to those interviewed for this article.

Much of the national spotlight has centered on the \$659 billion Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), which issued millions of government dollars to religious organizations for employee protection. General Conference and North American Division entities, along with dozens of schools, conferences, and independent ministries, received millions of federal dollars from that pot of money, despite the NAD’s recommendation to abstain based on religious liberty concerns.

However, the CARES ACT also includes specific funding for K–12 schools through a \$13.5 billion Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) pro-

Spectrum was able to confirm that at least eighteen Adventist K–12 schools received loan allocations ranging from \$150,000 to \$1 million through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP).

gram established as part of the Education Stabilization Fund. Those dollars, funneled through the fifty states, are allocated to individual schools via local school districts, which are required to provide “equitable services” to private schools based on the proportional share of students, according to guidelines established by the US Department of Education. Additional money is available through Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funding, distributed by governors at their discretion.

The ESSER funds have been embroiled in controversy in recent months due to public backlash over private schools receiving the money. Critics have argued that a rule implemented by US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos would divert millions of dollars from public schools serving low-income children. The policy required public school districts to funnel more coronavirus stimulus dollars to private schools using a calculation based on total student enrollments, rather than the number of low-income students, a formula historically used for such allocations.

- On August 21, a Seattle federal judge issued a temporary injunction blocking the funds to private schools in response to a lawsuit filed by the state of Washington.
- On August 26, a federal California judge temporarily halted the funding in response to a lawsuit filed by a coalition of states, including California and Michigan, and school districts such as those in New York and Chicago.
- On September 4, a federal judge in Washington, DC, blocked the funding in response to a lawsuit filed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), school districts and public-school advocates.

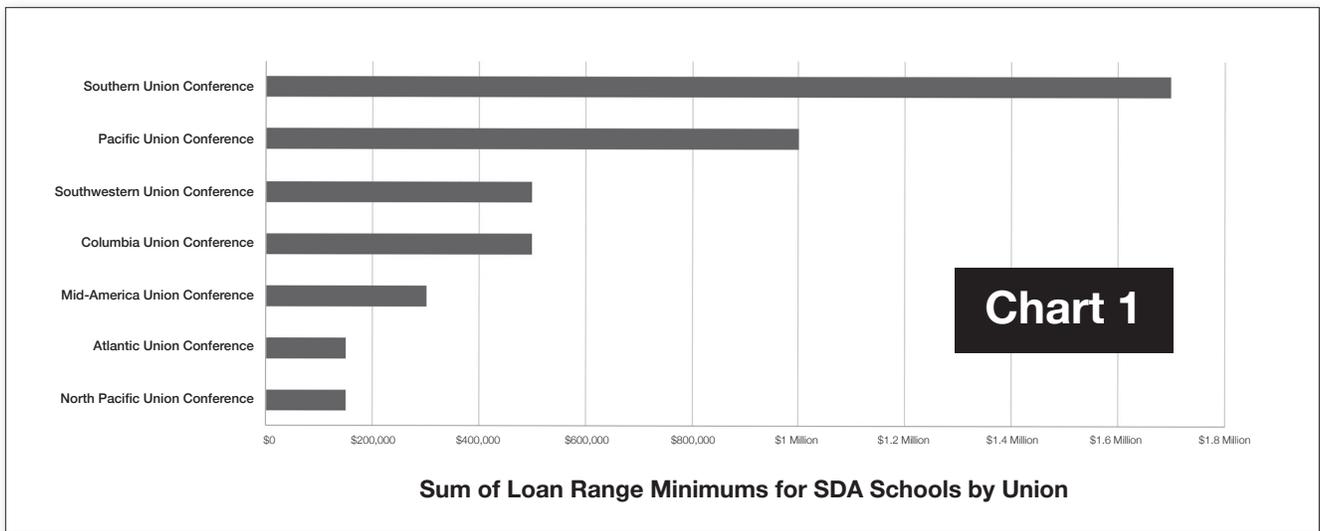
Spectrum conducted a four-month investigation to track money flowing to Adventist K–12 schools via the CARES Act. Reporters tried contacting Adventist administrators from each of the fifty conferences located in the United States, as well as many union officials. Of that number, only twenty-one responded and nineteen agreed to be interviewed.

However, through analyses of data released by the US Treasury Department—matching Adventist K–12 entities and government data using school names, addresses and the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code that the federal government uses to classify educational nonprofits—*Spectrum* was able to confirm that at least eighteen Adventist K-12 schools received loan allocations ranging from anywhere from \$150,000 to \$1 million through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). A data scientist from DataKind, a volunteer organization that provides pro bono services to journalists and other clients, assisted with the project.

The money tracked thus far does not include PPP loans amounting to less than \$150,000 that Adventist schools may have received from the CARES Act, or dollars that conferences may have applied for separately. A *Spectrum* database of fifty-five Adventist organizations that received PPP allocations lists twenty conferences in the United States.

The US Treasury database categorizes the dollars received according to a range of funding, not specific amounts, with tiers of \$150,000 to \$350,000, \$350,000 to \$1 million, \$1 million to \$2 million, \$2 million to \$5 million, and \$5 million to \$10 million. Entities receiving less than \$150,000 were not identified by the SBA due to privacy concerns, according to US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. Five news organizations, including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, are suing the SBA for access to government records regarding who received funding and the exact amounts.

Most of the Adventist schools on the list are located



in the southern and western states. Four are in the Florida Conference, four in the Southern California Conference, two in the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference, and two in the Texas Conference. The Greater New York, Chesapeake, Iowa-Missouri, Oregon, Ohio, and Dakota conferences each had one school on the list.

The minimum amount the schools would have received, based on the ranges reported by the government, is a total of \$4.3 million, with schools in the Southern Union receiving the most with a total of at least \$1.7 million. (See Chart 1). The Adventist schools in the database reported a total of 440 jobs to the government, with those in the Southern California Conference reporting the most, with a total of 135. Schools in the Florida Conference, which received the most money, reported zero jobs, according to the government database. (See Chart 2).

Tracking ESSER funds allocated to Adventist schools is more complicated because of how the funds are distributed. *Spectrum* submitted public-records requests to education officials in all fifty states to track the funding, but only a few released the information. So far, the magazine has been able to confirm through government records that at least sixteen Adventist schools in Georgia received the ESSER funding, amounting to a total of at least \$269,449, and six Adventist schools in New Jersey received allocations amounting to a total of at least \$42,070.

Stephen Bralley, director of Secondary Education and Accreditation



Stephen Bralley

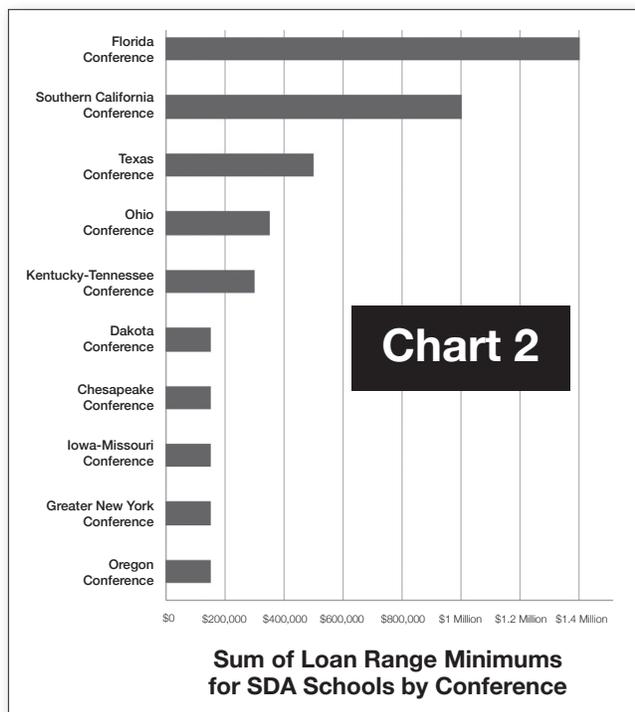
for the North American Division, sits on the Council for American Private Education (CAPE) and other councils that have been lobbying the government on behalf of private schools. He said many Adventist schools applied for and received CARES Act funding in the spring because of financial stresses caused by the pandemic.

Before April, word started kind of filtering out that the funds were being developed, and we started getting a lot of questions from the field—some excitement—because [the schools] were in financial pain. And so, the NAD began to look and evaluate what we knew at the time, and that generated the written response that the NAD sent out on April 8.

In that missive, the NAD stated:

Many church leaders and members have concerns regarding both restrictions and conditions surrounding the acceptance of this government aid. In addition, there have been questions regarding how receiving this money fits into the Seventh-day Adventist Church's longstanding and historic commitment to the separation of church and state.

“It is the North American Division administration's recommendation to abstain from participation in both of these federal financial assistance programs,” the statement



continued, referring to federal funds available through both the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES) and the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). “While the risk associated with this money is uncertain, NAD leadership’s primary concern is remaining faithful to the counsel we’ve been given regarding church-state relations.”

Though many Adventist schools ignored the NAD’s recommendation and pursued the funding, much of it may now be in jeopardy because of public outrage, the recent court rulings, and developing restrictions, Bralley explained.

What the bill was described as pre-April and April has not been static. It has evolved and, in some cases, changed in its delivery all the way up until now. Originally, there was a lot of affirming talk from the US government that there would be no strings attached. And then by mid-April/(early) May the Treasury Department started releasing language and information that was very clear there were going to be strings attached, specifically when it had to do with non-discriminatory practices, employment practices, Title VI and IX, and age discrimination.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects individuals from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin when trying to access benefits or financial assistance under any program funded by the federal government. Title IX protects people from discrimination based on sex when participating in educational programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance.

“Some of [the guidelines are] totally understandable,” Bralley said,

But when it comes to hiring practices, there’s still some gray area on what that’s going to mean in the future. So, all of these funds, they were given without the expectation of you having to pay them back unless you fail to follow the terms and recommendations. And those terms and recommendations have kind of been shifting and developing. You kind of feel like you’re on a little bit of shifting sand in some cases.

Bralley said DeVos and the US Treasury Department tried to ensure that private schools would be able to continue hiring according to their religious beliefs, but he is not confident that will happen. Federal education officials recently informed CAPE and other private school lobbying organizations that their input would be considered, he said, but he believes CARES Act private school funding is on a slippery slope.

What we were leery about when the NAD released the statement on April 8 was that there was a whole lot of this administration sort of shooting from the hip and figuring it out later. . . . We do know that it’s not as it was originally described. And we don’t know what it will ultimately mean for the schools that accepted funds.

The word we’re getting back is that support, mainly from conservative politicians, is starting to wane. And so they’re really starting to pull back. The fear now is if they continue to push and lobby for equal access to the CARES Act funds, it could end up hurting broader support for private schools when it comes to [accessing

funds for] Title II, III and IV. And so that's kind of where we are right now.

Title II provides federal funding for professional training for teachers. Title III is designed to help ensure that English learners attain English language proficiency and meet state academic standards. Title IV refers to federal financial-aid funds at colleges and universities.

Bralley said one example of strings attached to the money is the US Education Department's recent announcement that private schools' use of the ESSER funding would be determined by Title I specifications, which would require the schools to prove that they were using the funding for low-income and/or special-needs students.

There's a lot of angst in the local public-school districts and counties. The political narrative is that rich, private schools are taking funds from poor public schools. Now, the reality is that in most of our private school systems, our student population looks exactly like the economic distribution in the public systems and counties. But that narrative is not the one that has won out, and that's why political support on Capitol Hill has kind of waned. The narrative is you're just fighting for the well-off in requesting any more funds.

The NAD has been trying to track the numbers of schools that received stimulus dollars, Bralley said, but it has not always been easy.

For that information we rely on our union directors, and our union directors rely on our superintendents, and our superintendents rely on our principals, and sometimes those communication lines work very well, and sometimes—due to various reasons—that communication takes more time. But our teachers and administrators have done an amazing job dealing with this crisis. And, in some cases, overnight, they shifted the pedagogy of how they're delivering education, and they just rolled on right into it. And I think that's part of why our enrollment is stable. They made the

shift quicker and better than many of our public and sister schools.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, a denomination based on an eschatology steeped in the inevitability of government infringement on religious rights, boasts the largest Protestant school system in the world and the second-largest private school system next to the Catholic Church. In the North American Division, that amounts to 941 schools, which include, early childhood centers all the way to colleges and universities. The combined enrollment for the 2019–2020 school year, the most recent year for which numbers are available, was 77,315, according to Bralley. Overall, enrollment has been increasing over the past five years, he said, but schools in some parts of the division have been faring better than others. Small schools, with one to two teachers, have been struggling more than midsize to large ones. And, in some cases, administrators have had to reduce staff or combine educational programs.

Before COVID, we did have schools and, in some cases academies, that were already kind of on the edge. And just like families, with very little savings in the bank, if you're already on the edge and something like COVID comes along, you go from living on the edge to crisis quickly. And so, that's kind of the picture we're seeing.

I know right now enrollment numbers appear to be stable. And in some cases, we're seeing increased enrollment. . . . But if you're sitting in the Southern Union in Georgia Cumberland-Conference in a small school and your enrollment is going down, that's what you see. [We] could stand there and say, "Well, the school in California has tripled in enrollment." But it really doesn't help, and so that's the reality.

While many of the schools receive government vouchers, Title I dollars, financial aid, grants, and other funding through various government programs, the debate over the potential hazards of government funding has challenged the denomination practically from its existence.

Alan Reinach is director of the Church State Council, a religious liberty ministry of the Pacific Union Confer-

ence that has strongly opposed school voucher programs. Though expressing empathy and understanding for Adventist schools that struggled financially because of COVID-19, he reiterated his strong belief in the separation of church and state.

“I have long urged that in the Adventist church, we don’t have a financial problem, we have a spiritual problem. The reason why we can’t provide affordable education to every child who wants it is because we have a spiritual problem,” he said in a June interview with *Spectrum*.



Alan Reinach

I don’t know the figures, but I’m told that a relatively modest proportion of members pay a faithful tithe. So if we had far more participation in financing and tithing and offerings, etc, then we really could provide all of our kids with free or low-cost religious education. Government funding becomes a bit of a crutch.

At the same time, other Adventist church leaders, such as Daniel Honore, president of the Northeastern Conference, believe there are times when government funding is warranted. As his conference considered whether to pursue PPP funds, Honore delivered a PowerPoint presentation titled “A Study from the Spirit of Prophecy on Receiving External Assistance.”

Honore told the story of land that was donated to the Adventist church by the British South African Company in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in the 1890s, for a university and hospital.

“A knowledge of this gift created considerable concern among certain leading brethren at Battle Creek, who feared that to accept it would be a violation of the principles of the separation of church and state,” according to the information provided by Honore.

As the matter was discussed at the General Conference Session of 1895, action was taken, “That we ought not as a denomination either to seek or to accept from any civil government, chief, ruler, or royal chartered company, supreme, local, or otherwise, any gift, or donation, concession, grant, either of land, money, credit, special

privilege, or other thing of value, to which we are not in common with all others justly entitled as men without any reference to our religious profession or religious work.”

However, Ellen White, the denomination’s prophetess and most prominent co-founder, had a different perspective, which led to the General Conference action not being implemented, according to Honore. In the PowerPoint, Honore listed several quotes from White in favor of accepting government assistance in some instances, including one from *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (203).

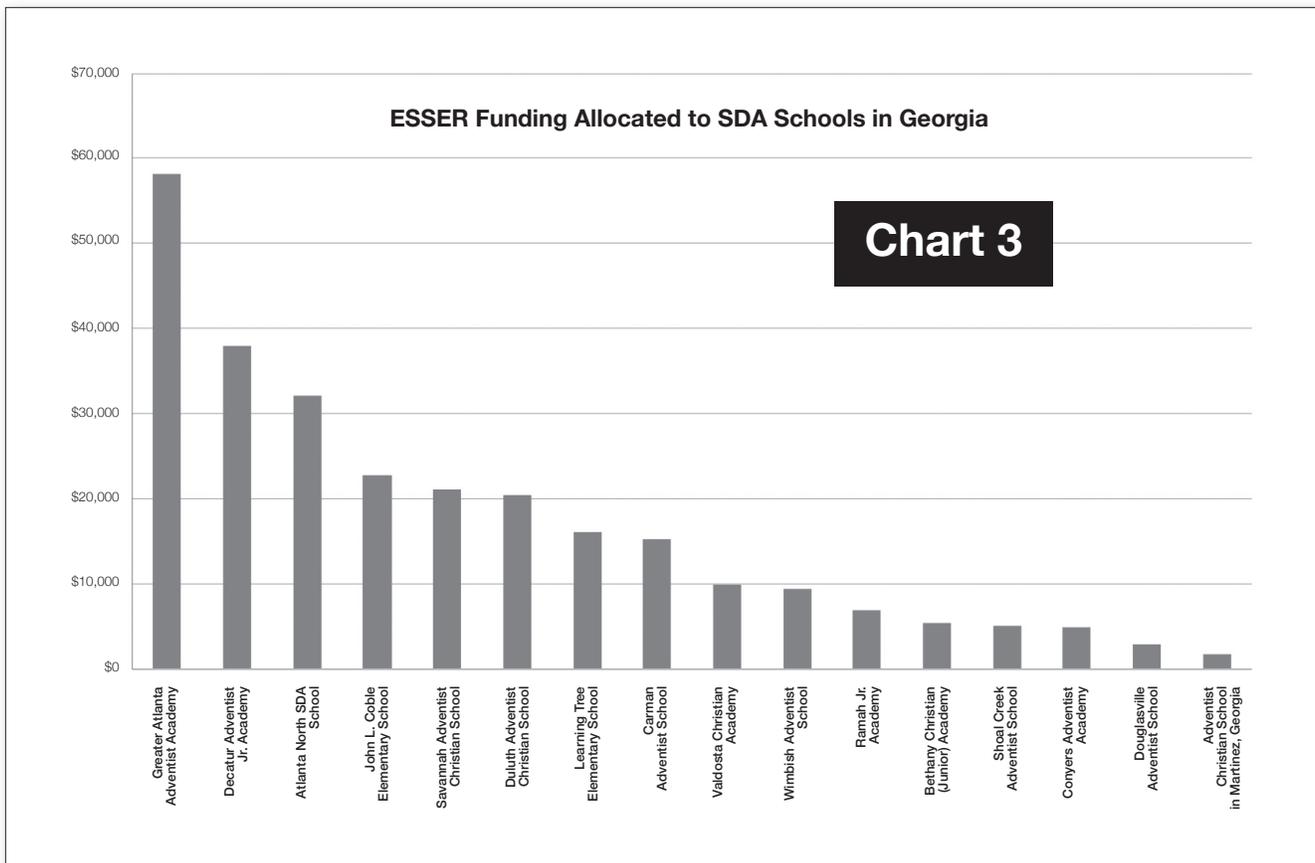
The Lord God of Israel has placed His goods in the hands of unbelievers, but they are to be used in favor of doing the works that must be done for a fallen world. The agents through whom these gifts come may open up avenues through which the truth may go. They may have no sympathy with the work, and no faith in Christ, and no practice in His words; but their gifts are not to be refused on that account.

Kevin Kossick is vice president for education in the Georgia-Cumberland Conference (GCC). He said administrators there followed the NAD’s recommendation not to accept PPP funding, and only one school applied and was approved for a forgivable loan through the US Small Business Administration. However, several GCC schools applied for and accepted funds through the ESSER program for cleaning supplies and other COVID-19 related resources with the conference’s blessing.



Kevin Kossick

I personally believe that this is a time for adherence to our historic feelings about separation of church and state. But I’m okay with them taking money for cleaning supplies and [those kinds of things]. Because, if you look at any educational legal standards, there’s something called the “child benefit theory.” And it has always been understood that private



or parochial schools can take funding from the government if it benefits the child.

At the time of the interview, Kossick said he did not know the amount of money individual GCC schools received through the ESSER program. However, public records obtained from the Georgia Department of Education revealed that the schools are (see Chart 3):

- Wimbish Adventist School - \$9,331.99
- Savannah Adventist Christian School - \$20,991.86
- Shoal Creek Adventist School - \$4,951.21
- Learning Tree Elementary School - \$16,097.19
- Atlanta North SDA School- \$32,125.39
- Decatur Adventist Jr. Academy - \$37,874.15
- Douglasville Adventist School - \$2,816.61
- Adventist Christian School in Martinez, Georgia - \$1,768.63
- Duluth Adventist Christian School - \$20,457.77
- Carman Adventist School - \$15,165.95
- Conyers Adventist Academy - \$4,876.34
- John L. Coble Elementary School - \$22,725.74

- Greater Atlanta Adventist Academy - \$58,143.67
- Valdosta Christian Academy - \$9,911.32
- Bethany Christian (Junior) Academy - \$5,402.73
- Ramah Jr. Academy - \$6,808

Greater Atlanta Adventist Academy, Decatur Adventist Junior Academy, Bethany Christian Academy, and Ramah Jr. Academy are all in the South Atlantic Conference. All the other Georgia schools listed are in the Georgia-Cumberland Conference.

Collegedale Academy, a K–12 school in Tennessee, also located in the Georgia-Cumberland Conference, received an allocation of about \$146,274, according to an article in the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*.

In the early stages of the application process, the conference shared a video with educators, which featured Rebekah Helbley, the former principal at Carman Adventist School, explaining the benefits and pitfalls associated with the government funding. In the video, Helbley said she had been



Rebekah Helbley

working with the city of Marietta to secure funding for sanitization and school supplies.

“It could be used for technology. It could be used for cleaning supplies. It could be used for training your janitor how to clean,” said Helbley. “It could be used for signage in your school for social distancing.”

Though the possibilities seemed endless, Helbley warned of a caveat regarding technology, which, she said, would remain the property of the local school districts.

“And, therefore, if you try and utilize those in a private school, especially in a religious setting, it would be inappropriate or hard to keep track of,” she warned. “However, on the flip side, if you were to use those funds for sanitizing equipment such as wipes, things that don’t have to be kept track of, then you’re good to go.”

Helbley is now the principal at John L. Coble Elementary School in Calhoun, Georgia, which received an ESS-ER financial allocation of \$22,000 for health and sanitization supplies, according to public records. She said the school did not receive funding in cash; all supplies were purchased by the public school system.

“We have the supplies with no strings attached, and we’ve had excellent, excellent interaction with our local community school system in that process,” she said last week in an interview with *Spectrum*. “I feel like we were super, super, super blessed, and a lot of it comes down to the relationships that you have between the local public-school system and the private school.”

Helbley said the funding ultimately benefits students.

They will benefit from maintaining a clean, healthy, and safe space. And, in this instance, the purchasing power of the public-school district is far, far, far greater than the purchasing power of our local schools, because we’re just small independent schools.

However, the recent rulings by the federal judges could impact funding that was not processed before September 17, she said. On that day, Matt Cardoza, director of external affairs for the Georgia Department of Education, sent an email to superintendents notifying them that the funding is on hold.

“As you’ve likely seen, several courts have recently ruled against the US Department of Education’s interpre-

tation . . . of the Equitable Services calculation method for CARES Act funds,” he wrote in the email now posted on the GDOE website.²

We do not yet have any guidance from the USED [US Education Department] on any proposed changes as a result of these court rulings. We also do not know if USED will appeal the court decisions.

In light of these circumstances, we are asking that all CARES Act expenditures from all CARES Act grants . . . be halted until Wednesday, September 30, or until we get further communication from USED from which we are able to finalize our own guidance for LEAs [Local Education Agencies] and private schools. We will also be communicating this same message to private schools that met the Equitable Services eligibility under USED’s original interpretation . . . of Equitable Services for CARES Act.

Schools Across the United States That Received PPP Loans

\$350,000–\$1 Million

Forest Lake Academy
Forest Lake Education Center
Glendale Adventist Academy
Greater Miami Adventist Academy
North Dallas Adventist Academy
North Tampa Christian Academy
San Gabriel Academy
Spring Valley Academy

\$150,000–\$350,000

Dakota Adventist Academy
Greater New York Academy
Highland Academy
Highland View Academy
Madison Academy
Milo Adventist Academy
Newbury Park Adventist Academy
South Bay Junior Academy
South Texas Christian Academy
Sunnydale Adventist Academy

Yet, Helbley does not regret accessing the financial resources.

“I know there’s pushback; I know there’s tons of politics,” she said. “However, at the local level—you know, down here at the bottom—I haven’t had any pushback. I haven’t had any problems; I haven’t had any concerns.”

Karen Senecal, treasurer for the New Jersey Conference, said none of the Adventist schools in that territory applied for PPP funds. Instead, the conference applied for and received \$1.48 million, which allowed administrators to forgive a portion of the amounts the schools owed to the conference.



Karen Senecal

Some New Jersey Adventist schools did, however, receive ESSER allocations, Senecal confirmed. Those on the state list obtained by *Spectrum* through a public records request are:

- Tranquility SDA School - \$1,028
- Lake Nelson Adventist Academy - \$18,229
- Meadow View Junior Academy - \$789
- Waldwick SDA School - \$5,370
- Vine Haven Adventist School - \$14,401
- Wilbert Mays SDA School - \$2,253

Tranquility, Lake Nelson, Meadow View, Waldwick, and Vine Haven are in the New Jersey Conference. Wilbert Mays is in the Allegheny East Conference.

Senecal said the New Jersey Conference has had the highest percentage decrease in tithe money out of all fifty-seven conferences in the NAD, due to the pandemic, and the schools would have been in a financial bind without the stimulus money. The funds helped the conference avoid layoffs and implement health-and-safety measures for the five schools in its territory.

She said the conference received criticism from some church members when they learned that the organization had received PPP funds. Regarding the debate about whether Adventist institutions should accept government money, Senecal said Adventist institutions had been doing so long before COVID.

We are so happy to contact our state tax department and get a nice little tax exemption

when we go to Walmart or Home Depot. We are so happy when we are working with a contractor to make sure that they understand that we’re tax exempt. This is a big part of our lives as Seventh-day Adventist entities.

We also make sure that we jump through any and all hoops and red tape that is put in our way to make sure our properties are exempt from property taxes. And, from state to state around the United States, keeping that tax-exempt status is hard or easy.

Jeremy Garlock is superintendent of schools for the Pennsylvania Conference. He said when COVID hit, conference administrators grappled over whether to accept CARES Act funds, and PPP dollars specifically. Garlock said he was not a part of the discussion,



Jeremy Garlock

but the conference decided to pursue the funds, keeping all the teachers and support staff employed as a result. In one case only did a school not renew some contracts for the 2020–21 school year

As a whole, our conference is doing pretty well when we compare our enrollment this year to last year, conference wide. We have only dipped in enrollment by thirty-seven students. We’ve had a few schools that have actually had a boom, and one that has a waiting list and we’re trying to hire a teacher.

Educators considered ESSER funding for clean-up and mitigation, Garlock explained, and some schools took advantage of the opportunity. However, the conference and schools shied away from any funding with strings that might infringe on or minimize the school’s ability to practice Christian values, he said.

Bralley said he sympathizes with schools that struggled financially because of the pandemic, and he understands why many opted to accept the stimulus money despite the NAD’s recommendation.

My gut tells me they were in pain and trying

to figure out how to meet their financial responsibilities, and that overrode any of these theoretical concerns. At the time, that's what they were—you know, the "what ifs?"

From my office, and the education office as a whole, we have to recognize that when it comes to this type of situation, we're advisory. We're not the ones paying their bills. We're not the ones that hold the titles to the deeds, and the banks aren't knocking on our doors. They ultimately have to figure out how to be financially stable.

For the North Pacific Union, deciding whether to pass the NAD recommendation onto its conferences was not an easy decision, according to Jay Wintermeyer, the union's communication director.

"It was something that was definitely deliberated over because a lot of organizations, a lot of churches, a lot of schools are hurting," Wintermeyer said. "When you have an opportunity for free money that apparently doesn't have any strings attached—at least on the surface—it's hard to say no to that."

Ultimately, the union decided to stick with the NAD recommendation, citing religious liberty concerns.

"We just feel more comfortable leaning on our historical stance of there being a clear separation between government and religion," Wintermeyer said. "We don't know what the future holds, what changes would be made to legislation that if we took this money now, what could possibly happen. We would prefer to err on the side of caution."

Although a union does not have the authority to direct a conference to do or not do something, all of the union's six conferences have withheld from applying for or receiving any government relief funds under the CARES Act, said Wintermeyer in a June interview. However, *Spectrum* did find one of the conference's Oregon schools—Milo Adventist Academy—listed in the US Treasury database. The school received an allocation of between \$150,000 and \$350,000, according to the information.

Several representatives from the union's conferences made it clear that they agree with Wintermeyer's reasoning and are adamant about not accepting or applying for any government funds.

Kevin Miller, superintendent of the Alaska Confer-

ence, said that although the pandemic has caused some financial distress at the schools, the impact has not been alarming.

"We're not at this time recommending anything from the government," he said at the time. "We would rather not be entangled with them if it's not necessary."

Even if conditions were to worsen due to a second wave of COVID-19 cases, Miller said, the conference would not consider applying for any government relief funds.

"I think we're pretty set on that," he said. "We would work for alternative means to help a school out if they needed help."

M. D. Shuey, a data scientist with DataKind, a volunteer organization that helps journalists and other clients with data analyses, also contributed to this story.

Endnotes

1. <https://spectrummagazine.org/news/2020/adventist-organizations-receive-millions-federal-paycheck-protection-loans-despite>.
2. <http://bit.ly/shealy>.



ALVA JAMES-JOHNSON is an assistant professor in the School of Journalism and Communication at Southern Adventist University and an award-winning journalist who has worked for several newspapers across the country. She is a life-long Seventh-day Adventist, active in church ministries, along with her husband and two young-adult children.



JOEL GUERRA is a public relations and business administration major at Southern Adventist University. The Chicago native currently works in freelance journalism and social media management.



PAOLA MORA is an international student from Costa Rica. She is working towards her broadcast journalism degree from Southern Adventist University and is set to graduate in May of 2021. Paola is the editor-in-chief of her school's newspaper, the *Southern Accent*, and, after graduation, plans to work at a local newspaper or at a church magazine.

F IS FOR FOREST: *A New Kind of Kindergarten*

BY HALLIE ANDERSON

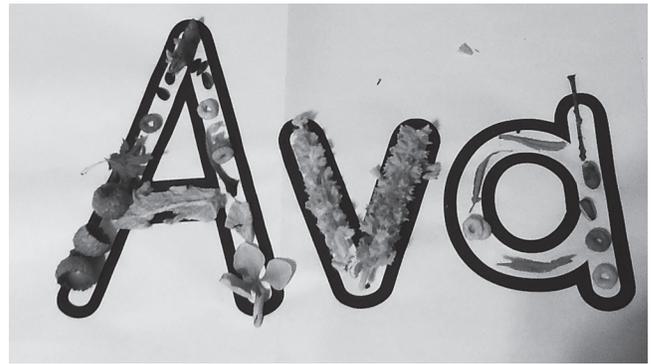
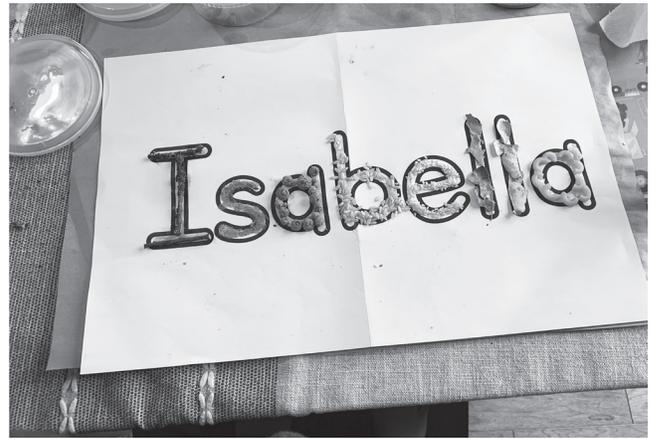
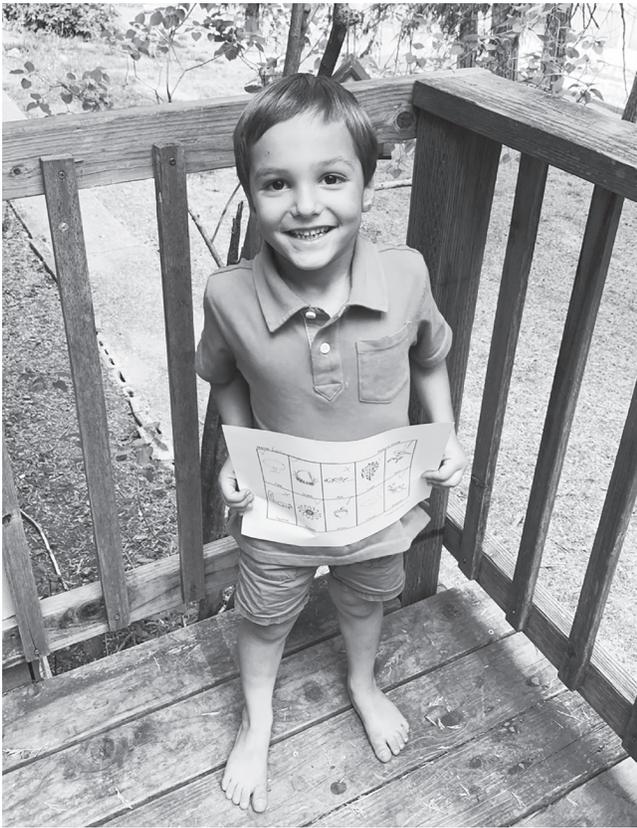
Laminated alphabet letters, plastic counting blocks, sticky desks and chairs, carpet stains, cluttered cubbies, noisy toys, and the smell of inky markers and waxy crayons. Most would recognize this kind of Kindergarten classroom anywhere. But a couple of Northern California Seventh-day Adventist schools have been offering a new kind of Kindergarten class that, quite literally, is a breath of fresh air: Forest Kindergarten.

The concept is fairly simple. Forest Kindergarteners spend every day of their school year outside, learning hands-on lessons from nature. They learn to dress for the weather as they experience seasons and explore the world around them in these early years of life. While the concept is new to Seventh-day Adventist school staff, students, and their families, Forest Kindergarten has been offered throughout the world for decades, with origins in Denmark, Sweden, and Germany dating back to the 1950s.

Redwood Adventist Academy (RAA), located in Santa Rosa, California, and Pine Hills Adventist Academy (PHAA) in Auburn, California, are two schools currently offering Forest Kindergarten programs in the Pacific Union Conference.



“Pine Hills Forest Kindergarten promotes a nature-immersion education, inviting the integration of literacy and mathematics into the students’ discoveries in the forest,” the PHAA website states. “Follow-up lessons and



activities that connect to what the children have discovered during their nature explorations are used to enrich and enhance their outdoor learning.”¹

PHAA sits on ten acres of land and RAA on twenty-two acres. This is PHAA’s first year offering Forest Kindergarten, while RAA begins its second. Esther Nanasi teaches ten Forest Kindergarteners for PHAA and Steven VandeVere has welcomed nine students to his class this year.

VandeVere explains that he was first introduced to the teaching style at Lester Coon Adventist School in Apison, Tennessee, when he attended Southern Adventist University studying to be a teacher. He says that last school year was his first year introducing the concept to RAA. He believes this is yet another unique selling point for small Adventist schools, placing them in a niche that stands out among the many options parents have for their children today.

A couple of Northern California Seventh-day Adventist schools have been offering a new kind of Kindergarten class that, quite literally, is a breath of fresh air.

Science also supports the value of Forest Kindergarten, further boosting its selling points. As referenced on RAA’s website, studies have shown that Forest Kindergarteners benefit from better social, communication, and concentration skills and are less likely to struggle with obesity and ADHD symptoms.²

“Our community is excited about it,” VandeVere shares.

Nanasi shares the same enthusiasm for PHAA’s Forest Kindergarten class, saying, “This has always been on my heart.”

She says that while the philosophy may look like just playing outside every day, it is interpreted as work and learning for children in that age group.

They use their hands, learn new skills, and spend time away from electronic devices.

While given the freedom of the outdoors, there is structure to a Forest Kindergartener’s day. PHAA offers a

While the philosophy may look like just playing outside every day, it is interpreted as work and learning for children in that age group. They use their hands, learn new skills, and spend time away from electronic devices.

fully outdoor experience, while RAA has tried both fully outdoors and a hybrid of indoor and outdoor learning. Either way, students quickly find that Forest Kindergarten comes with longer hours than the typical half-day Kindergarteners usually spend at school. At PHAA, a Forest Kindergarten's day begins at 8 a.m. and ends at 3:15 p.m. At RAA, the day begins at 8 a.m. and concludes at 2:45 p.m. In both instances, their time outside consists of walks, story time, and nature scavenger hunts, while also incorporating learning through music, art, and gardening.

“Curriculum is carefully and thoughtfully planned out based on observations and assessments of the children’s play, ideas, questions, and discoveries,” the PHAA website states. “Reading, writing, mathematics, arts, and language are incorporated into the daily happenings in the forest. Small teacher-child ratios allow one-on-one scaffolding to foster individual needs. Teachers strive to help each child meet the NAD (North American Division) as well as the California State standards.”

Both schools are also working to meet the expectations of their counties as the new school year has begun during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. RAA in Sonoma County is careful to follow social-distance guidelines and are exclusively outdoors. VandeVere planned to try more of a hybrid of indoor and outdoor learning for his class, but has adjusted the plan to fit within the county restrictions for the time being.

As for PHAA’s class, they have begun the year online through distance learning and are anxious to get out into their forest environment as a group. While the online school arrangement is not ideal for a curriculum designed to keep students off devices and outside of four walls,

Nanasi strives to keep their experience as nature-based as possible until they can meet together. She provides each student with projects that will take them outdoors into their yards, giving them opportunities to learn hands-on from home.

“I hope they will learn how to appreciate nature and find God through nature,” Nanasi shares.

Both schools in the Pacific Union Conference believe this is the exact intention of the program and find inspiration from Ellen White’s words in *Education*, p.100:

To the little child, not yet capable of learning from the printed page or of being introduced to the routine of the schoolroom, nature presents an unfailing source of instruction and delight . . . from the loftiest tree of the forest to the lichen that clings to the rock, from the boundless ocean to the tiniest shell on the shore, they may behold the image and superscription of God. (100)

Endnotes

1. <https://sites.google.com/phaaonline.com/pinehillsforestkindergarten/home>.
2. <https://www.weloveredwood.com/about#heading-40031>.



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CALIFORNIA PREPARATORY COLLEGE *Gains Regional Accreditation after Thirteen Years*

BY NANCY HOYT LECOURT

Spring 2007 was not a good time to start a college. But that is when a new junior college, grounded in Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, indeed began, with thirty students, in Redlands, California. It was called California Preparatory College (CPC), and its goal was to provide two years of low-cost, faith-based, higher education to prepare students for transfer, especially to Adventist colleges and universities in California and the rest of North America.

Disaster came in three waves. First, on January 1, 2007, just as CPC was preparing to open, the law authorizing the regulation of the private, postsecondary education sector in California was allowed to sunset, leaving the state without any regulatory body overseeing private institutions. The fledgling school could thus not even begin to apply for accreditation, because it could not register with the state. This limbo was to last for many years.

Next, student aid became almost impossible, when the private market for student signature loans evaporated that spring. CPC was committed to low tuition, but most college students need at least some help in the form of grants and loans, and without accreditation it could not

offer government financial aid either.

Finally, the Great Recession arrived with the fall, the economy collapsed, and any reasonable hope of starting such a difficult new venture withered on the vine.

Except that it didn't. The CEO, Gene Edelbach, as well as the board, administration, and faculty, were all committed to filling what they saw as an important niche for students who wanted a private, faith-based, Adventist-inspired education, but felt they could only afford two years at an official Adventist institution. They determined not to give up.



Thus began a thirteen-year struggle for state recognition and accreditation: a struggle that ended in January of this year when the ACCJC—the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges—granted CPC initial accreditation. ACCJC is part of Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the regional accreditor for California, Hawaii, and the Pacific.¹

Now located in Colton, California, CPC’s mission is “to provide affordable higher education in a Christ-centered, diverse learning environment, focusing on rigorous academics, mission service, and life skills while preparing students for continued education, job placement and service to humanity.”²

The original idea for CPC was to provide an alternative for Adventist college students who were not prepared for the rigors of the four-year campuses and ended up leaving with no degree, but plenty of debt. Others simply went to community colleges and never transferred to an Adventist campus. What was needed, Edelbach believed, was an affordable place where such students could prepare for transfer without running up a large bill. CPC does not intend to give any loans. Indeed, the original idea—which remains in place thirteen years later—is that students with a full Pell Grant will have their tuition covered by this government money. “We had a grand vision,” recalls the first academic dean, William Chunestudy.

CPC keeps tuition low by providing a strictly 8 a.m.–9 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 8 a.m.–2 p.m. Friday operation, with no weekend services, no cafeteria, and no residence halls. Edelbach says this highly focused approach allows them to concentrate on what they value most: providing a safe, comfortable learning environment, quality academics, and life coaching. Classes are small, and each student is assigned a Life Counselor who is always available to provide personalized advice and support regarding college admissions, study skills, student finance, scheduling, and career counseling.

CPC describes itself as based on Adventist traditions and understanding of Scripture. While neither owned nor operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the current Academic Catalog lists a familiar twenty-



Gene Edelbach



Jankel Cadavid

eight foundational beliefs, and spiritual life is a high priority at CPC. Adventists currently make up about 30% of students, with the remaining 70% a mixture of believers and non-believers of many types.

Vice President for Enrollment and Marketing, Jankel Cadavid,

who oversees spiritual life on campus, believes that this mix strengthens the faith of all students, as they discuss their beliefs in small classes where Adventist teachings are taught in a loving, accepting environment. “Adventist students walk away stronger because of the questions of other students who want to know about their belief system. To share, it has to be theirs. Each student has an opportunity to grow, over time, through relationships in community.”

With the campus closed on weekends, spiritual life is rooted in the wide variety of local Adventist churches in the area—Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Thai, English—with CPC providing announcements about mission outreach and social activities planned by nearby church youth groups, as well as inviting these youth to join CPC students and staff for beach vespers and so on. Cadavid likes to think of CPC as providing an “off-ramp to local churches on Sabbath,” and area pastors are invited to speak for Week of Prayer on campus. Approximately 10–15 students ask for baptism each year—baptisms that take place in these local churches.

The success of such an approach was confirmed in an interview with current CPC student Levi Alamo, from Loma Linda. “CPC gives Adventist students a cool opportunity to introduce others, especially international students, to Adventism and connect them to our local congregations. Some of them even get baptized.” Alamo is a pre-nursing student who attends CPC because it is close to home and “very affordable compared to other Adventist options.” He feels he is getting a good education at CPC, with its small class sizes, and is very satisfied. Asked about future plans, he says he hopes to transfer to Pacific Union College for the nursing program.

Sergey Lopez, who was born in Columbia and raised in the States, was attending an evangelical church in the area when some Adventist friends invited him to attend

church with them. When he confided in them that he was having trouble figuring out where to go for college, they suggested he check out CPC. It turned out to be a good fit. He is working on an AS in business and has found that the affordable price and personal career counseling have met his needs well. Baptized at the CrossWalk Church in Redlands, he says there is an Adventist campus “on the list” of places he is considering when he completes his degree at CPC.

CPC has steadily enrolled approximately 200 total students each year over the past thirteen years as it has struggled for recognition and accreditation. These students are enrolled in four programs: a certificate in World Healthcare Practices and Communication, which prepares nurses from other countries to take qualifying exams and work here in the States (35%); an AS in health sciences (25%); an AA in business administration (25%); and a certificate in English as a second language (15%).

As for the future, CPC will soon begin to recruit students in earnest; its facility can accommodate 450–500 students. The goal will be what it has been from the beginning: to provide a safe, Adventist Christian education for those who are not yet ready or able, to attend a four-year institution, and to partner with the official Adventist campuses of North America. As Edelbach puts it, “we would like to become the number one feeder school for Adventist higher education.”

Controversy has swirled about this project from the beginning. Edelbach was a vice president at La Sierra University when he decided that Adventist families would benefit from a junior college. He saw many students who were deciding to attend community college, perhaps intending eventually to transfer to an Adventist campus, but often getting lost in these large institutions—dropping out, or transferring to state campuses. He pictured the new campus benefiting the official Adventist campuses by bringing in students who would otherwise go to a community college and never return to Adventist education, or helping to remediate those who had already tried and failed at a four-year campus like La Sierra, where academic standards are higher.

Larry Geraty, who was president of La Sierra University at the time, recalls that some faculty felt that Edelbach was too eager to recruit students to La Sierra who really weren’t prepared academically. They were

working to raise standards, while Edelbach was trying to find ways to bring in students whom they saw as not qualified. Edelbach’s solution—to start an Adventist junior college—wasn’t to their liking either, however. While Geraty himself supported the vision and has nothing but praise for Edelbach (“diligent, creative, hardworking”), he admits that “it stands to reason that such a college, located in the Inland Empire, would siphon off students from La Sierra.”

Indeed, some faculty and administrators on the official Adventist campuses did not welcome the idea of a new, low-cost alternative in the largest student market for Adventist education—southern California. They wondered if an Adventist junior college would really bring students into the system who would not otherwise attend, or simply dilute the already diminishing pool of Adventist college students. Whatever the intent, CPC seemed more threat than promise to some.

Edelbach himself now has a foot in both worlds; in January of this year, while remaining president of CPC, he became vice president for Enrollment and Marketing at Pacific Union College. Time will tell whether his idea will add to the problems of Adventist higher education or be part of a creative, collaborative solution.

Endnotes

1. <https://accjc.org/>.
2. <https://www.calprepcollege.com/mission/>.



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LESSONS FROM RECENT CHURCH HISTORY

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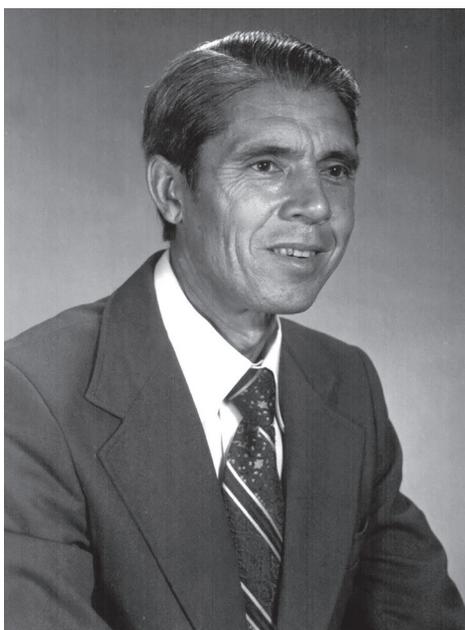
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“GOING PUBLIC” AND ITS CONSEQUENCES: *New Sources and Forty Years Give Perspective on the Glacier View “Trial” of Desmond Ford*

BY GILBERT M. VALENTINE

Forty years provide important critical distance for reviewing many things in life. Distance enables a wider, deeper perspective. So what does Glacier View and the “trial” of Desmond Ford look like, in perspective? What more is now known about this crucial event that was not known before?

On September 17, 1980, internationally recognized Adventist theologian Desmond Ford had his ministerial credentials very publicly withdrawn and was removed from his position as a theology teacher at Avondale College in Australia. The decision to dismiss Ford, who at the time was on leave from a teaching exchange at Pacific Union College (PUC) in California, wrought widespread trauma in a church already sharply divided. Developments leading up to and at the high-profile review of Ford’s teaching at the specially convened Sanctuary Review Committee (SRC) at Glacier View



Gillian Ford/Public Post/Facebook

Ranch, Colorado, in August had caused huge anguish. The Australasian Division executive committee that voted the final action, augmented by sixteen invited observers, (largely local conference presidents chosen by administration) had convened, together with the Avondale governing board, in a joint session following proceedings viewed as technically illegal by the division’s own in-house attorney.

The termination of Ford followed a recommendation of the General Conference’s Presidential Advisory Committee (PREXAD) on September 3 which, in a five-and-a-half-hour-long session chaired by President Neal Wilson, had advised Australia to reject Desmond Ford’s two letters of carefully nuanced affirmation of faith and confidence in the church’s teaching. Ford had said that he could teach and preach in

harmony with the twenty-seven statements of fundamental belief voted at the Dallas General Conference session in July 1980 and the landmark consensus statement agreed upon at the SRC, August 10–15, 1980. Ford’s affirmations, however, were viewed as too carefully nuanced, too artfully “qualified,” too ambiguous. More problematic, he had insisted on including in his letter a list of twelve points of expanded biblical and doctrinal interpretation from his study document, which he believed the Glacier View meeting had embraced. The decision to dismiss him disillusioned many of the church’s theological scholars and led to the dismissal or resignation of many teachers and ministers, the loss of many lay members, and the emotional disengagement with the church of innumerable others. The traumatic episode seared itself into the church’s memory.

Four decades after “the dismissal,” with the passing of many of the participants in the drama, extensive new documentation has become available. These new materials, viewed through the lens of time and distance, cast fresh light on details of the church-changing trauma and help provide a clearer, more detailed, and more nuanced understanding of the specific problems, the contending personalities, and the differing perspectives that lay at the heart of the conflict.

For example, a close study of the new sources helps to resolve the vexed question of whether the dismissal of Ford after the Glacier View meetings was indeed a forgone conclusion on the part of Wilson and his headquarters colleagues. A decade after Glacier View, Richard Hammill, who had coordinated the historic meeting, reported that a significant number of scholars who participated in the conference became convinced that Dr. Ford’s future employment had been decided before his document had actually been studied. Hammill himself was not inclined to think so, at least as far as Elder Wilson was

concerned. On the other hand, his fellow administrator and participant in the conference, PUC President Jack Cassell, was convinced that by the time of the August conference dismissal was inevitable and predetermined before the document was considered. A careful study of the new sources casts light on that question.

The new sources also enable a clearer assessment of the relative weight and validity of the two determinative issues cited to justify termination: perceived doctrinal deviance and perceived lack of pastoral sensitivity and judgment. To what degree was “going public” Ford’s fatal mistake? How did differing interpretations of pastoral responsibility weigh against honesty and integrity and thus shape the outcome of the saga? Furthermore, in the light of a more complete understanding of the tangled conflict, what more can be said about the large enigma that puzzled church leaders, friends, and colleagues at the time, and now intrigues historians? If the stakes were so high, what motivated Ford to abandon caution and “go public” in his Forum address of October 27, 1979? Did he not consider that the result might well be his dismissal?

Dismissal: Predetermined or Not?

A large question widely voiced at the time, and one that has continued to hang darkly across the four decades since 1980, concerns the issue of whether Ford’s dismissal was inevitable because predetermined. Were the Glacier View proceedings a genuinely fair inquiry with an unprejudiced openness to new understandings, or were they a necessary public relations exercise to provide a semblance of natural justice but which needed to obtain a certain desired “result” as the conclusion? Had Ford inflicted such a deep wound on the body of the church by “going public” in his airing of doctrinal problems that church leadership perceived the only realistic solution to the conflict was for

The decision to dismiss Ford, who at the time was on leave from a teaching exchange at Pacific Union College (PUC) in California, wrought widespread trauma in a church already sharply divided.

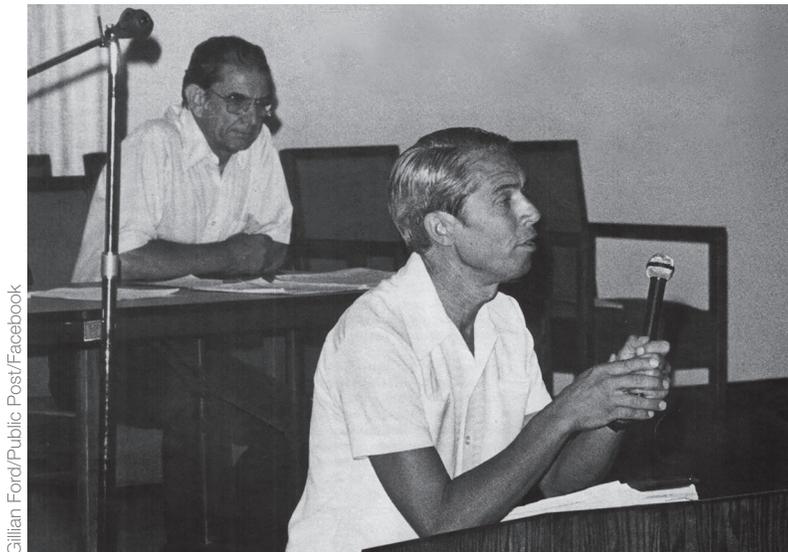
the agent of the infection to be surgically removed? When Pacific Union College theology department chair Fred Veltman wrote to theology department chairs at other North American colleges as 1980 commenced, he noted that the continued employment of Ford was “an open question.” He was speaking of “where” the employment might be, as in location. Church administrators, on the other hand, were focused much more on “if,” and the answer to that was more complicated and not so open.¹

The extensive documentation now available from this turbulent period indicates that the answer to the question of predetermination is both yes and no. The decision was not predetermined in the sense that Wilson genuinely hoped that the process of Glacier View might have a positive outcome, allowing continuing employment of some kind in some location for Ford. But that hope, it is now clear from both implicit and explicit communications of Wilson, was predicated clearly and firmly on one condition: Ford by the end of the leave must change his mind and his attitude. Wilson did not see the church changing its stance. The decision, therefore, was predetermined by the assumption that Ford would have to publicly recant in some form or another. He would have to say he was wrong, or could be wrong, and that the doctrine in question needed no correction. Several lines of evidence illustrate this.

When PUC President Jack Cassell and Academic Dean Gordon Madgwick met with Neal Wilson and his colleagues in Washington DC, in November 1979, to consider how to deal with the enormous global turmoil that had resulted from Ford “going public” in his Forum talk on their campus, immediate termination was a clear option advocated by some. Some senior church leaders and conservative agitators, like the Standish brothers, called stridently for this. But Cassell and Madgwick, sensitive to the claims of academic freedom strongly voiced by their faculty, advocated another option. They recommended a six-month leave of absence for Ford to research and further articulate his views in a study document. Wilson and PREXAD saw wisdom in this option. But because, in a totally unexpected way, Ford’s “going public” had generated world-wide concern, the leave would be spent at church headquarters under the supervision of PREXAD appointees, not at PUC. The agreement PREXAD entered into with the college administrators was that

the study document would be reviewed in June 1980 by a small, select group of scholars and administrators.² In instructions to the Biblical Research Institute director, Richard Leshar, about wording to be used in the public announcement of the agreement, Wilson noted that he was “anxious to take a positive direction.” Leshar should do “everything possible to avoid saying or doing anything that could be misinterpreted or construed as punitive disciplinary action.” At the same time, however, Wilson and PREXAD’s expectations were clear that the leave of absence would result in “the reaffirmation of the message that God has given to His prophetic movement.” This was a very firm given. Hopefully, though, the outcome would also save “Dr. Ford’s talents for future contribution to the church.”³ The recommendation was sent to the PUC Board of Trustees for action in mid-December 1979.

In the negotiation over the final wording of the agreement between the college administrators and PREXAD, the Board of Trustees wanted the hard edge softened by including an explanation of why Ford had given his public presentation. The initial draft thus included the sentence “The officers of the Forum had requested that he [Ford] speak on the topic of the investigative judgment, a topic that was receiving considerable discussion, in part, perhaps, related to the publication of Robert Brinsmead’s *1844 Re-examined*.” A softening explanatory phrase also indicated that there had been “previous questions on this subject.” In the version of the Statement of Agreement finally recorded by PREXAD, the softening language had been deleted and the statement considerably toughened with intimations of punitive intention, asserting that Ford had “ignored the counsel, directives, and procedures outlined in the *Church Manual*,” which was a “very reasonable and carefully worded,” expectation. Brethren should “refrain from presenting publicly any questions that are not in harmony with the views of the established body. The public announcement in the *Review* condensed the information and simply stated that Ford was placed on leave because he “took issue with basic theological positions” of the church.⁴ Thus, from the very outset, two different ecclesial perspectives on the controversial forum talk stood in contention. Ford and PUC saw it as a suggested solution to a doctrinal problem already being publicly discussed. Church administrators saw it as a frontal, public attack on a church doctrine.



Gillian Ford/Public Post/Facebook

Ford presents at Glacier View, a photo that was shared in the American version of *Good News Unlimited*.

Non-Negotiables

For Neal Wilson personally, there were two non-negotiables: the Sanctuary doctrine and the “canonical” doctrinal authority of the Spirit of Prophecy (i.e., Ellen White). In the first place, the Sanctuary doctrine needed to be understood and taught in a way that made clear that 1844 was the specific fulfillment of prophecy and pointed to a literal happening in heaven. Communicating news about this event constituted the rationale for the existence of the church and provided its distinctive message. This was foundational. Second, and more importantly, Ellen White’s writings carried not just pastoral authority but doctrine-elucidating and, in matters of dispute, doctrine-determining authority. Wilson made this clear in a response to Walter Rea’s January 1980 public exposure of Ellen White’s extensive literary borrowing: a parallel conflict that added challenging layers of complexity to the church’s understanding of Ellen White. The Rea exposure had seriously escalated the level of denominational turbulence.

Wilson authored an important article, intended to calm the fears of the church over the Walter Rea findings, in which he reported an investigating committee’s initial conclusion that “Ellen White used sources more extensively than we have heretofore been aware of or recognized.” Fully studying the implications of this, he noted, would take more time. But Wilson concluded with his personal testimony in very carefully nuanced language. The new information, he declared, did not detract at all from the

fact that Ellen White was still “a reliable teaching authority” and “part of God’s continuing revelation and corroboration of doctrinal truth.”⁵ White must retain her doctrine-determining authority. Wilson believed that this was the clearly established position of the church and needed to remain so. In Ford’s view, by contrast, if the church believed that Ellen White was the ultimate arbiter of the meaning of scripture and a determining source for its doctrine, it was not possible for such a community to continue to be a church in the Protestant tradition.

In early January 1980, when Wilson was asked by a member of his extended family by marriage, what would happen if Ford was “judged to be right” by his peers, Wilson replied that “there is too much that would have to be changed.”⁶ Ford could, therefore, not possibly be right. He would simply have to modify his beliefs on the Sanctuary and publicly accept Ellen White’s canonical authority.

After a personal discussion with Ford about his progress a few days later, Wilson felt the need to caution Ford in writing about expecting too positive an outcome from his research. He was pleased to discover that Ford approached his task “with optimism,” but Wilson felt the need to warn Ford about hoping for what would not be possible. “I am not sure that it is going to be as easy as you seem to anticipate to convince church leadership that your position is compatible with the Biblical and E. G. White teaching on the subject under discussion,” he wrote.⁷ Ford should be prepared to change and make things easier for himself to change.

What particularly distressed Wilson in his mid-January discussion with Ford was that Ford “saw no problem” with his Forum tape “circulating” his “viewpoints and message as widely as possible.” The Australasian Division had learned (mistakenly) that the “Brinsmead Group” was planning to circulate 50,000 copies of the Forum tape and telexed Wilson, asking him to request Ford to deny permission for this.⁸ The “coolness” with which Ford “dismissed” the suggestion, and that he register “feelings of disappointment with Bob Brinsmead,” perplexed Wilson and indicated Ford’s “lack of discretion and good judgment.” Why? Because, noted Wilson, the views

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expressed in the tape had not yet “been evaluated and accepted” by the church. “This procedure we believe to be contrary to the clear counsel of Ellen G. White, and also contrary to denominational policy,” he explained. “Should your position after examination be rejected,” Wilson implied, it would be harder for Ford to acknowledge his error, which he undoubtedly would have to do.⁹ The tapes were circulating without Ford’s permission and Ford said he would write a letter protesting the circulation if Wilson “ordered” him to do so. Wilson declined to give such a directive, just as he was reluctant to indicate in an explicit way that if Ford did not change his mind there was no future for him. In a conversation with Siegfried Horn later in the month, Wilson reported that already in his estimation Ford had “a closed mind, and will not change.”¹⁰

Two weeks later, Wilson reiterated his core convictions and his forebodings to his predecessor in office, Robert Pierson. Ford was “working hard” on his assignment he reported, noting that, for Wilson himself, “the whole matter revolves around his [Ford’s] understanding of the role and work of Ellen White.” Ford did not consider Ellen White “to be authoritative in the areas of doctrinal theology,” Wilson reported, and she did not have “teaching authority comparable to the prophets that are in the scripture.” Wilson indicated to Pierson that Ford would need to “adjust his thinking” on this. Wilson meant that Ford would have to acknowledge he was wrong. He noted that Ford “needs our prayers” to help him acknowledge this wrong understanding.¹¹ Without such a change, in Wilson’s view, continuation of employment at the conclusion of the study would not be possible. In this sense, the conclusion of the Glacier View meeting

would clearly precipitate the end of Ford’s employment as a logical outcome, though such inevitability Wilson would take care not to publicly articulate.

Reinforcing Convictions

Letters and proffered academic papers flooded across Wilson’s desk during the pre-conference period of Ford’s study leave most of them reinforcing Wilson’s strengthening conviction to hold the line.

Among the more notable were letters such as A. LeRoy Moore’s late-November, eleven-page analysis of Ford’s Forum talk, apparently written in response to a General Conference request to Moore to provide Wilson a list of questions that could be put to Ford. Moore asserted a remarkably close similarity between Ford’s talk and Brinsmead’s *1844* book, and focused nearly the entire eleven pages on a traditional defense of Ellen White’s doctrinal authority, with a list of questions intended to challenge Ford’s perceived inadequate views on this matter. Leshner marked up the letter and passed it through to Wilson.¹²

In mid-December, General Conference archivist, Don Yost, sent Wilson a copy of a 1930 letter from A. O. Tait to LeRoy Froom warning Froom not to question Ellen White’s authority and that great peril lay ahead for him and the church if he did so.¹³

In May, Robert Pierson expressed confidence that Wilson would deal “kindly but firmly” with any error in Ford’s position.¹⁴

In June, someone sent Wilson a copy of a *Newsweek* article entitled “A Pope with Authority,” by noted columnist George F. Will on tensions in the Catholic church between its theologians and church authority. Will

argued for conservatism and the importance of preserving “a core of settled convictions.” The task of “nurturing, defending and transmitting those convictions” called for strong leadership and “institutional judgment.” Will commended Pope John Paul for reigning in Hans Kung of Tübingen University. Wilson’s underlining of the article clearly indicates that he found it instructive.¹⁵

The General Conference president’s father, Nathaniel Wilson, sent him a sheaf of Ellen White quotations in July, emphasizing the traditional authority vested in Ellen White and urging him to stay strong.

Meanwhile, Kenneth Wood peppered *Review* readers with a flurry of articles hotly defending the traditional doctrinal formulations as inviolate. He

accused Adventist colleges of departing from the faith and warned the church against Ford and his “heresy,” equating Ford’s viewpoints with apostasy.¹⁶

The defensive tactics of the *Review* editor generated a wave of letters of protest from numerous academic communities on Adventist campuses, and the college presidents, at their annual meeting, united in calling Wood to account and condemning his attack on Adventist education. Many scholars who agreed with Ford’s assessment of the exegetical weaknesses underpinning the church’s Sanctuary doctrine felt that through the *Review*, the church was pre-judging and condemning Ford’s proposed solutions before they could be fairly considered. It seemed clear that, in Wood’s mind, the primary purpose of Glacier View was to be disciplinary.¹⁷ Wilson would later defend Wood’s defensive stance.

Hammill, however, had persuaded the church’s scholarly community to participate in the conference on the basis of Wilson’s assurance that Ford’s ideas would be given a fair hearing. Addressing the rapidly rising levels of angst and claims of hypocrisy, Wilson authored a prominent back-page article in the *Review*, again attempting to calm anxieties. Choosing his language carefully, he could not deny that discipline might be

involved, though it was not the “primary” purpose of the meeting, he explained. It was true, nonetheless, that the one who “publicly challenged” was at fault because he should have laid his ideas before “brethren of experience” and, if they disagreed, he would have to “yield to their

judgment.” Wilson assured readers that he did not expect anything to change, apart from maybe some “new terminology” or “changing definitions.” There was no need for conservative folk to be fearful. “In no way do we expect this restudy of our distinctive doctrines to weaken the pillars of our message.”¹⁸

In January, General Conference officials such as C. D. Brooks and Ralph Thompson, visiting camp meetings in Australia, let it be known publicly that at the end

of his study period Ford would be “shown his error” and then he would have to decide his own future: recant or be terminated. Robert Olsen and Norman Dower were also reported to have made known the mindset at church headquarters.¹⁹ Such public and explicit pre-judgment outraged many Australian ministers committed to “fair dinkum” justice, not only as a basic Christian principle but also as a deeply embedded cultural value.²⁰ The public and explicit expression of the expected outcome by others might embarrass Elder Wilson but they did not express a different view of the inevitable outcome. Wilson as leader preferred not to specifically voice the consequences if Ford was not able to change his views; nevertheless, in his and Parmenter’s post-Glacier View world, if Ford could not retract his assertions on the Forum tape or his views in the study document, he would have to be released.

Two influential letters among the many Wilson received immediately prior to Glacier View also reinforced his personal conviction that he needed to stand immovable on the role of Ellen White. These were sent to Wilson after their authors had read the 990-page study document. Ford’s former teaching colleague at Avondale and, at the time, division field secretary, Alfred Jorgensen, devoted three of his ten discussion

Such public and explicit pre-judgment outraged many Australian ministers committed to “fair dinkum” justice, not only as a basic Christian principle but also as a deeply embedded cultural value.

points to objections about Ford's diluting of Ellen White's authority. Furthermore, from his perspective, Ford's new "alien model" of Adventist theology would undermine the church's unique mission and its understanding of 1844, and make it highly unlikely that any Seventh-day Adventist could ever persuade a Seventh Day Baptist to convert to Adventism. This observation made its way into a specific question that Wilson posed to Ford at the tension-filled Thursday afternoon SRC meeting at which Ford was first formally confronted with the requirement to retract. Ford replied firmly that he could convert a Seventh Day Baptist and explained how. More serious for Wilson's view of Ford, however, was Jorgensen's assessment that Ford's document was in essence a "cosmetic version" of Brinsmead's *1844 Re-examined*. The Jorgensen letter undoubtedly contributed to the heightened role that fear of Robert Brinsmead played at the conference, reinforcing Wilson's conviction that Ford would have to retract or be dismissed.

Ministry editor, Robert Spangler, in his review of Ford's final study-document chapter, sent to Wilson just prior to the meetings, also stressed that the Spirit of Prophecy's corroboration of biblical truth must stand "regardless of what the great majority of contemporary scholars and theologians may declare with unanimous voice." Apparently, chapter six, on Ellen White, presented material particularly difficult for Wilson, according to Gillian Ford. He viewed the chapter as evidence that her husband was "throwing out" the Spirit of Prophecy. Spangler also argued strongly for retention of the "proof text method" of interpreting scripture because he viewed it as still valid and, without it, key Adventist doctrines could not be proved. This was "counsel" Ford had not been able to accept from his advising committee. The inability to do so even after further reflection and discussion during the SRC would make his termination inevitable. But was it simply the rigidity of his personal attitude and convictions or the deadly seriousness of the doctrinal error in his teaching itself that would be the catalyst?

Rationale for Dismissal: Deviant Doctrine or Poor Pastoral Judgment?

At the outset of the Glacier View conference, Wilson

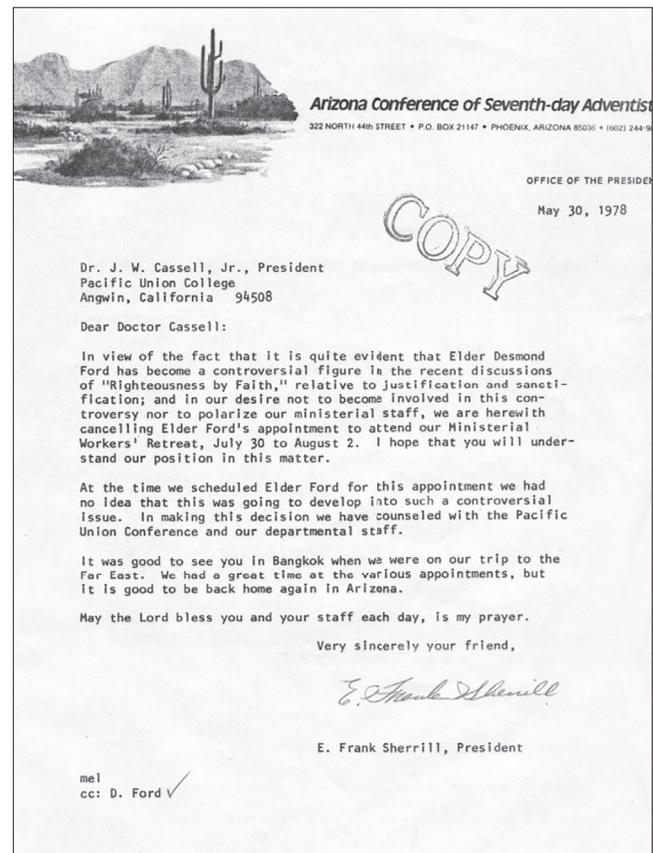
had declared that Ford was "not on trial but his ideas were."²² That distinction as a framework for proceeding through the meetings proved impossible to maintain. By Thursday afternoon, after distressing *ad hominem* thrusts at Ford and difficult personal interactions with Wilson the previous day, PREXAD concluded that dealing with the ideas could not be "completely separated" from dealing also with their author. They recorded in their minutes at this time that two levels of decision making would be needed. The SRC group would deal with Ford's document. Church administrators would make decisions about Dr. Ford's future and on this second matter, according to Richard Hammill, they found themselves needing to move more quickly than they had planned. Elder Parmenter needed a decision before he returned to Australia and thus, as Hammill reports, Wilson found himself with his "hand" being "forced."²³

The first formal discussion of Ford's continuing employment surfaced at this same Thursday-afternoon, PREXAD meeting on August 14, *before* the consensus statement had been finalized and voted on Friday morning. It seems clear that Wilson and Parmenter had talked through the issue of urgency previously. The sixteen members of PREXAD were joined for the discussion by three Australian leaders, the PUC president, and PUC Board of Trustees chair. The context suggested that the question that had always been in the background but not made explicit was now placed front and center on the table. What would be Ford's future? They would let him decide, but they would set the conditions. Discussion focused on what would be the minimal expectations of Ford for him to continue employment with the denomination. Church leaders were clearly apprehensive of schism. Four criteria were agreed. Two concerned doctrinal understanding and two concerned pastoral issues. Ford would have to acknowledge in writing that positions he had taken in his 990-page document "could be wrong," that they were "not his final argument," and that he could give "complete support" to the new statement of fundamental beliefs voted at Dallas in June. Furthermore, Ford would publicly, in writing, have to "disassociate himself" from the distribution of his study document, express regret for its "unauthorized circulation," and "address an appeal to young workers to follow the counsel of the church rather than of one man."

In tense exchanges with Ford during question time at the plenary session late Thursday afternoon following PREXAD's agreement, Wilson indicated publicly for the first time that the "administrative matter" (i.e., Ford's employment), would soon have to be dealt with. Ford, apparently surprised, asked Wilson what he meant by that and then followed up with a request that Wilson remember "the changes that had taken place in doctrine" during the SRC and alluding to what he expected would appear in the consensus statement still being finalized. Wilson responded to this with the assertion that this was simply "begging the question." There was already "a clear position" in the church, Wilson observed, and it was "not complicated" to know whether a person was "in harmony" with it. Parmenter followed these comments and expressed the essence of the PREXAD criteria agreed earlier in the day, asserting that if Ford could not agree with the church it would be easier for everyone if he would hand in his credentials. This blunt, open exchange immediately cast a deep gloom over the conference.²⁴ Would Ford cooperate? Was this the feared inevitable outcome?

PREXAD's agreed Thursday-afternoon criteria became the basis for the extended, highly fraught discussion with Ford about his continuing employment late on Friday afternoon, and provided the content for the handwritten letter of expectation that Parmenter read to Ford at that time. Several issues seriously muddled the waters and complicated the "administrative" proceedings on Friday afternoon. The consensus statement had only just been voted that morning and Ford said he could agree with it. He further said that he could teach and preach the Dallas Statement of Fundamental Beliefs and, indicating his desire to be pastorally sensitive, vowed he would not raise controverted issues. That meant to administrators, however, that there were still controverted issues. Furthermore, in a surprise move unanticipated by Hammill and which Hammill would later consider a major tactical mistake, Wilson had PREXAD request six selected participants work together to draw up a list of ten points where, in their estimation, Ford's study document differed not from the new consensus statement but from the traditional formulation of Adventist teaching. This was not new information, and the list, when completed, identified points on which many of the other scholars at the conference also disagreed with traditional formulations.

But Ford had "gone public." Ford agreed with most of the list, but would also later go on to argue, insisting on integrity, as already noted, that in twelve other significant areas the consensus statement had embraced theological development and had adopted specific points of view he had raised in his document. Most of PREXAD, however, were operating under the impression that "the majority of the participants" had straightforwardly affirmed traditional teachings, that the consensus statement broke no new ground, and that the SRC had thus rejected Ford's arguments. As Parmenter told Ford in the Friday meeting, "most of the scholars with whom I have talked do not agree with your doctrinal positions."²⁵ When Gillian Ford mentioned by name several important scholars who said they agreed with her husband, both Wilson and Parmenter expressed frustration and responded that "it was difficult to know" because "these same scholars came to them and said the opposite."²⁶ Clearly there would be continuing disagreement over whether any development had taken place at all at Glacier View and if so, how much. Many administrators thought no change had taken



A letter from Arizona Conference in 1978 canceling a Desmond Ford appointment to attend their Ministerial Workers' Retreat.

Gillian Ford/Public Post/Facebook

To calm church fears and maintain unity, Wilson wanted to acknowledge only affirmation of the existing tradition. Continuity was all that mattered for him at this point.

place at all. To calm church fears and maintain unity, Wilson wanted to acknowledge only affirmation of the existing tradition. Continuity was all that mattered for him at this point. Ford's keen sense of integrity, on the other hand, would not allow him to ignore the reality that significant development had taken place, though not as much as he would have liked. Change had occurred. The consensus statement was proof. At this juncture in Adventist history, change and continuity glared at each other uncompromisingly, freighted with heavy emotional intensity.

Beyond the unwillingness of Ford to concede that his major suggestions for reframing the church's doctrines were in error, the weightier issues that troubled PREXAD, and which ultimately predominated as factors in his dismissal, were his perceived lack of pastoral responsibility: first of all in his decision to "go public" and now his perceived resistance to taking counsel and conceding clearly and simply that in a major way he might be wrong. In the Friday afternoon session, Wilson sharply criticized Ford's charismatic personality and the manifesting of an attitude that Wilson perceived as always needing to be right. Ford could teach, asserted Wilson, but he appeared unable to learn. Wilson expanded at length on his discomfort with the perception that Ford communicated that he [Ford] was "the one person who can lead the church out of its theological morass."²⁷ Ford's approach to the circulation of the Forum tape and the study document was cavalier and further evidence of his lack of pastoral sensitivity and care. Field Secretary Duncan Eva, who was very sympathetic to Ford's general direction, could not understand why Ford did not see the need to move slowly and patiently. "We need to move slowly enough so that all in the church can keep up with us," he pled.²⁸

The Problem of Robert Brinsmead

Weighing most heavily in the balance against Ford, as evidence of his lack of pastoral concern, was his perceived relationship with Brinsmead: "an area of great consternation" to Wilson. Perceived collusion with Robert Brinsmead, and Ford's unwillingness to publicly declare where he was different from Brinsmead, was a major problem. Clearly the activity of Brinsmead was seen by the Australian leaders as dangerously "subversive" and a major threat to the welfare of the church. Parmenter anguished over this. A month before Ford's October 1979 talk, he had written to Ford and pled with him to distance himself publicly from Brinsmead because, he explained, many people thought Ford was in Brinsmead's "camp."²⁹ The first paragraph of this letter hinted that Ford was responsible for causing confusion in Australia over Righteousness by Faith and it carried a hostile, or at least a frustrated, tone that may have made the letter difficult for Ford to read, particularly after the earlier exchange between the two men over allegations of a lack of integrity. But Parmenter feared that Brinsmead was planning to do more damage to the church with further publications and that he intended to launch a more general attack on Adventist teaching. Parmenter, apparently drawing on conspiratorial reports fed to him by Robert Brinsmead's brother John, seems to have been persuaded that there had been collusion.³⁰ John had alleged the false notion that even Ford's Righteousness by Faith themes had been drawn from himself and his brother, a claim which should have made Parmenter skeptical of the whole report. Ford had assured Parmenter in personal conversation that there was not any collusion.

In a three-page statement, Ford had also made clear to members of his advisory committee at its second meeting, the non-threatening nature, as he saw it, of his relationship

to Brinsmead. He related details of Brinsmead's successful outreach to thousands of non-Adventist clergy and that he "would not want to improve my situation by damning Bob and his work, as of Satan."³¹ Later, at the end of the SRC, the AUD president again related that it was commonly believed in parts of Australia that Ford had helped Brinsmead with his first book and was assisting with the new one. Ford again denied in public any such collusion and asserted that there had been only very occasional, innocent personal contact if Brinsmead happened to contact him.³² He acknowledged to Parmenter during the discussion that he had seen Brinsmead's more recent book.

That Ford would not publicly criticize the subversive Brinsmead seemed clear evidence to church leaders of Ford not being cooperative and of not being pastorally concerned for the welfare of the church. Furthermore, his failure to express regret for the distribution of his materials and his unwillingness to personally intervene to try and curtail such circulation constituted further evidence of a serious lack of pastoral sensitivity. This loomed as a major issue of poor pastoral judgment. At the commencement of the project it had been agreed that the study document would only be released with the mutual consent of the author, PUC administration, the General Conference, and AUD leaders. The unlicensed duplication of the confidential study document, as Veltman had noted, had, therefore, "created a pastoral problem of serious magnitude for the church."³³ Veltman called the distribution "unethical and irresponsible," an "unprincipled action." It was not Ford, however, who released the document, although he was aware that interested supporters were trying to obtain copies.³⁴ It

became clear later that Dr. Dean Jennings, of St. Helena Sanitarium, was the source. One of Jennings's patients was former General Conference president Reuben Figuhr. Jennings requested access to his copy. Apparently, he asked to borrow the document to read and then made a copy for himself. Subsequently Jennings made it available to people in Australia, sending a copy, it seems, to Elder Robert Parr, the editor of the *Australasian Record*.³⁵ Earlier in the year, Veltman had appealed to Jennings to try and

use his influence "to quiet" Ford's friends and supporters and thus try and achieve "a calmer atmosphere." Veltman feared that Ford's friends would cause more injury to him than his enemies.³⁶ Jennings seemed to believe that openness was more important.

Doctrinal Development: Yes or No?

Prior to the conference, William Johnsson, as associate dean of the Seminary and a member of the committee advising Ford on his study document, was keenly aware of the exegetical inadequacies in the traditional proof text support for the sanctuary doctrine. In the light of his Vanderbilt doctoral study of the book of Hebrews he understood that changes were needed to reframe doctrinal understanding. But after visiting the Minnesota Camp Meeting

in June 1980, he had become alarmed at the "wide gap between the sort of thinking of the academics and our workers and lay people." To avoid crippling dissension descending on the church he advised Wilson that, in his view, a "result" was needed from the SRC meeting that would "affirm the essence of our sanctuary doctrine." Along with "affirmation of the center" there should, however, also be expressions of openness to further study. The issues were so big, he believed, that they could

Personal integrity drove Ford's need to avoid fudging his meaning, while PREXAD also wanted clarity, but of a different kind. Using a detailed, fourteen-point grid, they carefully scrutinized the letter line by line, phrase by phrase, to flesh out the qualifying expressions in his response, not willing to take positive assurances at face value.

not be resolved in four days. Although Johnsson was uncomfortable with his fellow Australian's "polemical" style and his tendency to emphasize the problem so strongly that "the constructive elements in his work" were not adequately heard, he was hopeful that Ford was becoming more "conciliatory" in his manner.³⁷

Before the SRC meeting, Veltman had written to a scholarly colleague on Ford's study advisory committee urging that the scholarly community be encouraged to send in position papers so that the broader SRC group could "get some idea of the widespread support" among the Adventist scholarly community of the need to address the problems that Brinsmead had raised to public awareness and which Ford had now amplified in proposing a solution. Ford himself had received many letters of support from scholarly colleagues prior to the conference and while some later voiced that same support in the small committees at Glacier View, others had found it difficult to do so. Thus it was that most church administrators came away from Glacier View convinced that the church had not changed in anyway at all in its understanding of the sanctuary doctrine. It wasn't just "the center" that seemed to have been affirmed as Johnsson hoped but in administrators' minds every detail about the traditional formulas had been re-established. Kenneth Wood emphasized this particular understanding in his articles in the *Review*, stressing that the "Historical Sanctuary Theology" had been reaffirmed. The bold headline announced, "Variant Views Rejected."³⁸ In his verbal report to the *Review* and *Herald* staff after Glacier View, Wood cited a list of Ford's errors but suggested that the exegetical problems were of no real concern to him. He explained that in his view, Ford was wrong basically because his soteriology was wrong and always had been. Ford did not express "historic Adventism."³⁹

While conservative scholars like Old Testament specialists William Shea and Gerhard Hasel, and historians Kenneth Strand and Gerard Damsteegt, agreed with Kenneth Wood that the church had firmly stood its ground unchanged, many other scholars left the Colorado meeting believing that significant change had indeed occurred. Fred Veltman, for example, in a twelve-page memorandum of the meeting composed immediately after the close of the meeting, noted disappointment in Ford's polemical style and his uncooperative, determined

stance that offended administrators and some scholarly colleagues, and personally frustrated Veltman and his friends because it seemed that Ford was making it difficult for himself. Did Ford see himself as a Luther in a Diet of Worms moment, they wondered? But Veltman represented a number of others when he identified in his memo three noteworthy modifications to the historic doctrinal position embraced in the consensus statement, and observed that there were several other modifications.

Hammill also related to retired BRI director, Harry W. Lowe, directly after the meeting, that "several points" had been acknowledged as a result of Ford's research. He also reported, however, that Ellen White had been the stumbling block to any further concessions. Biblical evidence, for example, did not seem to support the idea that "the blood of a sacrificial animal defiles the sanctuary," he told Lowe. But because Ellen White said it did and seemed to place much stress on the concept, the older administrators and scholars found this "an almost insurmountable problem." It seemed such a "vital" matter. Most of the younger scholars and administrators, Hammill reported, acknowledged no difficulty in considering that Ellen White could be mistaken on something like this. Their view was that Ellen White was not "the final interpreter of the Bible," and thus "did not stumble" over the matter. There were other related issues like this.

In Hammill's desire to assist church unity, he framed such matters as "fringe areas," which did not affect the "basic doctrine."⁴⁰ This was deft language because, as Hammill would observe a decade later, the "basic doctrine" for him was essentially the broad New Testament doctrine of Christ's priestly ministry articulated in the book of Hebrews. Adventists should see themselves called to especially emphasize that. Jack Provonsha of Loma Linda University also spoke for a number of colleagues when he observed to the Thursday night plenary session that, for him, Dr. Ford's focus on the forensic model of the atonement was too limited. Nevertheless, in the broad picture Provonsha "agreed with most of what he [Ford] said. He was more right than wrong."⁴¹ This was bravely stated in the session when it emerged that administration was intending to terminate Ford. Such scholars saw the consensus document reflecting a helpful broadening of understanding. Given further time and reflection, scholars

could see the essence of the doctrine being enhanced, even as there would need to be a significant reframing of the details. Church administrators by contrast read the documents entirely differently.

Dismissal

In the days following the conference, church administrators in Washington and Sydney moved ahead expeditiously in attending to the administrative “duty” of resolving the question of Ford’s future. The situation in Australia had been further inflamed by preliminary reports from the final day of the SRC. Resolution was needed more urgently now also because Ford had formally responded to Parmenter’s August 28 letter setting out conditions of his employment. Wilson and Parmenter perceived continuing intransigence in Ford’s hedged response. Personal integrity drove Ford’s need to avoid fudging his meaning, while PREXAD also wanted clarity, but of a different kind. Using a detailed, fourteen-point grid, they carefully scrutinized the letter line by line, phrase by phrase, to flesh out the qualifying expressions in his response, not willing to take positive assurances at face value.⁴² Wilson had perceived at his first reading of Ford’s response that it was not a clearly stated, black-and-white, unreserved endorsement of the Dallas statement and he cabled his impressions to Parmenter. He also conveyed the same impressions to PREXAD. It does not seem to have bothered Wilson that Ford could not, in principle, respond to the Dallas statement as if it were a creed. Adventism had rejected creedalism. Ford’s response was shaped by this conviction and thus used qualifying phrases. For PREXAD, the nuanced response was evidence of Ford’s uncooperativeness and his unorthodoxy.

After PREXAD reviewed Ford’s “qualified” support of the Dallas Statement, they then disputed the list of twelve points in which he had claimed that changes in interpretation had been embraced. By means of a carefully outlined document (apparently prepared by someone before the meeting, for it was listed in the agenda), each point was linked to an expression or phrase in the consensus statement that conveyed continuity of understanding of the tradition. The analysis instrument intentionally ignored, demeaned, or discounted the expansive phrases in the consensus statement embracing wider interpretive options and their implications. There

was a clear unwillingness to acknowledge any suggestion of inadequacy in the traditional approach or any expression pointing the way forward toward a need for reframing.⁴³ Thus they noted that Ford’s twelve points were debatable, enabling an assertion of no change at all. PREXAD’s action, after five hours of discussion, was carefully crafted, noting that “the Sanctuary Review Committee rejected Dr. Ford’s argument and conclusions . . . as not being sufficiently convincing to cause the church to change its distinctive beliefs” concerning the Sanctuary and the role of Ellen White. Because Ford had affirmed that he could not “change his views” they concluded that the divergence was unacceptable and carried the risk of further misunderstanding later. In the lengthy action, more attention was given to Ford’s inability to receive counsel, take responsibility for the circulation of his tapes and documents, or dissociate himself from Brinsmead.⁴⁴ These were pastoral concerns.

In the follow-up Australian action, the rationale for dismissal was nuanced in a different way at a meeting that the division secretary noted as “a traumatic affair.” The AUD action emphasized theological difference as the main rationale for termination, not poor pastoral judgment. It began with the fact that Ford had “publicly challenged basic doctrines,” that his document had been “found unacceptable” in these areas, that he admitted “that his belief is no longer in accord with some of the accepted teachings of the church,” and that he was “unable to accept counsel . . . to reconsider his position.” The rationale concluded by recording that PREXAD had recommended Ford’s credentials be withdrawn and that he be relieved of his responsibilities as a minister and teacher.⁴⁵ His ordination was not annulled.

Reaction

Veltman, who had been on holiday in late August and early September following the SRC, was deeply shocked when he learned in mid-September of the actions to terminate Ford for his “divergent” theology. In an anguished letter of protest written too late to have any influence, he insisted to Wilson that the administrators were “drawing conclusions from Glacier View which were quite different from the actual facts of the case, particularly as relating to the scholarly consensus.” Scholars could legitimately feel “duped.” The “views”

discussed at Glacier View “were neither Des’s nor were they rejected,” he asserted. Veltman argued the point further three days later in a follow-up letter, citing the specific language of the SRC reporting groups and the final consensus statement as clear evidence of the fact that Ford’s views had definitely not been rejected. Parmenter, he asserted, was reading neither the consensus statement nor the ten-point statement in the same way the scholars were and this was deeply problematic for the scholarly community. Ford should not be dismissed on theological grounds. This would be grossly detrimental, untrue, and unfair. If administration felt they needed to discipline Ford for being uncooperative and for pastoral “irresponsibility” then they should identify these facts and make them clear.⁴⁶ Being wrong on doctrine was certainly not the issue. Glacier View had not determined this. Similarly framed protests against Ford’s dismissal on doctrinal grounds, asserting that such action was a negation of the agreement achieved at Glacier View and a betrayal of trust in the scholars, had been sent by groups of theologians at PUC, Andrews University, and Southern Missionary College.

In Wilson’s verbal report to General Conference staff two days later, after interviewing Ford to convey PREXAD’s recommendation of dismissal, one hears clearly the anguish of a leader who has had to make a difficult decision and knows that he will be criticized for it. Expectations of the large, aggressive, and highly critical fundamentalist section of the church represented in the Kenneth Wood bloc competed against a large section of the scholarly community and the many thousands who had been blessed by Ford’s ministry. The contention placed enormous, almost intolerable, pressure on the president. With some exasperation and irritation he felt the need in his report to defend Elder Parmenter, who he believed had “suffered a great deal of abuse” from both parties.⁴⁷

He expressed his awareness of his own ethical dilemmas involved with decisions like these. He asserted, however, that in good conscience he could “sleep at night . . . devoid of hypocrisy.” If a minister/teacher was not in harmony with the church’s beliefs, he noted in carefully chosen words to give himself ethical space, it was not unreasonable at all to expect the worker to remove themselves “*from the arena of conflict.*” He did not talk of removal of such workers *from the ministry*. If one remains and “becomes schismatic” then that “becomes a problem.” Church employment involved clear expectations and commitments. This did not address the question of which party was being schismatic. Was it not people like the Standish brothers and their supporters who had behaved as schismatics?

The ethical dilemma in which Wilson felt caught was sharpened by the awareness that even as he was setting out the criteria for Ford’s dismissal, he knew that ministers and teachers in many places, some of whom he knew very closely as loyal colleagues and associates from previous mission service, shared the same views as Ford or views that were similar in many respects or that they perhaps differed from important Adventist doctrine in other sensitive areas. But he didn’t want a “witch hunt.” Highly respected seminary professor, Siegfried Horn, for example, recorded in his diary a conversation he had with Wilson and Hammill in early 1980 at Loma Linda when the two men briefed him on Desmond Ford’s study. “At the end of our meeting I had a brief talk with Neal Wilson, who said that he wished Des Ford had followed my example and kept quiet as I had done with regard to the problems on chronology and OT history which I had faced.”⁴⁸ “Going public” was clearly Ford’s mistake.

A fortnight later in Washington, on the day in Australia when Parmenter’s committee took its action to terminate Ford, PREXAD noted in its minutes that a

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number of groups and individuals had appealed on Ford's behalf, some asserting that now PREXAD itself was not being pastorally responsible. But PREXAD was not listening anymore. It simply doubled down in asserting in a recorded action that such scholars did not understand things properly. The consensus statement, in PREXAD's determination, had clearly confirmed the Dallas Statement of Fundamentals. There had been no growth. Veltman's letters arrived too late it seems even to make any difference to the doubling down. Wilson himself was unchangeable in his view on Ellen White's doctrinal authority and on the distinctive doctrine. PREXAD echoed these convictions.

Integrity and Honesty or Pastoral Responsibility

Four times in Veltman's September 15 letter to Wilson he alluded to the matters of honesty and integrity. Not only was he tempted to feel himself “duped” but among his colleagues he reported “seeing old doubts being raised on the integrity of church administrators.” “Unity in the church” was important he noted, but so was the need to “deal honestly” with the data. Before Glacier View, he had addressed the same issues to his two senior administrators at PUC in his July letter. His views on the doctrinal problems and possible solutions were “similar” to Ford's “in a number of places.” He had informed them when he had become Theology department chair several years previously that he could be “true to his calling only where issues are open and upfront.” Back in July he had imagined that he would have to declare himself at Glacier View. He could not “live two lives.” He was willing to resign after Glacier View if necessary.⁴⁹

The tension between the exercise of pastoral care and the implications of this for personal integrity and honest expression became acute for both scholars and administrators at Glacier View. Clearly there were genuinely held differences of perspective in how to resolve or maintain the tension. This was the core dilemma for

Ford, who was inclined to come down on the side of integrity as the best way, in fact the only way to properly exercise pastoral responsibility. The issue is illustrated well in a quarrel between Ford and Hammill during the last stages of the writing up of Ford's study document.

A Quarrel

In July 1980, it had been reported to Ford by friends in the Northwest that Dr. Hammill, in a talk to ministers, had represented Ford's views on various points, but had then suggested that Ford had focused on problems so much he had “come to the point of not being able to discern truth.” Hammill had not at all indicated to the ministers that he shared many of the same questions. In a frank letter to Hammill, Ford challenged, “on committee you have frankly expressed the reality of our sanctuary problems and have told us repeatedly you have known them for twenty years.” In fact, when asked on the committee why Hammill believed in the investigative judgment, he recalled, “your reply was so frank and honest that it devastated some such as Bob Spangler.” Ford listed a number of specific interpretations that Hammill had frankly admitted to the guidance committee that he favored and were similar in nature to Ford's, and which modified established doctrine. He observed that Hammill had remarked that other scholars on the guidance committee had been “strangely silent in our discussions” on these matters. Ford's complaint to Hammill was that Hammill well knew “the ‘thinness’ of the traditional case, even as evidenced by the committee members, but you have conveyed a different impression to the workers just a week ago. . . . this cannot be pleasing to the God of truth.” Ford corrected two matters on which he felt Hammill had misrepresented him and then again reiterated his main concern that Hammill had conveyed “a false impression regarding your own appraisal of the Sanctuary problem.” He worried that “if the Glacier

View committee men behave similarly, what hope has the church for God's blessing." Did not the golden rule call for "fairness and honesty"? Ford concluded by expressing his disappointment in Hammill and he copied his letter to Neal Wilson, C. E. Bradford, Duncan Eva, and Fred Veltman.

Hammill's reply to Ford acknowledged that perhaps his talking to the ministers had been a mistake and that he had not intended to misrepresent Ford on the two specific issues Ford had corrected him on. He did not believe he had really done so. In fact from his perspective he did not think he had condemned Ford in public nor opposed his views. He said he did not wish to comment in writing on the specific points that Ford said he had conceded frankly to the committee. He acknowledged, however, that it was true that since his membership on the Daniel Committee of the 1960s he had "been aware of the lexical and contextual problems" associated with the interpretation of Daniel 8 and other aspects of the investigative judgment. At that time, however, he had "made an accommodation" about the problems and hoped that with further searching and praying "God, in his own time, would help us find some answers." He was "content to 'wait on the Lord'" and, in the meantime, "teach our denominational view" and not introduce the questions into classes or sermons. After complimenting Ford on the "excellent contribution" he was now making through "conceptual tie-ups" between the important biblical texts for which "we are all indebted to you," he counseled Ford to do as he himself had done. "You should be careful to soften the impression that now that you have spoken, lo, all the problems are solved." He warned Ford against "hubris" and urged, "we should give more consideration to pastoral concern for the members of His church and not be so positive about our own view." Hammill concluded by noting that he had tried to "avoid giving the impression [to the ministers] that decisions had been made, and that the matter was open for study." This did not mean that the doctrinal subjects were to be "held in abeyance" nor that the church's publications cease advocating the "standard positions" on the subjects.⁵⁰ Hammill clearly had a different view of pastoral responsibility. It would not be until a decade later, in 1990, that he would explore the doctrine of the investigative judgment in an unpublished manuscript and concede that using "typology" and talking of two

apartments was not a safe basis for doctrine. Furthermore, he would argue that the time projection connected with the traditional view of the investigative judgment "is off," proven by "the inexorable passing of around 150 years since that time scheme was first projected."⁵¹

Jack Cassell, who had "a great deal of respect" for Richard Hammill and counted him as a friend, would nevertheless, in later years, consider that Hammill's choice "not to speak candidly until after his retirement" was troubling. He surmised that it came "out of a deep love for the church." Pastoral concern was processed by Hammill as maintaining silence. For Ford, the same deep "love for the church" meant not staying silent. For Ford, the defense of the church he loved required speaking out. With hindsight, Cassell "could have wished that he [Hammill] had been more helpful" in the events that followed Glacier View, when Cassell himself became the victim of fundamentalist vilification and character assassination. According to Cassell, Hammill conceded that Cassell had "gotten a raw deal." Cassell felt the same about Neal Wilson's post-Glacier View unhelpfulness, recalling that Neal Wilson had visited the two PUC administrators in their offices and, in an effort to protect himself, had been "outright dishonest in his statements."⁵²

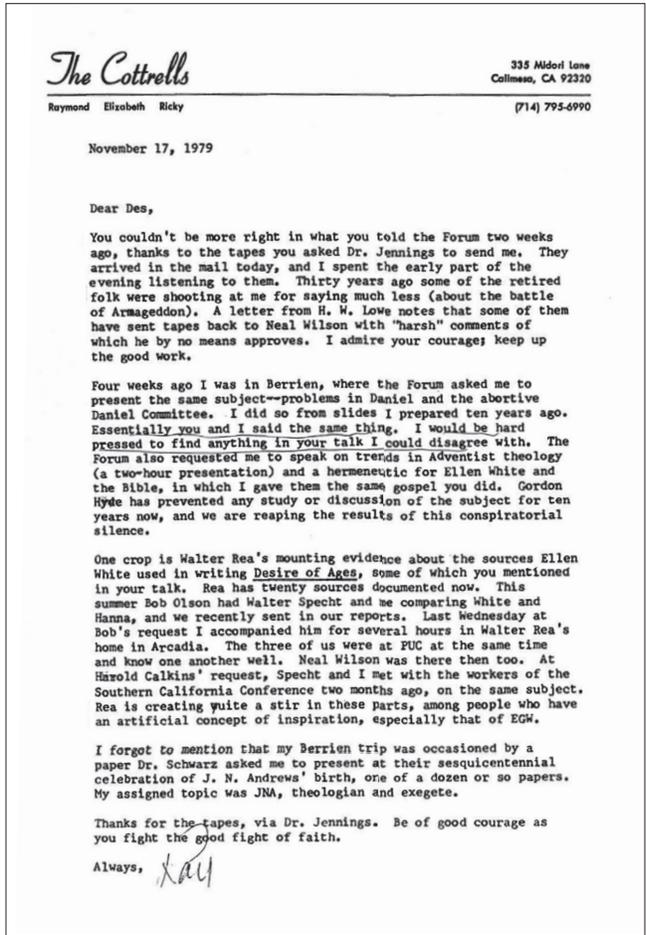
On the other hand, Cassell was also troubled by Ford. He observed that he "personally liked" Desmond Ford "and sincerely felt that he was one our outstanding theologians." He viewed Ford as "as asset" to the faculty at PUC with his "charismatic personality and excellent academic background." Students flocked to his classes, there was standing only room in the Sabbath School class he taught, and both the community and campus family "were enthralled by his presentations." Cassell himself sometimes attended his classes and "thoroughly enjoyed" the experience. Cassell recalled the positive impact that Des had both on campus and in the field. In his work relationships, Cassell found Ford "always polite and cooperative" but he noted that Ford did have "strong convictions" and at times could show frustration with "church administrator types" whom he considered "less informed and [theologically] competent" than himself. Other administrators, like Pierson, sometimes experienced this attitude as a gently patronizing disdain for administrators whom he did not consider theologically sophisticated. On one occasion in the heat of a discussion,

Ford had alluded to Robert Pierson as a Sabbath School teacher and had been obliged to apologize after the remark was reported to Pierson by Russell Standish. There “was a somewhat arrogant aspect to his [Ford’s] personality,” observed Cassell, and “like many charismatic individuals” who had strong opinions, “many, if not all of his problems arose from this personality trait.”⁵³

Students, on the other hand, deeply appreciated Ford’s warm pastoral manner in personal interviews and the practical pastoral advice he offered for those who faced personal challenges or problems. He lacked neither pastoral gifts nor pastoral sensitivity in this part of his ministry. And yet Cassell felt that he and the Forum leaders at PUC exercised poor judgment in arranging the October 1979 talk on the sanctuary question. He applauded Ford’s initial decisions to decline the invitation and believed that Ford should have “continued to resist the effort” to persuade him, given the “divisive nature of the topic.” Why then did Ford throw caution to the winds and choose to “go public” in October 1979 and address such a radioactive question, knowing the consequences could be fraught?

Why “Go Public?”

Important decisions are always made for a cluster of reasons, some perhaps contradictory and some even subconscious. Motivations are inevitably mixed and, in addressing the fateful question of why Desmond Ford chose to make a public presentation on the troubled doctrine of the sanctuary, there are numerous factors to consider. According to Cassell, Dr. Ford initially declined the invitation to speak on the topic pressed on him by forum chapter president Adrian Zytkoskee and his associate, Wayne Judd. Ford was clearly ambivalent but, after further pressure from his faculty colleagues, he agreed. Still apprehensive, he and his chairman, Fred Veltman, talked about possible risks, and Ford suggested that if Veltman would directly tell him not to speak, he would cancel the appointment. Veltman was reluctant to do this. It was not his custom to relate to his colleagues in that way, he reported later to Arthur Ferch, who had preceded Ford on the PUC exchange and was now teaching back at Avondale. Ferch had written to inquire about the fallout from the talk. Veltman responded to Ferch that he was “a little disappointed” with the way



A letter from Ray Cottrell to Desmond Ford shows Cottrell’s agreement with what Ford presented in the Forum.

Ford’s presentation had gone, but on the other hand he would defend his colleague’s “right to speak on the subject” if he felt he was making a contribution toward the solution of a problem Brinsmead had already made public. “Regardless of the outcome of the session, I think we will have to grant Des the integrity to respond to an issue in a way in which he felt was positive regardless of the way in which the meeting turned out.”⁵⁴

What were Ford’s motivations?

1. First and foremost, Ford’s decision to speak publicly on the investigative judgment in late 1979 grew out of a deep, genuine pastoral care and concern for the church. In an irony of large proportions, it was just the kind of pastoral sensitivity that he was charged with lacking and for which perceived lack PREXAD recommended his dismissal from ministry in September 1980. The context for this tension between conflicting perceptions of pastoral responsibility is

important.

a. The subject of the investigative judgment was already being widely discussed by Adventists in California and in parts of Australia. In July 1979, Robert Brinsmead had published a preliminary edition of his book, *1844 Re-Examined*, with a second, revised edition appearing three months later. In broad sweep, Brinsmead analyzed the history of the doctrine with its roots in the post Shut Door period of denominational history, and then critiqued the concept of judgment in the light of a clearer understanding of the New Testament gospel. He concluded that there was no biblical warrant for the doctrine at all. Furthermore, he had conducted seminars for large groups of Adventists in many places in Australia and throughout California.

b. If the thirty-four-page transcript of Brinsmead's audiotaped talk at Windsor, west of Sydney, on September 22, 1979 is an indication of what he said elsewhere, the impact of Brinsmead on church members should have been worrying to Washington leaders. The impact worried Ford. After criticizing the traditional investigative judgment doctrine as being unbiblical, Brinsmead cited numerous conversations with Adventist theology teachers and pastors on campuses and in churches across America and internationally during the previous two years who could not with confidence defend the doctrine and had given it up. His prognosis for the church as he concluded his talk was very negative.

I say that the immediate prospect of Adventism, looking at it from a human point of view is exceedingly bleak. I think we are facing a situation that will look like the

absolute collapse of the Adventist Movement in the world. I think it's that serious. It will look as if Adventism is gone. It's breaking up, its theology is utterly divided. All these great questions are sort of tearing people apart, . . . and they don't know where they are. . . . they are walking around as if they have had a hit on the head. They don't know what to do. They're white. They're white with fright. They are almost speechless. They seem paralyzed. As far as some of the men—I think some of the men at Washington, they are all going paralyzed on this whole present situation as to what to do.⁵⁵

c. Ford reported to Neal Wilson in December, seven weeks after his PUC talk, that during the late summer he had received “a continuing barrage of calls and letters asking me for a solution to the problem of Hebrews 9 raised by RDB. . . . Every time I went anywhere, I was asked to make a statement on what RDB had presented.” Ford disagreed strongly with Brinsmead's methodology and his dark predictions of despair for the church. He believed wholeheartedly in the mission of the church and its future and, while he agreed with Brinsmead on the nature of the exegetical problem presented by Hebrews 9, Ford strongly believed that he had developed an answer that resolved the inadequacy of previous Adventist attempts to resolve the difficulties. His inaugurated-consummated eschatology framework, he considered, provided a helpful construct. He attached a one-page schematic outline of the schema with examples of the theme in his letter to Wilson. Thus, as a pastoral response to the confusion and bewilderment of church

His talk had been an attempt “to pick up the pieces” after Brinsmead's Californian activities and, as he explained to Wilson, it seemed to his colleagues that “the church in general was doing nothing to answer” Brinsmead.

members, Ford had agreed to talk about his proposed solution. His talk had been an attempt “to pick up the pieces” after Brinsmead’s Californian activities and, as he explained to Wilson, it seemed to his colleagues that “the church in general was doing nothing to answer” Brinsmead. Retired Review and Herald book editor, Ray Cottrell, concurred with Ford.

d. In responding to a request to provide material to assist Ford’s advisory group, Cottrell complained to Hammill and Veltman that the church itself was at serious fault. “The enforced silence over the past ten years has been a major factor in escalating the problem as we face it today,” he wrote. The blame for this lay with Elder Pierson and Dr. Gordon Hyde at the BRI. If they had been willing for “responsible Bible scholars to explore these problems” before they had become a public issue confronting the church, “we would not be confronted by the serious situation we face today.” He hoped that the material he was sending them would help the administrators “to see the exegetical facts of life in their true perspective.”⁵⁶ Ford may not have seen this letter, but it helps provide the background to Ford’s citation of a “key administrator” in his letter to Wilson. The individual had commented to Ford that “there is nothing new in what you have said. Everyone knows the problems except the administrators.” Ford acknowledged that this assessment was undoubtedly a “hyperbole” but perhaps “pardonable.” Even so, reporting it to Wilson may not have endeared him any more warmly to the president.⁵⁷

e. The fact that an estimated 1,000 attended the October 27 meeting would also seem to be an evidence of strong pastoral need. Wilson observed that for him, Ford’s address came as a “bolt from

the blue,” as he described it to a relative. This suggests that headquarters was unaware of what was happening in the field in California. Normally at a Forum presentation the interest levels are low and lecture rooms designed to accommodate between 100 and 200 are chosen for the occasions. In the planning for this occasion just such a lecture room was arranged. Advertising for the occasion was similarly limited. Perhaps the title attracted greater interest. It was chosen by the forum organizers and was provocatively announced as “The Investigative Judgment: Theological Milestone or Historical Necessity?” Undoubtedly the name of the speaker attracted additional interest. And as department chair Fred Veltman observed, the presentation was a talk, not a quiet, scholarly paper. This evidence also suggests that Ford’s response was motivated by pastoral concern. As he walked on to the platform on October 27, and being surprised at the size of the crowd, Wayne Judd recalls Ford saying to himself, “it’s time, it’s time.” Ford saw the working of providence in the event.

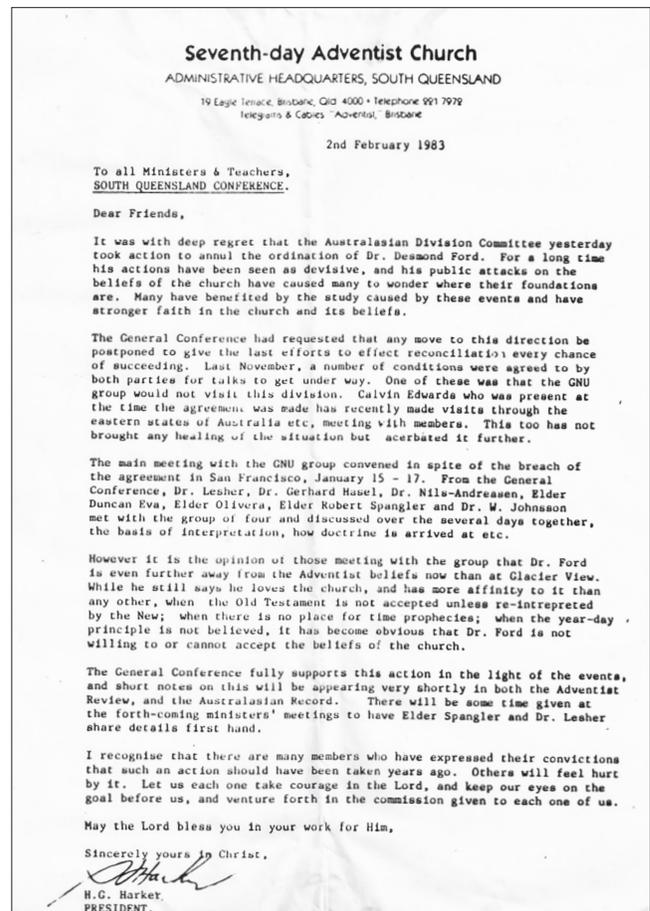
2. Whether Ford and the Forum planners were aware of it or not, Raymond Cottrell had, on the previous weekend in October 1979, conducted a three-session scholarly presentation on exactly the same topic at Andrews University. That event attracted approximately 100 or so participants and was hardly noticed. Clearly, the pastoral context was different. What was also different was that Cottrell’s solution to the exegetical problems was to propose that the troubling doctrine be accepted and defended by relying on Ellen White’s endorsement of it. This involved accepting her authority to determine that this

Ford believed that his inaugurated-consummated framework, combined with his recurring fulfillment-of-prophecy concept, resolved the dilemma and avoided the need to extend to Ellen White what should be Bible-only authority for defining doctrine.

is what scripture now meant in the relevant passages used to undergird the teaching. Whether Cottrell was speaking tongue in cheek and playing devil's advocate on this point is not clear.

Ford did not believe that Adventism, claiming to be a Protestant church, could consistently remain protestant if it accepted Cottrell's solution to the problem and tried to secure its sanctuary doctrine on the basis of Ellen White's teaching. The need to respond to this unsustainable approach was thus a strong motivating factor for Ford. Associate Review editor Don Neufeld had also previously advocated the same position and, according to former Biblical Research Director Harry Lowe, Siegfried Horn had adopted that solution too, whether genuinely or not is not known. But as Harry Lowe explained to Hammill just prior to Glacier View, Lowe himself had found that he could not explain or defend the doctrine without reference to Ellen White either. He considered that this had brought the church "to an impasse." He warned Hammill that "the greatest problem" he would face at the upcoming conference would "center in inspiration" and "Sister White's work for the church," implying that this would become a barrier to progress.⁵⁸ Ford believed that his inaugurated-consummated framework, combined with his recurring fulfillment-of-prophecy concept, resolved the dilemma and avoided the need to extend to Ellen White what should be Bible-only authority for defining doctrine. In pastoral concern for the church, he wanted to get that approach on the table as a response to Brinsmead's criticism.

3. Ford genuinely believed that his 1979 presentation, while pushing further to deal with specific issues that Brinsmead had now raised in public, was, nevertheless, in essence, just what he had been writing about in *Ministry* magazine with increasing clarity since 1961. Along the way, he felt he had uncovered more support for his approach. During the previous two decades Ford had published in *Ministry* twenty or so articles on the inaugurated-consummated eschatology schema and he had linked this with the concept of conditional prophecy. The articles had been sought out and published by *Ministry* editors who had expressed a



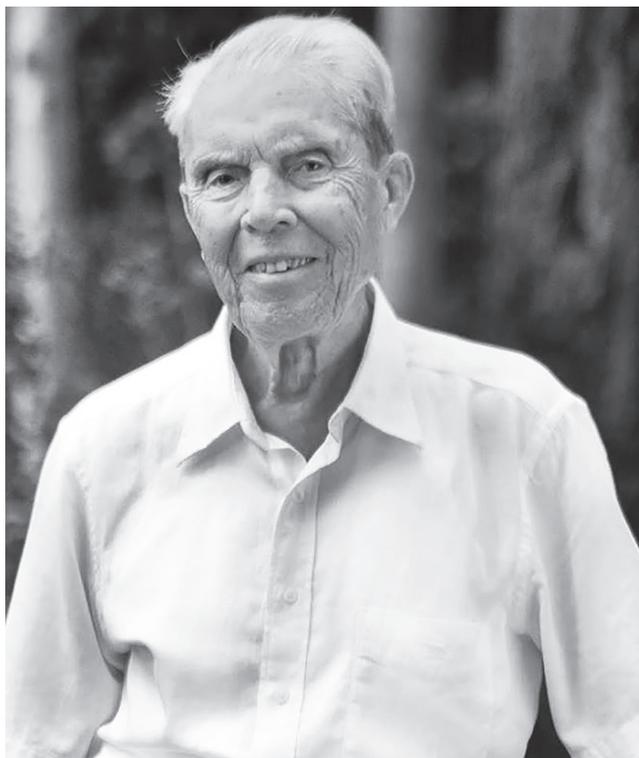
In a letter dated February 2, 1983, to all ministers and teachers in the South Queensland Conference, H. G. Harker informs that the Australasian Division Committee voted to annul Ford's ordination.

need for new and better understanding.⁵⁹ This reality makes the assertion that Ford did not submit his ideas to "brethren of experience" somewhat problematic. In his Forum talk in response to Brinsmead, he had conceded that the meaning and significance of 1844 needed to be reframed but he believed that the scholarly work he had published previously on the topic provided a context for it and that the approach still preserved a continuing prophetic mandate for the church. He believed that he was not really saying anything different from many of his colleagues. It was true that he had addressed the problem publicly and highlighted the exegetical difficulties as a backdrop for presenting his inaugurated-consummated solution, but part of his calculation of the risk was that he believed he had already publicly set out a larger framework for his solution.

4. Another motivation for Ford to speak concerned the

Following conscience was critical. In a tragic sense, both the conflict and the trauma it caused seemed almost inevitable.

need to correct a misunderstanding of the doctrine of Christian perfection. Ford had come to believe that the teaching of sinless perfection had become so embedded in Adventist preaching and teaching about the end-time because it had become entangled with and nurtured by the traditional teaching of the investigative judgment. The doctrine had been taught in a distorted way that robbed church members of Christian assurance and a relationship with God that was joyful. Ford saw his inaugurated-consummated eschatology framework as a way of correcting that distortion. He believed that teaching about the pre-Advent judgment was still needed and that it was indeed scriptural, but it needed a different, Christocentric emphasis. Duncan Eva respected this and pointed it out to Neal Wilson when he sent him a



Desmond Ford died on March 11, 2019.

copy of one of Ford's articles on it on July 31, 1979.⁶⁰ Edward Heppenstall had also long appreciated Ford for this emphasis. As already noted, other scholars, such as Jack Provonsha might hold the view that Ford relied too exclusively on the forensic-penal satisfaction explanatory metaphor of the atonement, but all of them applauded his emphasis on Christian assurance balanced by accountability in the pre-Advent judgment. The need to address this issue through preaching and teaching was prompted by pastoral concerns at the deepest level in Desmond Ford.

5. A not insignificant factor that may have persuaded Ford to overlook, or underestimate, the risk of a negative reaction to his talk on such a delicate doctrinal subject, was the measure of his disillusionment over a lack of integrity that church leaders in Australia had demonstrated in their dealing with him. Ford believed that the AUD president, in response to unrelenting fundamentalist criticism, had betrayed a firm agreement with him and had lied to him about arrangements for him to stay in California for another year. Ford had left Australia on a two-year leave of absence with the assurance that after the two years he would return to Avondale as head of the theology department. Fundamentalists opposed to his anti-sinless-perfection stance and his emphasis on Christian assurance had continued their agitation and pressure on Parmenter during Ford's absence. They did not want Ford back. Parmenter indicated to Ford that Cassell had requested for him to stay on at PUC. It was, in fact, Parmenter who had asked Cassell to keep Ford and offered to subsidize his remuneration to facilitate it, but in a way that the arrangement would not become public. Ford saw the deal-making as a cynical betrayal and downright dishonesty in their communication. Furthermore, it left him without the

prospect of teaching employment. As he noted in a letter of protest to Parmenter, the decision was in effect a “sacking from my position” and Parmenter had not talked with him or given him any hearing. His prospects now were that if he returned to Australia it would be to pastor a church in some country town. This was an affront to Ford, who had completed two PhDs for the purpose of contributing to the training of ministers in Australia, and it stung at a deeply personal level. It was as if he had lost his future already and now had no home country to return to. Ford replied with deep indignation to Parmenter’s formal letter of notification that he could not return to Avondale. He challenged Parmenter’s lack of integrity, noting that “we must soon meet at the bar of God to give an account of our stewardship.” Their dealings needed to stand the scrutiny of “the Eye of the Omniscient one.”⁶¹

6. Personal integrity and honesty played important roles in Ford’s motivation. These were central values to be prized above others in Ford’s sense of Christian morality. The lack of honesty in Parmenter, linked to the consequences for his future employment, seems to have tipped the balance for him to decide that his own Christian integrity could not be sacrificed. Did he think, what else was there now to lose? Being pastorally responsible and maintaining integrity had to be held together and it seemed more important that he should “go public” about the church’s doctrinal problem come what may. This same sense of personal integrity at the end of the whole process in September 1980 would not allow him to smooth over or gloss the expression of doctrinal differences in the service of so-called pastoral sensitivity. Maintaining the tension between pastoral care and speaking truthfully with integrity for Ford could not be achieved at the expense of dishonesty.

Ford would probably not have appreciated the writings of his contemporary, African American writer James Baldwin, but Baldwin’s observation about love and safety would have resonated with him. If the racism of the broken promise at the heart of the American nation were ever to be resolved, Baldwin as artist, prophesied, it would

only be so by a love that could move beyond safety for the self. Only a genuine love could brave such a move. Ford would suggest in different ways that it was genuine love that moved him beyond the concerns of safety to address the great disappointment at the heart of Adventism.

Regret?

Did Ford ever apologize for the pain and disruption his convictions of personal integrity had caused? In December 1979, at the beginning of the controversy, Ford, in a letter to Wilson, apologized for the administrative difficulty resulting from his decision to “go public” and expressed “regret” at “having been the cause of this.” The response to his talk had been a “surprise” to him “and a matter of deep regret.” He apologized for “unintentionally” bringing trouble. Again, in his letter to Parmenter at the end of the affair, he expressed remorse for the pain he had caused. “I sincerely regret the sorrow I have brought to many by acceding to the request of my fellow teachers at PUC in speaking on the topic of their choice.”⁶² Wilson and Parmenter were sorry too. But the church was not equipped at the time to be able to cope by overlooking the trauma. This was the sort of reflection Wilson and his fellow administrators thought Ford should have exercised and been persuaded by before “going public.”

Ford would acknowledge to Wilson and his PREXAD colleagues his recognition of the administrative dilemma they faced. If he were “in their shoes,” and given the same circumstances, he observed, he would make the same decision. “I know what I would do if I were in your place.”⁶³ Following conscience was critical. In a tragic sense, both the conflict and the trauma it caused seemed almost inevitable.

Conclusion

Writing a decade after the events of Glacier View, Richard Hammill believed that it was inappropriate to speak in terms of trying to have the church “revise its official statement on the sanctuary doctrine.” Further study still needed to be given to the implications of Daniel 8 and 9 and to the consensus statement, he wrote. Furthermore, he was convinced that though he personally found it unsafe to build doctrine on typology, “some Adventists will always stress typological interpretations.” He was convinced therefore that differences of view about

the sanctuary would “exist until the end of the world.”⁶⁴ In 2020, the church no longer sees debilitating quarrels over sanctuary teaching, and in the life of the church there has been slow growth in understanding and a broadening theology has been found in the sanctuary doctrine.

But what has been learned about how to manage conflict in the church? Conflicts in other theological areas lurk beneath the surface and could become more disruptive unless proactively managed more carefully. The trauma of Glacier View suggests that resistance to change and a rigid defense of the status quo can build up pressures that can eventually become destructive. Intentionally adopting strategies that embrace inclusiveness, foster tolerance of spirit and diversity of viewpoint, and emphasize continuity while embracing change, will hopefully diminish the building up of sharp polarization over issues. Such an approach will become necessary to prevent the tearing of the delicate fabric of fellowship. Developing trusting relationships so that the duty of pastoral responsibility does not clash with and overwhelm the values of integrity and honesty are critical for the church if it is to survive conflicts over biblical interpretation in the future.

Coping with charismatic individuals who serve as change agents will also pose an occasional challenge. Can the church encourage an environment that values “speaking the truth in love”? What would it mean for learning and development as a church community if leaders cultivated a culture anchored by landmarks and waymarks that remind the church it is no longer the church of “the shut door” but the church of the open door? What would it mean if such learning would become a lifelong learning experience for Adventists?

Endnotes

1. F. Veltman to “Religion Department Chairmen SDA Colleges of North America and Australia,” January 7, 1980. F. Veltman Papers, (FVP) Box 1, Correspondence Folder, Walter C. Utt Center for Adventist History (WCUCAH), Angwin, CA.

2. The initial wording of the agreement stated that “Dr. Ford’s completed study document would be read at a meeting of the Biblical Research Institute, which would include such other persons as may be designated by the General Conference President’s Executive Advisory.” “Statement of Agreement, December 3, 1979.” Cassell would later assert that the enlarging of the review group with the addition of many more church administrators, some from the third world, was an administrative “tactic” and a departure from the intent of the proposal. Conservative pressure seemed to necessitate the widening of the readership group. For Cassell, the widening represented administrative intent to “load the dice” against Ford, and it confirmed a fear that “the case against Des was stacked and already decided.” Trevor Lloyd interview with J. C. Cassell, January 20, 1990,

48. Adventist Heritage Center, Avondale College, Cooranbong, NSW, Australia (AHCAC).

3. Neal C. Wilson to Richard Leshner, November 29, 1979. Record Group (RG) 11: N. C. Wilson – Glacier View Files (NCW-GVF), Correspondence Files 1979, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, MD, (GCArch).

4. Initial drafts of the “Statement of Agreement,” may be found in RG11: Vice President Files – Leshner 1979, GCArch. See also “Teacher Given Leave to Prepare Doctrinal Paper,” *Adventist Review*, December 20, 1979: 23.

5. N. C. Wilson, “This I Believe About Ellen G. White,” *Australasian Record*, April 28, 1980: 5. The article was published internationally.

6. “Telephone Conversation Record,” Richard Osborn with Neal Wilson, January 9, 1980. FVP Box 1, WCUCAH.

7. N. C. Wilson to D. Ford, January 31, 1980. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.

8. R. W. Taylor to N. C. Wilson, January 9, 1980. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.

9. Taylor to Wilson, January 9, 1980. It is now known that the tapes were not being circulated by the Brinsmead Group but by an independent “tape ministry” person in New Mexico. The misinformation had apparently come from John Brinsmead, who had fed conspiratorial interpretations to Parmenter and his colleagues. John Brinsmead to N. C. Wilson, March 14, 1980. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.

10. Siegfried Horn diary, January 20, 1980. Original in possession of Larry Geraty, Riverside, CA.

11. N. C. Wilson to R. H. Pierson, February 4, 1980. RG 11: NCW-1980 Correspondence - P, GCArch.

12. A. LeRoy Moore to N. C. Wilson, November 24, 1979. Wilson seems to have received it mid-December. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.

13. Don Yost to N. C. Wilson, December 12, 1979. A. O. Tait was the editor of *Signs of the Times* and Froom the editor of *Ministry*. The letter was dated January 28, 1930. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.

14. R. H. Pierson to N. C. Wilson, May 5, 1980. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.

15. George F. Will, “A Pope with Authority,” *Newsweek*, June 23, 1980: 92.

16. K. H. Wood, “Colleges in Trouble,” *Adventist Review*, February 21, 1980: 3.

17. See for example, F. Veltman to Sakae Kubo and Kenneth Vine, March 11, 1980. FVP Box 1, Fld M-Z, WCUCAH.

18. N. C. Wilson, “Update on the Church’s Doctrinal Discussions,” *Adventist Review*, July 3, 1980: 24.

19. Milton Hook, *Desmond Ford: Reformation Theologian, Gospel Revivalist* (Riverside, CA: Adventist Today Foundation, 2008), 245.

20. Letter to N. C. Wilson, March 10, 1980, signed by twenty South Australian pastors. Copy in author’s possession.

21. J. R. Spangler, “Comments and Suggestions on Desmond Ford’s Sixth Chapter,” [July 1980], 4–6. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch; Gillian Ford to Calvin and Nerida Edwards, July 8, 1980. Copy in author’s possession.

22. “Minutes of the Sanctuary Review Committee: August 10–15, 1980,” 4. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.

23. “Minutes of PREXAD,” August 14, 1980. GCArch; Richard Hammill, *Pilgrimage: Memoirs of an Adventist Administrator* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1990), 196.

24. “Minutes of the Sanctuary Review Committee Meeting: August 1–15, 1980,” 78. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.

25. “Notes on Meeting with Dr Ford,” 6a. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.

26. "Notes on Meeting," 21.
27. "Notes on Meeting." 3. See Gilbert M. Valentine, "Fear and the Hidden Agendas of the Ford Controversy (1979–1980)," *Spectrum* 47 No. 4 (Fall 2019): 30–49 for a more extended discussion of the downside of Ford's charisma.
28. Valentine, "Fear and the Hidden Agendas," 15.
29. K. Parmenter to D. Ford, September 6, 1979. Copy in author's possession.
30. John Brinsmead to N. C. Wilson, March 14, 1980. Brinsmead had read his letter to Parmenter and his colleagues and division ministerial director, A. N. Duffy, had typed it up to be sent to Wilson. A. N. Duffy to N. C. Wilson, March 14, 1980. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.
31. D. Ford, Statement on Robert Brinsmead, [undated but likely March 1980]. Copy in author's possession.
32. For more detail on the personal relationship between Ford and Robert Brinsmead see Valentine, "Fear and the Hidden Agendas," 30–49.
33. F. Veltman to PUC Faculty, August 21, 1980. FVP Box 1, Fld M-Z, WCUCAH.
34. Gillian Ford to Calvin and Nerida Edwards, July 8, 1980. Copy in author's possession.
35. Gillian Ford, "Glacier Review Reflections," (2017). Copy in author's possession.
36. F. Veltman to D. Jennings, February 13, 1980. FVP Box 1, Fld A-L, WCUCAH.
37. W. G. Johnsson to N. C. Wilson, June 17, 1980. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.
38. See *Adventist Review*, August 28, 1980: 32; September 3, 1980: 4–15; *Ministry*, October 1980.
39. K. H. Wood, audiotape recording of Review and Herald worship talk, September 8, 1980. Copy in author's possession.
40. R. Hammill to H. W. Lowe, September 18, 1980. RG 11: VP-R, Hammill, 1980. GCArch.
41. "Minutes of the Sanctuary Review Committee Meeting: August 1–15, 1980," 74. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.
42. "Analysis of Desmond Ford Letter to Parmenter," and "Analysis of the Four Points in the Parmenter Letter. . .," Minutes of PREXAD, September 2, 1980. GCArch.
43. "Comparison of Twelve 'Key Points,'" Minutes of PREXAD, September 2, 1980. GCArch.
44. Minutes of PREXAD," September 2, 1980.
45. R. W. Taylor to N. C. Wilson, September 19, 1980; R. W. Taylor to D. Ford, September 19, 1980. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.
46. F. Veltman to N. C. Wilson, C. E. Bradford, R. W. Wernick, and W. Duncan Eva, September 15 & 18, 1980. FVP Box 1, WCUCAH.
47. Audiotape recording of Neal Wilson staff worship talk, September 5, 1980. GCArch.
48. Siegfried Horn diary, January 20, 1980. Diary in possession of Larry Geraty. Horn's archeological research posed serious challenges to the church's short chronology for the Genesis story. Horn went on to muse that the "Washington hierarchy must have talked about me and may have worried that I would cause them trouble. They are probably happy that I am shunted aside before I could do any harm."
49. F. Veltman to J. C. Cassell and G. Madgwick, July 12, 1980. FVP Box 1, WCUCAH. After Glacier View, Veltman took up an appointment with the White Estate working on the literary dependency study exposed by Rea.
50. R. Hammill to D. Ford, July 25, 1980. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch. Hammill also copied Wilson, Bradford, Eva, and Veltman.
51. R. Hammill, "Reflections on the Adventist Typological Interpretation of the Mosaic Tabernacle and its Cultus," Unpublished Paper, January 1990, 20. Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI. (CAR) He had originally thought to include the document in his published memoir but decided not to.
52. Trevor Lloyd interview with J. C. Cassell, January 20, 1990, 48. AHCAC.
53. Lloyd interview with Cassell, January 20, 1990, 44, 47.
54. F. Veltman to A. Ferch, March 17, 1980. FVP Box 1, Fld A-L, WCUCAH.
55. Transcript of "R. D. Brinsmead Tape," September 22, 1979, 31. Copy in author's possession.
56. R. E. Cottrell to R. Hammill and F. Veltman, January 6, 1980. FVP Box 31, Fldr 3, WCUCAH.
57. D. Ford to N. C. Wilson, December 12, 1979. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.
58. H. W. Lowe to R. Hammill, July 28, 1980. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.
59. In 1960, Robert Spangler had sought his articles for a *Ministry* series on the Sanctuary doctrine. He asked if Ford had any "additional evidence" to support the doctrine and published Ford's contribution as "New Light on the Sanctuary." J. R. Spangler to D. Ford, March 25, 1969; D. Ford to J. R. Spangler, April 14, 1969. Copies in author's possession. In 1974, Spangler ran a nine-part series he had asked Ford to write entitled "Dare to Study Daniel." In 1978 and 1979, Ford had further developed the theme. See for example, "The Way of the Blood," *Ministry*, July 1978: 10–18; "The Ark," *Ministry*, November, 1978: 11, 12; "The Prophetic Calendar of Israel," *Ministry*, January 1979: 16, 17; "Yom Kippur and Judgment Day," *Ministry*, March 1979: 18, 19; "Day of Atonement-Fulfilment and Consummation," *Ministry*, May 1979: 10, 11; "The Judgement," *Ministry*, July 1979: 14, 15.
60. The article was entitled, "Daniel 8.14 and Recent Scholarship." Duncan Eva to N. C. Wilson, July 31, 1979. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch. Eva thought the article evidenced Ford's "firm adherence to a pre-Advent judgment and the 1844 date." Eva applauded Ford's desire to "make our 'queer' sanctuary belief and doctrine appear more reasonable to our critics," though he suspected that his AUD brethren would condemn him on some details.
61. Desmond Ford to K. S. Parmenter, November 3, 1978. Copy in author's possession.
62. D. Ford to N. C. Wilson, December 12, 1980. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch; D. Ford to K. Parmenter, August 26, 1980, filed with Minutes of PREXAD, September 2, 1980. GCArch.
64. "Notes on Meeting with Dr. Ford," (August 15, 1980), 23. RG 11: NCW-GVF, GCArch.
65. Hammill, "Reflections," 20.



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The Adventist Church AND ITS LGBT MEMBERS

BY RONALD LAWSON

How has Adventism responded to social issues over time? We have exhibited two different patterns and one unique case. In one pattern, early sectarian Adventism did not care how a category of people was regarded by other groups, but focused on using all available resources to get its message out; concurrently, it reduced hindrances to conversion that were common in the practices of other churches. This response was urged strongly by Ellen White. Consequently, it used women as well as men as pastors, evangelists, and administrators. When it evangelized African Americans along the Mississippi River it created mixed-race congregations, even though this provoked anger among other whites: all

were welcome. And in Africa it did not follow the example of other mission churches by insisting that polygamous male converts send their additional wives away, but instead accepted whole polygamous families, only insisting that the men not add any additional wives after their baptism. However, as Adventism became less sectarian over time, and therefore more concerned with its reputation in society and especially among the more conservative churches that became its reference group, Adventists segregated their churches, stopped appointing women to the ministry, and changed their policy on polygamy to match those of the other churches, in spite of the damage such changes caused.

In the second pattern, Adventists accepted the judgment of most of society and the other churches of morally unacceptable behavior, as a sign that the end was near, but as otherwise not their issue; they assumed that Adventists did not get pregnant outside of marriage, divorce their spouses, or abuse their wives or children. When this assumption proved incorrect, they regarded the members concerned as a blotch on the church's reputation that must be removed immediately, and disfellowshipped them.

Homosexuals also fell into the second category: just as an unmarried pregnant member was seen as shaming the church, when a gay or lesbian was discovered among its members—and in those days discovery was usually the result of the publication in the press of the names of those arrested following a police raid on a gay meeting place—this was seen as embarrassing, and that person was purged immediately.

Religious and Civil Contexts

Condemnation of homosexuality by Christian churches long fostered discrimination against homosexuals in many countries. This was reflected both in law, where criminal penalties were often harsh, extending to capital punishment in some parts, and in public opinion, where it was invoked to justify ridicule, physical violence, eviction from housing, and loss of employment. However, growing concern for justice and civil rights in the United States during the 1960s, beginning with discrimination against blacks and women, was extended at length to homosexuals. The new current fostered the emergence of the gay liberation movement in 1969. This quickly garnered support from key organizations; the American Bar Association issued a call for the decriminalization of homosexual behavior between consenting adults in 1973,

and the American Psychiatric Association voted to remove homosexuality from its official list of mental disorders in the same year. The more liberal denominations also responded; the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian-Universalist Churches, emphasizing that God loved all his children, voted to ordain openly gay and lesbian pastors. Most of the mainline churches began to debate such issues, and some of their congregations declared that they welcomed gay members.

However, conservative religious groups quickly mounted several political crusades that tapped deep reservoirs of hatred and prejudice within society. For example, when, in 1977, Anita Bryant successfully took the lead in the campaign to reverse a civil rights ordinance that had helped protect homosexuals against discrimination in employment and housing in Dade County, Florida, her campaign spawned bumper stickers that urged people to “Kill a gay for Christ.”

In recent years, the situation has changed dramatically; same-sex marriage and the right of LGBT couples to adopt children are the law now in many countries in the developed world. Several US states, beginning with Massachusetts in 2004, legalized same-sex marriage, and the US Supreme Court extended it to the whole nation in 2015. The previous “don't ask, don't tell” policy in the military was overthrown, making it OK to be openly gay, lesbian, or transgender. Gay and lesbian clergy and bishops are now common in several of the Mainline Protestant denominations. However, the religious right, made up of fundamentalists, Mormons, and many Catholics and Evangelicals, is striving to undermine same-sex marriage, and their congregations rarely welcome people known to be homosexual.

Where does the Adventist Church fit into this evolving picture?

Just as an unmarried pregnant member was seen as shaming the church, when a gay or lesbian was discovered among its members—and in those days discovery was usually the result of the publication in the press of the names of those arrested following a police raid on a gay meeting place—this was seen as embarrassing, and that person was purged immediately.

Although most “sins” committed by church employees could be forgiven, this was not true of sexual sin. Of these sins, homosexuality was considered the worst.

The Emergence of Gay Issues

The Adventist Church largely ignored the topic of homosexuality until the early 1970s. The Adventists’ prophet, Ellen White, never referred to it directly in her vast published works or correspondence. Consequently, when I was a teen in the 1950s and at university in the 1960s, wrestling with my realization that I was different from most people in terms of the gender I was attracted to, it was never mentioned in church services or publications. But I sensed, correctly, that I could not go to a pastor for help, or even to my parents.

Church leaders generally assumed that there were no homosexual Adventists. This assumption was false. However, most homosexual members were deeply closeted, living desperate lives. Their discomfort caused many to exit the church, and those who were discovered often faced rejection by their families and church, expulsion from church schools if they were students, loss of their jobs if they were church employed, and exposure to guilt, shame, and humiliation. Vernon Hendershot, who was president of the Adventist Seminary when it was located at the General Conference complex in Washington, DC, disappeared suddenly after being arrested during a police raid on a gay meeting place in 1952. Such experiences were repeated throughout the global Adventist Church. For example, a student at Avondale College, in Australia, in the 1970s, who confessed to being homosexual between his final examinations and graduation, was not allowed to graduate and finally received his degree in the mail a year later. Our church was concerned with protecting its purity and reputation rather than loving and supporting such members.

Although most “sins” committed by church employees could be forgiven, this was not true of sexual sin. Of these sins, homosexuality was considered the worst. In 1983, when Grady Smoot, the president of Andrews University,

was arrested after propositioning an undercover vice officer while in Washington for Annual Council at the General Conference [GC], it was reported to me that several dispirited church leaders had exclaimed, “If only it had been with a woman!” Although the number of church members whose homosexuality was discovered so dramatically was relatively small, the proportion of gay and lesbian members who grew up in the church was no doubt about average, and many others also joined as adults.

Many Adventist pastors, evangelists, and publications interpreted the emergence of the gay liberation movement in 1969 as a sign of the end of the world. Although counselors and pastors regularly advised homosexuals to pray for deliverance, and to date a woman and marry her in expectation that God would answer their prayers, two books on sex published during the 1970s recognized that change in orientation was unlikely and urged that divine strength be enlisted to resist temptations. Even though I was heavily involved in church during my university years as choir director, organist, and Youth Sabbath School Superintendent and teacher, I spent those years in agony as I wrestled with my problem, dated women I liked but was not attracted to, and had fleeting sex with strangers that caused overwhelming guilt. I felt incredibly alone, for I did not have a single gay friend. Fortunately, I did not marry; I think it would have been a sin for me to have done so.

In 1973, two years after moving to New York from Australia, I took stock of my turbulent life. I had been praying that God would change my attractions for fifteen years, but there had been no answer. I asked God and myself why so, and realized suddenly that I must have been praying for something that God did not want to give me, for surely the absence of an answer indicated that he was happy with the way he had made me. Wow!

After that, I gradually became willing to look for a gay man I wanted to date. But I so much wanted him to be an Adventist! In 1977, I was one of at least three Adventists who independently placed ads in the national gay paper that invited gay Adventists to write to us. I received between 40 and 50 replies—all from far away. But these ads helped to create networks among some gay Adventists, and this resulted in the formation of a support organization ambitiously named Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International. By following networks and placing advertisements in gay and lesbian publications, Kinship expanded rapidly around North America. It became global soon after the creation of the internet.

As time passed, church leaders felt pressure to respond to the needs of homosexual Adventists. In 1976, a series of articles in *Insight* proclaiming that victory over homosexuality through faith was possible drew a large pile of letters from young people seeking help. The author was Colin Cook, a former pastor who had been fired when he was found to be gay. Distraught, he had sought spiritual healing for his unwelcome drives and had eventually married. He held himself up as proof of what he advocated, and responded to the interest by distributing ten hours of tapes under the title “Homosexuality and the Power to Change.” In another contribution to *Insight*, in 1980, he estimated that there were between ten and twenty thousand homosexuals within the Adventist Church in the United States alone, and chastised the church for failing to foster ministries to help these members.

The First Kinship Kampmeeting

The membership and leadership of SDA Kinship was initially concentrated in Southern California. However, towards the end of 1979 its members decided to sponsor a national “Kampmeeting” the next summer, and invited me to a meeting in Los Angeles to help plan it. I found a group of gay men who were much like me; they were uncertain whether God accepted them, their guilt and self-hatred had made it difficult to form a relationship with another man even after marriages had failed, and this had

resulted in promiscuity and loneliness. The church had no answers for us, for no Adventist biblical scholar had researched our issue, and its rejection of us was based on proofreading a few isolated “clobber texts” that had not been examined in historical context. Since we were closeted and anyone discovered was disfellowshipped, the church leaders knew almost nothing about our lives, or how important our faith was to us.

I suggested that we invite the best Adventist scholars we could find, and leading pastors also, to minister to us at the Kampmeeting. I got the job of recruiting them, even though I knew no suitable candidates at that time. I recruited the heads of the Old Testament, New Testament, and Theology departments in the Seminary, the pastor of Sligo Church, and the only woman pastor in the church at that time. I asked each of the Seminary professors to tell us whether God would accept gays and lesbians as Christians; all said that would be something new for them to explore, but they were eager to do so. Each initially thought that he could slip away to the Kampmeeting without seeking

permission, but, when the Seminary professors discovered that three of them were coming, they realized that they would need permission. Jim Cox, the chair of the New Testament department, contacted

Neal Wilson, president of the GC, who responded sympathetically. (It turned out that he had a gay brother and at least one other gay person in his extended family.) He sent Duncan Eva, his special assistant, to meet with Jim and me at La Guardia Airport in New York City. The church leadership had at last taken a step towards addressing our situation.

During the negotiations, Eva said to me: “You have approached us; it is the responsibility of the church to reach out to you.” However, he insisted on two conditions: Kinship could not use the participation of clergy as an opportunity to claim in the press that the GC had accepted homosexuality; and Colin Cook, whose claim to be able to help homosexuals change their sexual orientations was attracting favorable attention among church leaders, should be added to the five invited. In return, the GC



On January 10, 1976, Kinship was founded at a meeting in Palm Desert, California, as a result of an ad placed by two gay Adventist men. Within four months, Kinship had 75 members, a temporary chairperson, and four committees

would pay the fares of all six. The scholars were expected to submit a written report afterwards.

About forty gay and lesbian Adventists attended the Kampmeeting in Arizona. The most emotional experience there was telling, and listening to, personal narratives, which were dubbed “the horror stories.” One person after another told of the isolation each had felt because almost all had been convinced that he or she was the only gay Adventist in the world; of years of unavailing struggle and unanswered prayer for a miracle that would make them heterosexual; of overwhelming guilt and self-rejection; of consequent difficulty in establishing relationships; of promiscuous patterns and more guilt; of rejection by their families and estrangement from their congregations. Since they had been taught that it was impossible to be both Christian and gay, but had found themselves irretrievably gay, they had despaired because they assumed that they were eternally lost: some had been told that homosexuality was the unpardonable sin. Many told of being bullied, some of being attacked. Some told how deep depression had led to suicide attempts. Almost everyone had found no one within the church to whom they could turn for help; those who had sought counseling there had met platitudes, such as, “It’s only a phase. Pray about it, date a girl, and get married—everything will turn out all right.” But the stories of those who had married were especially poignant, with guilt and defeat within their marriage relationships and sorrow over ultimate estrangement from their children.

The biblical scholars concluded, as a result of their study in advance of the Kampmeeting, that the Bible was silent about persons with a homosexual orientation and that the little it said there was directed to heterosexuals involved in pagan fertility rites or having same-sex fun on the side. They were deeply moved by the personal

stories they heard. They argued that homosexuals, like heterosexuals, were called to faithfulness within a committed relationship and to chastity outside of such a relationship. The biblical proscriptions were also the same for homosexuals as for heterosexuals: sexual exploitation, promiscuity, rape, and temple prostitution. Wilson may not have anticipated such an accepting response.

These scholars also drew up recommendations for the church leadership. However, these were forgotten when the attention of the church focused on the aftermath of the firing of Dr. Desmond Ford after his trial, held at Glacier View, CO, the week following the Kampmeeting, and were buried when a letter campaign, orchestrated by a right-wing publication, queried whether the participation of GC-sponsored clergy in a homosexual “kampmeeting” indicated that the denomination had “accepted homosexuality.” At its Spring Council in 1981, the church leaders explicitly rejected Kinship:

The problem of homosexuality in the church was discussed, emphasizing the need to help those who are enslaved by this perversion to find deliverance . . . It is not possible for the church to condone practicing homosexuals . . . The efforts of the church must be focused on individuals, rather than groups, who desire help and deliverance . . . We cannot negotiate with organized groups who refer to themselves as SDA gays and lesbians, and we cannot establish “diplomatic relations” with corporations which in the minds of most people, would be considered as recognition and official endorsement of a deviant philosophy and lifestyle. Counsel will be sought as to what appropriate action can be taken to prevent such groups from using the name of the church.

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Estrangement

A series of mailings that Kinship sent to college administrators, teachers, students, and pastors caused heartburn among many Adventists. The *Adventist Review* explained that Kinship was not associated with the church in an editorial titled “The Church and the Homosexual.” Church administrators also set out to add a statement on homosexuality to the *Church Manual*. The new statement, which was voted at the 1985 General Conference Session, for the first time labeled these “practices” as unacceptable and a basis for discipline.

In a further effort to distance the church from Seventh-day Adventist Kinship, the GC demanded in 1985 that Kinship remove the name of the church from its name. We refused, for it was seeing that name when we marched in gay pride parades that brought Adventists on the sidewalks running to us for information. Our Adventist roots and identity were central to the reasons for our existence and ministry. But the church leaders interpreted our use of the denominational name as “dragging it in the mud.” We waited nervously for the other shoe to drop, for the GC had registered “Seventh-day Adventist” as a trade name with the US Patent and Trademark Office in 1981.

Colin Cook and the Quest Learning Center

Church leaders were much more comfortable with the approach of Colin Cook, a self-described “recovered homosexual,” who had founded the Quest Learning Center in late 1980. His program, which proclaimed “deliverance from homosexuality,” brought homosexuals together in Reading, Pennsylvania, for counseling and involvement in a support group called Homosexuals Anonymous [HA]. Within a few months, the General Conference and Columbia Union opted to fund Quest and provided more than half of its budget. The Adventist Church thus became the first denomination to fund a “change ministry” for homosexuals.

Church periodicals provided the Quest-HA program with extensive publicity within Adventism, presenting it as the answer to homosexuality. Adventist pastors and counselors in Adventist schools began to recommend that anyone who came to them with a homosexual issue contact Quest. *Ministry*, the church’s publication for ministers, featured a long interview with Cook in an issue distributed free to thousands of clergy from other

denominations. As Quest grew, it attracted a great deal of attention from both the press and TV and radio talk shows and drew endorsements from conservative clergy of other denominations. Adventist leaders basked in the favorable publicity.

The Adventist Church never conducted a study of the impact of the program on counselees, nor did it even require a written report before extending funding. It ignored Kinship’s informed questions and listened only to the glowing reports of Cook and to orchestrated testimonies from counselees who were still in the midst of their time at Quest. It failed to understand that the reported healings were claimed by faith rather than achieved in experience. Church leaders eagerly extended funding when Cook and his wife appeared hand-in-hand before the Annual Council of the church leaders: Cook became their representative “ex-gay.”

The denominational role in financing and publicizing the Quest program helped make church members more conscious of homosexual Adventists. Three articles published by *Spectrum* in the spring of 1982 had a similar effect. These reported in detail on the 1980 Kampmeeting, recounted ten of the personal stories shared there, and, in order to provide “balanced” coverage, provided Cook with an opportunity to describe the Quest program. The arrest of the president of Andrews University in 1983 and of an associate pastor of the Takoma Park Church near the GC headquarters the following year, both on vice charges, brought further awareness. The sense of church leaders that they were under scrutiny made them more eager to proclaim the success of their program in changing sexual orientations and more careful to avoid appearing as if they were accepting of homosexuals.

When Cook conducted a weekend seminar at a NYC church in 1984 I attended it, and found his claims of healing unbelievable. I decided it was necessary to interview a sample of people who had been through his program as part of the study of global Adventism that I was preparing to launch. I interviewed fourteen Quest participants in 1985 and 1986. I found that they were fragile, very conservative church members, with high levels of guilt and self-rejection: Quest, the church-endorsed program for “recovery,” was their only hope.

But Quest turned out to be a nightmare experience for them—one that they did not describe in their testimonies

before church leaders. Suddenly, they had found that they were no longer the only homosexual Adventists in the world: isolation was replaced by community, a community under stress because its members were trying to change their orientation and yet were often sexually attracted to one another. The immediate result was confusion, turmoil, and considerable sexual contact. Their confusion was greatly increased when they discovered that a regular feature of counseling sessions was massage from Cook with both counselor and counselee naked, sexual arousal, and repeated sexual advances. None of the interviewees reported that his sexual orientation had changed, nor did any of them know anyone who had changed. Indeed, eleven of the fourteen had come to accept their homosexuality.

I had thought Quest's claims and testimonies of "healing from homosexuality" hard to believe, so I was not surprised to discover that the testimonies I had heard were not real. However, I was taken aback by the evidence that Cook had sexually used and abused almost every counselee. Realizing that I had a moral obligation to report such abuse, I wrote to GC President Wilson in October 1986, telling him what I had found. To try to ensure that he would not ignore my letter,

I sent copies to twenty-nine other church leaders and academics. Cook admitted that my findings were correct and was removed within a week. Church leaders decided shortly afterwards to close the Quest counseling program, but to continue support for Homosexuals Anonymous chapters.

The Adventist press initially ignored the closing of Quest and the removal of its director, so that the widespread image of the program as *the* solution to the problem of homosexuality remained uncorrected. Eventually, I asked the editor of the *Adventist Review* about

this omission, and he responded with a "newsbreak" announcing merely that Quest had been closed because of the resignation of Colin Cook as its director. Ironically, the same issue included a full-page advertisement urging Adventists to subscribe to the *Review* with the heading, "It's my church. I want an honest picture of what's going on." In September 1987, eleven months after the situation was disclosed, *Ministry* published another long interview with Cook which, although indicating that there had been

improprieties, strongly endorsed Cook's methods as the answer to homosexuality and announced (in a photo caption apparently left in by mistake) that he would "soon resume leading seminars for recovery by homosexuals." By December, Cook had recovered enough confidence to announce, in a report addressed to Wilson and copied to forty others, that he had launched Quest II and was working with his first two counselees.

In 1989, an article by Cook appeared in the Evangelical publication *Christianity Today*, trumpeting how he had "found freedom" from homosexuality. Cook was beginning to find new sources of support among Evangelicals and, ultimately, the religious right, which, because of its frequent attacks on homosexuals, sorely needed a

"solution" to showcase. In 1993, Cook moved to Denver, where he founded a new ministry, FaithQuest. This grew and became prominent thanks to close alliances with organizations such as James Dobson's Focus on the Family. Cook also reappeared once again on national television on the *Phil Donohue Show*. He spoke frequently at Adventist churches in Denver and spoke at a series of meetings at PUC. These opportunities in Adventist circles emerged because of the failure of the church to inform Adventists of his fall. Consequently, young Adventists troubled by their homosexual desires continued to contact him for help.

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My interest in Cook and his ministries was rekindled when two of his new counselees brought their new painful stories to my attention. They had discovered that the would-be healer was still a sexual predator, and had learned about my earlier role in unmasking him via the Adventist grapevine. Consequently, I set out to research Cook's activities in Denver, and confirmed their stories about him. In an endeavor to prevent further abuse, I provided the results of my research to the religion reporter at the *Denver Post*, who then carried out a full investigation of her own, and published a front-page story. This then forced the religious right to back off. FaithQuest and Cook largely disappeared from view while the furor subsided. The Adventist Church announced that it was not connected to Cook's seminars and counseling activities. Meanwhile, Cook was greatly hampered because his wife, who had separated from him earlier, then divorced him. Shortly afterward, he happened to ask a female researcher, whom he did not realize was a friend of mine, for help in finding a replacement. He explained that he needed a wife to give his program legitimacy.

General Conference vs. SDA Kinship

In December 1987, the General Conference filed a suit against Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. in the US District Court for the Central District of California for "breach of trademark." Because the suit had to be shaped to address commercial law, it did not even mention that Kinship members are homosexual and Adventist: its case had to be shaped in terms of unfair commercial competition. Its brief consequently made the absurd claims that by using the name Seventh-day Adventist or its acronym as part of its name, competition from Kinship's newsletter was undermining the church's publishing empire and that Adventists were likely to contribute heavily to Kinship, mistaking it for the church's official tithe/offering conduit. However, the accompanying press release, titled "Church Moves Against Homosexual Support Group," made it clear that the GC was rejecting Adventist homosexuals and the ministry of Kinship. In addition to seeking to compel Kinship to change its name, the suit also demanded "exemplary, punitive, and treble" monetary damages.

This Goliath-versus-David suit was poorly timed from the church's point of view, for it coincided with the

media's belated discovery of the Quest scandal and the filing of a suit against the church by abused counselees. Although the latter suit was independent of Kinship, the press drew all these issues together, which resulted in considerable negative publicity for the church.

In filing this suit against an organization with fewer than one thousand members, church leaders expected an easy pushover. The GC hired two major law firms to present its case, at an admitted cost of more than \$200,000. However, it failed to take the strength of the gay movement into account: the case was accepted by National Gay Rights Advocates, which arranged for Fullbright and Jaworski, a major legal firm, to defend Kinship on a *pro bono* basis. Depositions were taken in the fall of 1990, and the case was argued in the federal court in Los Angeles in February 1991. I was one of those deposed and one of two Kinship leaders called to give evidence in court. The legal proceedings were traumatic for us: it was hard not to feel estranged from the church that was attacking us. Since the lawyer who deposed me, Douglas Welebir, was an Adventist, I suggested we begin with prayer. He ignored the suggestion. However, in its verdict, which was announced in October, the court rejected the suit, thus allowing Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International Inc. to keep its full name.

In her opinion, Judge Mariana Pfaelzer pointed out that the term Seventh-day Adventist has a dual meaning, applying to the church structure, but also to adherents of the religion. She found that the Seventh-day Adventist religion pre-dated the Seventh-day Adventist Church; that the uncontested use of the name by schismatic groups such as the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement indicated that it does more than suggest membership in the mother church; and that, as used by Kinship, the name merely describes that organization in terms of what it is, an international organization of Seventh-day Adventists. Consequently, she found that "as used by SDA Kinship, the terms 'Seventh-day Adventist,' and its acronym 'SDA' are generic, and are not entitled to trademark protection." Left with no good grounds on which to appeal the decision, and advised to avoid the risk of a more devastating loss in a higher court, the GC chose not to appeal this result.

The fact that a group of gays and lesbians could continue to identify themselves as Seventh-day Adventists, and that nothing could be done about this, continued

to irritate church leaders. After the verdict, Kinship approached the GC, suggesting that enmities be forgotten and communication begin concerning such common problems as HIV/AIDS. However, the GC spurned Kinship's overtures. The church press also persisted in referring to "Kinship International" rather than "Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International."

Church Statements and Political Involvement

The 1985 GC Session amended the *Church Manual*, for the first time, to refer to homosexuality: "Adultery, homosexuality and lesbianism are among the obvious perversions of God's original plan." In 1987, the Annual Council voted "A Statement of Concern on Sexual Behavior": "adultery and premarital sex, as well as obsessive sexual behavior . . . Sexual abuse of spouses, sexual abuse of children, incest, homosexual practices (gay and lesbian), and bestiality are among the obvious perversions of God's original plan." It was extremely hurtful to LGBT Adventists to find themselves listed in such company.

In the years that followed, the GC issued several statements focusing on gay-related issues. In 1994, when President Robert Folkenberg learned that Mitchell Tyner, a GC staff member, had been invited to minister at a Kampmeeting, he issued this statement:

HOMOSEXUAL GATHERINGS –
SPEAKING INVITATIONS. In view of the fact that homosexual behavior is clearly contrary to biblical teachings, Church beliefs, . . . and in order to avoid the appearance of giving the sanction of the Church to such behavior, it was VOTED, to request all General Conference personnel to decline invitations to speak to gatherings of homosexuals.

This response indicated that church administrators had not caught up with the interpretations of the so-called "clobber texts" by biblical scholars. Because Tyner saw the need to support and minister, he participated in the Kampmeeting for the whole week.

In 1996, the GC Administrative Committee voted "An Affirmation of Marriage," which reminded homosexual Adventists that their only acceptable option was celibacy.

In 1999, as gay issues came increasingly to the fore in political debate and court cases, the Annual Council voted a new "Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality" that was more sweeping and negative than the one added to the *Church Manual* in 1985. This was revised in 2012:

Seventh-day Adventists believe that sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. This was the design established by God at creation . . . Throughout Scripture this heterosexual pattern is affirmed. The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships. Sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden; . . . For these reasons Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and relationships. . . . we also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word.

As the new millennium dawned, Adventism became directly involved in the raging political debates. In February 2000, the president of the Pacific Union and his Religious Liberty specialist published articles in the union paper urging Californian members to support Proposition 22, which was designed to insure that California need not recognize same-sex marriages when and if they became legal in other states. Alan Reinach, the Religious Liberty director, added, "We need not sit on the sidelines on this issue, assuring ourselves that Adventists avoid political issues. . . . We can assist in efforts to educate our neighbors, and to get the word out, as well as urging our own church members to vote." Reinach became much more frequent and virulent in his statements than his counterparts at the GC. In May 2000, as Vermont was in the process of adopting legislation that recognized civil unions between same-sex couples, officials of the Atlantic Union and the North New England Conference raised their voices in opposition to it. Similarly, when courts in Canada began to move towards recognizing same-sex marriages, the Religious Liberty director there declared that "Adventists have a responsibility to make their voices heard on this issue."

In April 2003, Reinach opposed legislation in California



Many Kinship members worship in local Adventist churches on nearly every continent, despite the fact that some of them must not share who they really are.

that would have required organizations supplying goods and services to the state to provide the same benefits to domestic partners as to married couples because it did not exempt Christian organizations. He launched a petition against the bill and requested that churches make announcements urging that members sign it. Adventists were allied with Mormons, Protestant Fundamentalists, many Pentecostals, conservative Catholics, and other elements of the religious right in their stance. Their opposition failed.

Meanwhile, the US Supreme Court had shocked such Adventist officials when, in *Lawrence v. Texas*, it overturned a Texas sodomy statute on the grounds that it did not treat homosexual and heterosexual persons equally. When Canada added disparagement of “sexual orientation” to its list of hate crimes, the *Adventist News Network* reported that pastors there were afraid that their preaching against homosexuality could result in them falling afoul of the law.

After the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court legalized same-sex marriage there in 2004, Reinach attacked the ruling and suggested that Adventists support legislation designed to override that decision. Adventists committed to the long-held position of separation between

church and state saw such statements as a remarkable change in the church’s position.

Meanwhile, a number of cities had begun to perform same-sex marriages, attracting a great deal of attention from the media. These developments, together with the growing number of nations considering the legalization of same-sex unions, led the GC Administrative Committee in March 2004 to issue a “Seventh-day Adventist Response to Same-Sex Unions – A Reaffirmation of Christian Marriage.” This restated the church’s narrow position on homosexuality.

The official positions announced by church leaders became narrower and more polarizing over time. Although they often declared that all people, including homosexuals, are children of God and that abuse, scorn, and derision aimed at them were unacceptable, the dominant tone was an insistence that gay and lesbian Adventists lead celibate lives.

In 2008, when the Mormon Church secretly funded the campaign supporting Proposition 8, which temporarily ended same-sex marriage in California, Reinach, the Religious Liberty director in the Pacific Union, was outspoken in his support of it. However, a

web-based group organized by religion teachers at Loma Linda and La Sierra universities put forward a petition opposing the measure. This created a stir, for it was new and unexpected. Reinach scrambled to launch an opposing petition. The GC, under President Jan Paulson, chose to stay out of the issue.

In 2010, Ted Wilson, the son of Neal Wilson, became president of the GC. Knowing that he would garner little support from the developed world, he had used his travel in the developing world during the previous year to attract support there by voicing opposition to the ordination of women and to accepting homosexual members. Once elected, it became clear that his opposition was to sexually active homosexuals, including any living in committed relationships.

In 2012 the GC Executive Committee voted a statement on same-sex unions:

The institutions of marriage and family are under attack and facing growing centrifugal forces that are tearing them apart . . . Homosexuality is a manifestation of the disturbance and brokenness in human inclinations and relations caused by the entrance of sin into the world. While everyone is subject to fallen human nature, we also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word . . . God's Word that transcends time and culture does not permit a homosexual lifestyle.

In 2015, the Adventist Seminary approved this statement: "All persons, including practicing homosexuals, should be made to feel welcome to attend our churches, while non-practicing gay persons should be welcomed into membership and church office." Soon afterwards, the North American Division [NAD,] at its annual meeting, voted a statement that made the same distinction that any LGBT Adventist could be a member and hold any church office including that of elder, provided that he/she was not sexually active: "those with same-sex orientation, who conform to biblical teachings about sexual behavior, may fully participate in the life of the Adventist Church." The statement also insisted that "Seventh-day Adventist

Church employees are not to officiate, perform, or have an active, participatory role in same-sex wedding ceremonies." These rules were especially likely to impact Adventists living in committed relationships, while those remaining closeted and having promiscuous sex with passing strangers were much less likely to attract attention. The position adopted was likely, then, to encourage the kind of behavior foreign to biblical principles.

In 2017, the GC finally issued a rather confusing "Statement on Transgenderism." This recognized a "contemporary trend . . . to reject the biblical gender binary (male and female) and replace it with a growing spectrum of gender types." However, it warned that

the desire to change or live as a person of another gender may result in biblically inappropriate lifestyle choices . . . God created humanity as two persons who are respectively identified as male and female in terms of gender. . . . As long as transgender people are committed to ordering their lives according to the biblical teachings on sexuality and marriage they can be members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. . . . [However] because the Bible regards humans as wholistic entities and does not differentiate between biological sex and gender identity, the Church strongly cautions transgender people against sex reassignment surgery and against marriage, if they have undergone such a procedure.

The Adventist Church's attitude towards its LGBT members should be understood as part of a larger trend toward fundamentalism in society that it is in tune with. It is part of the larger picture of societal polarization in many countries, including the US. Religion itself is seen increasingly as allied with the political right; in the US, Evangelicals are perhaps the most fervent segment of President Donald Trump's base. Moreover, hope for change based on the far more accepting attitudes of younger generations is diluted by the fact that these same generations are far less likely to be attracted to organized religion. Many churches in the NAD have no millennials attending, leaving conservative members of older generations in total control.

In March 2014, GC President Ted Wilson sponsored a “summit,” *In God’s Image: Scripture, Sexuality and Society*, in Capetown, South Africa. This was the first conference on this topic ever called by the official church. A presentation by speakers from “Coming Out” Ministries, who endorse the official church position that the only acceptable homosexual is a celibate homosexual (see below), was highlighted; they were also the only LGBT people invited to attend. Wilson showed that sexual orientation was for him a very negative issue. However, although some of the presentations were very negative towards LGBT people, Wilson could not control all the speakers. This conference brought the issue to the forefront; it was a significant moment for the Adventist Church.

Adventist Ministries to Homosexuals

In 1995, Pacific Press published *My Son, Beloved Stranger*, which recounted the story of a mother’s distress on realizing that her son was gay and the events that followed. The mother, Carrol Grady, was well known in the church, for she was married to a pastor and both had worked at the GC for years. Although she initially published under a pseudonym, the book resulted in invitations for her to speak at Adventist meetings and to publish articles in church-related magazines. Her experience with her son had led her to realize that Adventist parents of gay or lesbian children had nowhere to turn for support. She started a newsletter, *Someone to Talk To . . .*, in 1996, and a support group by the same name for families and friends of Adventist gays and lesbians in 1999; she launched a



website in 2000. When Grady decided to retire from her post after twenty years at the helm, she passed the baton to a pastor and wife who were parents of a transgender daughter.



A variety of “change ministries” promoting celibacy for gay Adventists emerged around the end of the millennium. The most prominent has been “Coming Out” Ministries (COM), formed in 2010 by three men with LGBT pasts. A fourth person, a woman, joined them sometime later. Their approach is to share their personal stories with those “struggling with sexuality, identity, or brokenness,” and to present Jesus “as the source of hope, healing, and lasting victory.” They state that they reject “reparative therapy,” but they do hold up the possibility of becoming heterosexual and marrying—which has been achieved by one of the four speakers; however, their main thrust is towards celibacy.

COM conducts meetings in Adventist churches and academies, where its speakers tell their own stories, which feature wild promiscuity and involvement in drugs and alcohol. These personal histories are portrayed as typical of all LGBT people. In a presentation in Asheville, NC, in 2018, I found them out of touch with the diversity of LGBT people and the behavioral trends among them over time, and therefore both false and offensive. In the two academies near Asheville, attendance by students was made compulsory; the LGBT students were so distressed by the experience that some were reported to have become suicidal.

COM was embraced by the Ted Wilson GC administration, for its message is in tune with his. They

[COM] state that they reject “reparative therapy,” but they do hold up the possibility of becoming heterosexual and marrying—which has been achieved by one of the four speakers; however, their main thrust is towards celibacy.

were the only “LGBT” people featured at the GC-sponsored 2014 global conference on homosexuality in South Africa, which was attended by 350 delegates from all divisions of the world church. It has also been embraced by other conservative Adventist-related organizations such as the television network, 3ABN. “Journey Interrupted,” a documentary released in 2016 that also tells their stories, received the imprimatur of the GC when it was shown at Fall Council in September 2016. It has since been shown widely, such as at the GYC convention in December 2016, the NAD Ministerial Convention in January 2017, the Adventist Seminary in March 2017, and in several other countries.

The stories of the three older men featured in this group reflect the experience of some gay men, several decades ago: they were closeted, promiscuous, self-hating, and involved with alcohol and illegal drugs. I had a real problem with their presentation of this as the typical gay experience in an era where many LGBT couples, especially Christian couples, now form monogamous, committed relationships, and marry legally. However, the ill-informed church leaders evidently want to believe that their biographies are still a truthful depiction of the lives of LGBT Adventists.

COM has lost two of its speakers recently. I was told that one of the founders resigned because he failed to maintain a celibate record; the woman also resigned for “personal reasons.” Consequently, the COM website now offers only two speakers, and the organization has lost credibility. They found that marrying their beliefs to last-generation perfectionism was not sustainable.

I was given the information about a COM founder having had a sexual “fall” in an interview. Since I was not sure to what extent this had been publicized, I thought hard before deciding to mention it. I decided that if one of the COM founders can no longer say he has been celibate, that is relevant for people to know. It is obvious to me that for such a gay person, even a senior, trying desperately to be celibate is asking a lot of oneself, and that proclaiming one’s celibacy as an example to lure others to that path must increase the pressure. So I feel for him. But I, and lots of others, were oppressed by hearing their testimony and their judgment on our lives. I know from my own history that asking God again and again to help us to change orientation or be celibate, and then

failing again and again, and hating ourselves as a result, is a truly miserable experience. When I found love it was an enormous blessing—I understood God better as a result, for God is love. My years of unsuccessful prayer to be changed, from age 18-34—a total of 16 years!—were torture. Instead of trying to set up untold numbers of similar trajectories among Adventist youth, the church should let us show them how to create loving, committed relationships and to use those as examples of similar relationships with Jesus. The COM message, which it proclaims with GC backing, that being celibate is the only way an LGBT person can please God, is abusive.

During these decades, SDA Kinship grew more rapidly than previously, both in North America and internationally. Its total membership in January 2020 stood at 3,311 in 79 countries; 2,033 (61.4%) of these were in North America. Kinship supports committed relationships among its members, and its meetings and activities provide opportunities for gay and lesbian Adventists to meet one another and pursue such relationships. It also nurtures, without judging, all gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and intersexed persons who approach it. Most members are Adventist or of Adventist background, with most of its non-Adventist members being partners of Adventists. Kinship’s spiritual message, which has often brought encouragement and healing to homosexuals who felt estranged from God and rejected by their church, is that God loves and accepts them the way they are. Its worship services at Kampmeeting are moving experiences, for not only are the sermons addressed directly to their needs, but they are the only services where many of its members feel welcomed.

The Adventist Press

The official church periodicals were largely silent about homosexuality until the 1990s, apart from the earlier articles in the youth magazine, *Insight*, by Colin Cook, and those in *Ministry*, publicizing and then attempting to rehabilitate him. However, some magazines that were addressed to particular audiences became more willing to publish articles that addressed homosexuality and related issues. While a few broadened the issues addressed, all stayed within the official behavioral guidelines of the church.

In 1992, *Insight* published a major article, “Redeeming

“Could I go to your church? Would they be like you?”
She reported that she replied: “No, Jed, my church
isn’t ready for you yet.”

Our Sad Gay Situation: A Christian Response to the Question of Homosexuality,” authored by Christopher Blake, its editor. Blake admitted that the church should have issued a public apology following the collapse of the Quest Learning Center and that it had not moved ahead with any other approach to help gay and lesbian church members. In many respects, the article represented an advance in understanding, especially in its sections titled “Nobody Chooses to Be Homosexual,” “‘Gay Bashing’ Is Never Acceptable, Especially for Christians,” “Many Fears about Homosexuality Are Irrational,” “Homosexuals Are Not by Nature Necessarily Promiscuous or Child Molesters,” “Changing One’s Homosexual Orientation Is Difficult and Rare,” and “Homosexuals Can Be Genuine, Model Christians.” However, the article defined such model Christians as those who “battle against their orientation all their lives” because “homosexual activity is sinful” and cannot be condoned.

Insight published several more articles dealing with homosexuality in subsequent years, but these were much less adventurous and were careful not to contravene the official church position.

An article by a mother of a gay son writing under a pseudonym appeared in *Women of Spirit* in 2000. She told of traveling to meet her son’s partner for the first time and of finding herself eating with three gay guys and a lesbian, who unexpectedly asked her about her faith and church. Warming to her responses, one commented that he knew little about Christianity, but would like to learn more. He then asked, “Could I go to your church? Would they be like you?” She reported that she replied: “No, Jed, my church isn’t ready for you yet.”

In November 1996, *Ministry*, the periodical addressed to Adventist clergy, published an issue that addressed the question “What do homosexuals need from a pastor?” All articles stayed within the officially recommended

behavioral guidelines for homosexuals. The lead article stated that it was essential to recognize the difference between orientation and behavior and urged that pastors and churches “be both prophetically clear and genuinely compassionate”; that is, it held that sexual orientation was probably fixed, but LGBT Adventists should choose to be celibate.

As the issue of same-sex marriage became politically prominent in the United States, the tone of some articles in church publications became much more strident. In October 2003, for example, Roy Adams, published an editorial in the *Adventist Review*, the “official church paper.” Titled “Marriage under Siege,” it referred to “the concerted push for full acceptance by a well-heeled, well-financed homosexual lobby, the media falling all over itself to push the agenda.” After listing the overturning of the Texas anti-sodomy law and the acceptance of same-sex marriage by the Netherlands and Belgium and its advance through the courts in Canada and Massachusetts, it posed the question, “What is to be our stance as a Church?” Declaring that “the spiritual crisis of the last days” was here, that we were seeing “a brazen, deliberate, concerted attack on the three foundational pillars of the book of Genesis: Creation, Sabbath, and . . . marriage,” Adams asserted that in spite of the historic embrace of the separation of church and state by Adventists, “Silence is not an option. The stakes are too high . . . This is the time for faith communities to speak out.”

In 2004, an issue of *Liberty* set a similar tone. This was surprising, given that the publication’s historic purpose was to promote religious freedom and, in the United States, the separation of church and state.

In contrast, the progressive Adventist independent periodicals, *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today*, together with their websites, played very different and significant roles. During the 1980s, *Spectrum* informed its readers about

the emergence of the gay civil rights movement within Adventism and the response of the church. It covered SDA Kinship's first Kampmeeting in detail, the approach of the church-funded "change ministry" and its collapse amid scandal, the impact of HIV/AIDS on gay Adventists in North America, and the failure of the suit brought by the GC against Kinship. In 2008, it completed an ambitious and important project: the publication of the book *Christianity and Homosexuality:*

Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives. This told stories of LGBT Adventists and of their parents, discussed biomedical, ethical, and social science perspectives, including a history of the evolution of Adventist responses to its LGBT members, and presented discussions by Adventist biblical and theological scholars that were very different from the official church understanding. In the new century, both *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today* and their websites broadened their coverage considerably, opening the door to an understanding of the lives and problems of LGBT Adventists, including those who are transgender and intersexed. Both became supportive of treating them as brothers and sisters. They also covered the findings of major

studies detailing how Adventist families have responded to their LGBT children, and significant theological pieces helping people to understand the real meaning of the few biblical texts usually invoked against them. They have also challenged Adventists to treat LGBT Adventists as Christ would. *Spectrum* has published a total of forty-seven LGBT-related articles, twenty-three since 2000, and its website over eighty, all in the latter period; *Adventist Today* has published twenty-nine articles in just the last four years.

Adventist Schools and Colleges

Teenage LGBT students are often bullied at school. As I have prepared to write about Adventist education, I have found myself wondering about the extent to which the amount and kind of bullying in Adventist schools differs from that in secular schools. Even though I was 6-foot-plus tall by the time I was 13, I was bullied at my secular school and called names like faggot even before I was anywhere near dealing with that issue personally; the bullies sensed

that I was different and not inclined to fight back physically, and acted accordingly. I have wondered whether there is more or less of such bullying at Adventist schools, and whether the possibility of seeing LGBT or potentially-LGBT students as sinners as well as different would change the dynamics. I posed questions concerning this topic on gay-friendly Adventist-related sites on Facebook, seeking data, and received a bunch of replies. A number of these suggested that many of the LGBT persons responding had experienced less bullying at Adventist schools—perhaps because the students all knew one another as a result of the small size of those schools. Some reported more trouble from administrators/teachers: for example, some who refused to write positive references for

PUC was the first college to have a gay support group among students, in the late 1980s. . . .

There are currently LGBT-related organizations on seven NAD campuses, where they seem to be of great importance to the members. Three of these have official recognition, and the others function without harassment.

students who appeared as if they might be LGBT. When respondents could report on the situation of current students, their comments suggested that it had changed more recently; many public schools now recognize and support their LGBT students, and there are gay-straight alliances and other support for them there. However, this is not true in Adventist academies; evidence was put forward suggesting that the sin issue has become more important there in recent years: "When I was (a teacher and counselor) at small Adventist schools, the kids who came out as LGBT were picked on mercilessly."

By the mid-1990s, Adventist colleges had moved away from witch hunts focused on suspected gay students to policies of “don’t ask, don’t tell.” In part, this was because they had become more accustomed to the presence of known gay students within their student bodies. Another ingredient was their increasing need to maximize tuition income. Students found in compromising situations, however, are still likely to face discipline, although expulsion is now rare.

PUC was the first college to have a gay support group among students, in the late 1980s. This garnered help from the pastor of the campus church and several faculty. Walla Walla, what was then CUC, and La Sierra followed during the 1990s. All depended on the presence of students with the courage to act. The visibility and indeed the very existence of each group rose and fell as active students graduated and newcomers became involved.

During the 1980s and 1990s, students who were openly LGBT on campuses faced a lot of negative responses from other students. However, as homosexual issues became politically prominent in the new century, and as courts made decisions recognizing same-sex marriage, other students became more supportive, and many saw these issues as the major human rights issues of this time. The result was the emergence of a new kind of organization, gay-straight alliances, on some Adventist NAD campuses.

There are currently LGBT-related organizations on seven NAD campuses, where they seem to be of great importance to the members. Three of these have official recognition, and the others function without harassment. Members from each campus meet annually, usually at Kinship’s Kampmeeting. In very recent years, the climate for LGBT students has improved greatly on most campuses, with support from faculty and often tacit support from administrators. However, a few administrators have tried to block the formation of groups on the remaining campuses, ostensibly to be in support of the denomination. The dynamics at La Sierra University [LSU] have been representative of those at several campuses.

LGBT students at LSU created support groups starting in the early 1990s. Since their early iterations were not officially recognized, they were not permitted to meet on campus: instead, they met in the homes of supportive faculty members off-campus. They were also

hampered by not having access to the usual means used by other student clubs to publicize their activities. Since they depended on the presence of student leaders who had the courage to be open about their orientation, their existence was intermittent. While La Sierra was part of Loma Linda University in the 1970s and 1980s, it ignored the possibility that it had LGBT students. There was a lot of bullying, hate, and harassment of the LGBT students, especially in the men’s dormitories, but the college would not be accountable for mistreatment. The administration made a fuss in the later 1980s when the student paper published an ad from Kinship, making its phone number available to LGBT students needing help.

Once LSU separated from LLU, it became more open under the Guy and Geraty administrations, although this was always cautious and only really visible at an unofficial level. Nevertheless, many students continued to make homophobic remarks in classes, and the LSU chaplain was hostile to homosexuals. A new VP for Student Life, appointed in 1995, rewrote the Student Handbook in a much more LGBT-friendly fashion, but this was undone after 2000 on the initiative of the new Provost, Ella Simmonds. Meanwhile, however, the faculty had become more supportive; in 1995, over a hundred of them agreed to place their names on a list of faculty who were safe for LGBT students to talk with. At this time, a member of the Counseling department was important in publicizing a new unofficial LGBT support group among potential members. The Psychology department later took over and expanded this role. However, the Board of Trustees was seen as conservative, and some administrators also. The Student Life administration was unwilling to ask the Board to approve an LGBT support group, which was necessary to make it a legal student club.

In the early years of the new century, the attitude of the LSU student body began to change noticeably, because of both a new chaplain and societal changes. The LGBT students began to feel that they had many allies on campus, although some continued to be adamantly opposed to them. In 2011, LGBT students organized again, as Prism, and when they began the process of applying for formal recognition the student government voted in favor of this unanimously. However, the Student Life administration again refused to forward their application to the Board, thus again forcing the LGBT

support group to function unofficially. However, the group later gained the equivalent of official standing under the umbrella of the Psychology department. This made it organizationally more stable. Meanwhile, the presence of several LGBT faculty members and administrators has become more widely known, though not officially acknowledged, on campus.

The Adventist LGBT college students in the NAD came to regard the denial of their right to organize on their campuses as a discrimination problem that needed to be addressed. They also wanted to work together on problems faced by a significant number of Adventist LGBT students, such as rejection by their families when they came out to them or were discovered by them. In an attempt to address these issues more effectively, Rebbe Kern from LSU and Eliel Cruz from Andrews University founded the Inter-Collegiate GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) Coalition of LGBT groups (IAGC) at Adventist Colleges in 2011–12. Kinship worked with them, and it really took off. It began to train potential LGBT leaders on all the Adventist campuses, and several college administrations began to hold conversations with their campus LGBT group. The IAGC regarded the NAD statement issued in 2015, which stated that celibate homosexuals could be church members and hold any church office, as affirming their identity and giving the colleges permission to work with them. They used that interpretation to extend their contact with college/university administrations.

Meanwhile, at the two largest universities, Loma Linda [LLU] and Andrews [AU], both of which happen to be GC institutions, recent changes have been especially dramatic. These universities have been addressing such issues at a level far beyond the rest of the church, and, as such, have become social labs, working through things in advance of the denomination, and setting precedents en route.

Andrews University

In October 2009, Nicholas Miller, a Seminary professor, responding to the publication of *Christianity and Homosexuality* and its chapters by Adventist biblical scholars addressing the scriptural passages usually used to “bash” LGBT people, organized a “scholarly conference” on Marriage, Homosexuality and the Church. Its focus was tightly theological. Those working with students at

Andrews University found its contents irrelevant to their LGBT students. In fact, the practical issues of how to respond to Adventist LGBT children were never addressed in those years.

In 2013–14, Jonathan Dorum, an AU freshman, described his feelings about being a gay student at AU:

I think one of the hardest times is when you're just sitting in vespers or church and everything is fine . . . until the speaker says something negative about homosexuality and how wrong and sinful it is. Suddenly the people around you and the congregation echo their amens and you've never felt so small before. And then in the dorm and on campus people proudly proclaim their homophobic slurs/comments and your friends laugh along. You feel like no matter how good, how friendly, how Christ-like you try to be, no one will like you if they knew the real you. And then you truly feel alone.

The Capetown “summit” in 2014 had brought with it a call for continued conversation on the topic of LGBT Adventists. Spurred by this, AU114One, the unofficial Gay-Straight Alliance at Andrews University formed in 2013, proposed that its members tell their personal stories to other interested members of the student body, and the university administration agreed to sponsor “a conversation with LGBT students” on Sabbath afternoon, April 19, 2014. President Niels-Erik Andreasen explained that it was “important that we seek to offer compassion and support for all members of our community.” The session was opened by then-Provost Andrea Luxton and moderated by two faculty members. The university advertised the event as “a supportive environment where Andrews University LGBT students can honestly and safely share their stories.” The event was attended by over six hundred people. It garnered a lot of enthusiasm both on campus, where the student newspaper devoted an entire issue to it, and from LGBT alumni who had not had voices when they were students there. However, the university received pushback from conference presidents such as Jay Gallimore of Michigan.

A year later, the unofficial group wanted to raise money for a homeless shelter in Chicago for LGBT teens. (There

are high numbers of such teens because many are thrown out of their homes when they come out to their parents. Some of the LGBT students at AU have themselves had such an experience.) However, the AU administration became nervous and refused the request because the group was working with an LGBT organization in Chicago that used drag shows to raise money. It explained that the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not support intimate LGBT relationships. Consequently, “Andrews University’s policies do not permit the raising of funds to support the work of agencies that advocate behaviors contrary to Adventist beliefs.” However, Eliel Cruz, the campus LGBT leader, who had excellent connections to the press, fought back by gaining press publicity for AU’s refusal to help the homeless. For example, the American edition of the respected British newspaper, *The Guardian*, published an article headlined, “Christian charities preach helping the less fortunate, unless you’re gay.” AU14One turned to crowdfunding to finance its project, collecting \$17,000, while the university was shamed in the press.

AU responded by establishing an LGBT Student Life Practice and Policies Taskforce, to address the difficult problem of how to operationalize the official position of the church on homosexuality, marriage, and same-sex unions in a way that provided compassionate care for LGBT students and prevented harassment of them. The concern for homeless LGBT youth resulted in a study by AU faculty that is examining the phenomenon of Adventist families who throw their LGBT children out after they have come out or been discovered by their parents.

In September 2016, Campus Pride, a national non-profit organization endeavoring to create safer college campuses for LGBT students, added AU to its Shame List, which calls out the “shameful acts of religion-based prejudice.” A key reason for this was the university’s refusal to allow an official LGBT group on campus. (The

unofficial group, like that earlier at La Sierra University, was not permitted to meet on campus or advertise to find others who may need help.) Ironically, this announcement came just in advance of the release of its *Framework for Relating to Sexual Orientation Differences on the Campus of Andrews University* by the Taskforce. While insisting that students refrain “from romantic behaviors between individuals of the same sex,” it recommended creating a safe, caring, and informed environment for LGBT students, and an

official campus organization designed to minister to their needs. In arriving at this recommendation, it took notice of the findings of a large study by faculty members that “a significant number of Adventist young adults who identify as LGBT have experienced a great deal of suffering and rejection from family members and faith communities.” Consequently, the university’s goal was to “engage these students spiritually and support them emotionally as they navigate their sexuality and/or gender identity.” The recommendation was approved

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by the Board of Trustees in October 2017. The plan offered students confidentiality, so that they were not outing themselves in joining the organization. Meetings are run by two faculty members, and look rather like a counseling office. The formation of this organization did not remove the need for the unofficial gay-straight alliance; the two organizations cooperate so that their meetings do not clash. Meanwhile, the university is still working on how to respond to questions raised by transgender students.

Andrews University follows the GC in distinguishing between sexual orientation and sexual activity. However, since it is aware that this has not been recognized in key legal decisions, this may be a reason why its official statements do not indicate that it does not discriminate on the basis of orientation. Staff members who administer in the area of student life expressed frustration with the extent to which discussions in this area emphasize religious rights while neglecting biblical themes like hospitality,

neighborliness, Christian forbearance, and access. One summed up the current situation: “In practice, LGBT students on Adventist campuses are still often excluded and made to feel unwelcome. There is a long way to go before the institutional culture is successfully changed. Meanwhile, many LGBT students think of themselves as no longer Adventists before they graduate—because they do not see a place for themselves within their church.”

Loma Linda University

Loma Linda University, the site of the Adventist Medical School and other related programs, long had a reputation of being inhospitable to gay and lesbian students. This was especially so during the long administration of President Lyn Behrens. In September 2000, she told a local newspaper during an interview that faculty were fired and students expelled if caught or suspected of breaking the university rules banning homosexual conduct. Student records were marked that the dismissal was because of immorality, and they were not given supporting letters or help in finding other schools. In an August 2002 article in the *Adventist Review*, the LLU vice president for diversity, Leslie Pollard, reported being asked about the university’s position on sexual orientation after making a presentation on health care and diversity at a national conference. His answer had been “Loma Linda has one standard applicable to both hetero- and homosexual persons: celibacy before marriage; monogamy within marriage.” Since same-sex marriage was still illegal, he was in effect saying that only celibate homosexuals were acceptable. In response to another question, he added that Loma Linda did not knowingly hire practicing homosexuals or extend benefits to their partners.

During this time, university policies, reflected in the

rules listed in the student and faculty handbooks, omitted mention of sexual orientation or gender identity from the lists of categories of people who were protected from discrimination, abuse, or other mistreatment. Similarly, in the section that covered principles of conduct concerning the relationships students develop with their patients, the clause that proscribed “refusal to treat any patient for reason of . . .” also omitted those categories.

However, under the administration of the current president, Richard Hart, and especially over the last six years, Loma Linda University has become a much more welcoming environment for LGBT Adventists. This has been a complex process, in which several clusters of factors each played important parts.

The dramatic changes in American attitudes towards LGBT people over the last twenty years influenced court and legislative decisions and the questions raised at re-accreditation visits. Recognizing that its community included LGBT people, for it did not grill potential faculty members or students concerning their sexual orientations, LLU chose not to be out of step with the law or the communities it serves, and came to realize that following the example of Jesus meant caring for such marginalized groups also.

The personal commitment of several key administrators evolved over time, becoming very different from that of earlier administrations. Knowledge of the angst of LGBT friends, family members, and students, and a certainty that they too were children of God, led such administrators to become strongly committed to making LLU a truly welcoming campus. For example, a close friend of President Hart, dating back to academy and college, transitioned from man to woman in the 1990s. Without Hart’s commitment and zeal, the changes would probably not have been made at this time.

Staff members who administer in the area of student life expressed frustration with the extent to which discussions in this area emphasize religious rights while neglecting biblical themes like hospitality, neighborliness, Christian forbearance, and access.

LLU was proud because both its faculty and students were drawn from many countries and were racially and culturally diverse. Its commitment to diversity broadened over time to include sexual orientation and gender identity also.

A growing commitment to follow where scientific research they trusted took them had prepared LLU administrators to think of gender identity and sexual orientation as scientific rather than doctrinal issues; scientific research, especially Kerby Oberg's studies of fetal development, helped both administrators and students understand the complexity of sexual differentiation, and that sexual orientation is not a choice.

In recent years, the rules listed in the LLU Student Handbook have gradually become more protective and friendly towards LGBT people. Treatment stigmatizing or degrading a student because of sexual orientation was forbidden in the Student Mistreatment section by 2011. In 2013, the medical school moved ahead of the rest of the university in the policies distributed in the orientation package to incoming students by its Office of Student Affairs: "Any form of discrimination or harassment based on personal characteristics of race, sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity will not be tolerated." This was the first mention in any LLU policy of gender identity. In 2014, the Student Handbook broadened the scope of Title IX: "Loma Linda University maintains a strict policy prohibiting discrimination and harassment based on personal characteristics of . . . sexual orientation, gender identity, . . ." However, the policies prohibiting same-sex sexual contact remained in force. The 2015 Handbook, which was published shortly after the Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriage throughout the nation was announced, removed the reference to homosexual sexual relations as being contrary to the ideals of the university and subject to disciplinary action. Sexual relations between same-sex couples had finally been accepted on campus within a marriage. The 2019 Handbook removed the statement that sexual relations within a committed heterosexual marriage were God's ideal.

During the years 2016–17, the process of changing LLU's attitudes towards LGBT people sped up. In May 2016, President Hart asked Dr. Jana Boyd, the newly hired director of the Employee and Student Assistance

Program, to be involved in working towards making the university a safe and affirming environment for LGBT students and faculty/staff. She created a resource site for LGBT information and materials, which involved meeting with LGBT persons on campus in order to ask them what resources were needed. She also began working with them towards creating an officially recognized LGBT support group.

Next, Hart invited a current transgender student, a former gay student, and a faculty member who is the mother of two gay children to tell their stories at meetings of the University Leadership Council, whose membership included most of the primary administrators and leaders. In September 2016, he made understanding LGBT people the theme of a Leadership Retreat.

In December 2016, the university had agreed to sponsor a Humanities Sabbath afternoon panel discussion on "Religion and the LGBT Community." After the meeting ended, some LGBT students and others gathered near the front, meeting and conversing with one another. This led to the formation of an unofficial LGBT club on campus. In mid-2017, Jana Boyd created an official LGBT support group, where students could discuss personal and campus issues. This was the first officially recognized LGBT group on any Adventist campus. In 2020, the LGBT club also gained official status.

Since LLU is a medical and health-related university, some of the research and teaching done there was immediately relevant to LGBT issues. For example, the research of Kerby Oberg on fetal development allowed him to speak with authority in a course about human development that discussed the developmental basis of intersexed persons, who have both male and female sexual organs, and also about the way sexual organs and brains develop and can get out of sync—a situation that can result in biological sex being discordant with a person's gender. Oberg showed that these variations could be biological, rather than theological, and therefore not a choice. LGBT students spoke enthusiastically about Oberg's classes, for the data presented had helped them understand and accept their sexual orientations.

In December 2016, Oberg addressed the NAD Symposium on Transgender People at Santa Barbara. After that, President Hart arranged for him to make presentations at LLU to the President's Leadership Council

and to a committee of the university's Board of Trustees in January 2017. In these presentations, Oberg provided evidence that gender identity could have a biological basis and as such would not be a choice, making it a medical rather than a theological issue. Hart also arranged for a transgender student to tell her story to the LLU Diversity Council, and for Oberg to speak after her, explaining the biological basis of reproduction. This had the effect of placing her story in scientific context.

President Hart devoted the issue of his letter to the campus, *Notes from the President*, distributed on February 2, 2017, to relating to LGBT people. This passage was highlighted:

It is critical that we understand, treat and support everyone we encounter, regardless of their hereditary, cultivated, assigned or self-assumed sexual identity. That is what we do as health professionals. It is what our code of conduct expects of us.

He continued:

My own interactions suggest that most LGBT individuals are not trying to stand out, or fly a flag—they are longing to be accepted as part of the human race and community they find themselves in . . . Christ Himself spent his time on earth reaching out to individuals who were marginalized during his day. . . . While the Bible doesn't give us a specific story about Jesus relating to an LGBT person, individuals under this umbrella would certainly fit into His lexicon of those deserving His compassion and care. The question of causation asked of Him about the blind man—"Who sinned, this man or his parents?"—seems very pertinent here. Christ's answer—"Neither, but to glorify God"—acknowledges his acceptance regardless of causation. . . . It seems to me that this is not a time for judgment, but rather a time for acceptance, a time for offering emotional support during a difficult journey.

There has subsequently been a remarkable shift in Loma Linda University's treatment of LGBT persons:

the meetings of the student LGBT groups are advertised on monitors throughout the campus; transsexual students have received gender-changing surgery and transitioned while training at the university; the university now has openly LGBT faculty members and is open to hiring same-sex couples. While this shift may have been initiated by the need to face accrediting agencies and to be in accordance with new California laws, key decision makers became personally invested in totally ending discrimination. As a result of this focus, they have withstood opposition and criticism from GC President Ted Wilson.

The staff who provide help to students at the other Adventist colleges and universities in the NAD are aware of the dramatic developments towards LGBT acceptance on the Loma Linda campus. Some have told me that they see Loma Linda as better positioned to move in directions that the GC might object to, and hope that it can create a wake that will also propel other campuses in a similar direction. Since they realize that the new state-sponsored regulations helped push Loma Linda towards dramatic changes, they realize that the time may come when similar regulations will pressure their colleges to be more caring towards their gay students. They see an irony in that pattern, where actions by government or courts prod Adventist institutions to be more Christian in their actions.

Congregations and Pastors

Given the negativity of the Adventist Church's official statements, the diversity of voices within it, and the bitter debates within society about civil rights for homosexuals, to what extent have Adventist congregations and pastors in the United States and Canada become caring and welcoming toward homosexuals? To what extent do Adventist churches support their LGBT children and members and offer them unconditional love? On the other hand, to what extent do they judge and reject them? How frequently do churches assume that they have no LGBT people and practice "don't ask/don't tell," offering no support or affirmation until perhaps one of their youth "comes out" by bringing a same-sex sweetheart to church?

We saw earlier that what matters most to the GC and the NAD is not whether a person's sexual orientation is homosexual, but whether or not he/she is believed to be sexually active. Celibate homosexuals are supposedly

eligible to be members and hold any office in their local church. This means that a same-sex couple in a committed relationship, who may now be legally married, is by definition not eligible. A 2017 incident illustrates some possible dynamics. A married lesbian couple had been attending a Californian church: one was a long-term Adventist, the other new to Adventism. When the latter's experience in that church and with her spouse led her to request baptism, the pastor and officers were supportive, but the senior pastor was nervous about performing the baptism himself. A retired ordained pastor agreed to do so. However, word of the happening was leaked to a right-wing publication in Oregon, which made a fuss about it. This led various church authorities, including GC President Ted Wilson, to apply considerable pressure to the conference, demanding that it discipline both the senior pastor for permitting the baptism to take place and the retired pastor for having performed an "illegal baptism," and that the baptism be annulled. The conference initially asked the retired pastor if she would be willing to relinquish her ministerial credential in order to allow it to demonstrate that it had taken strong action and upheld a strong position. However, ultimately it took the position that membership is a local matter, and no move was made at the church to annul the baptism. The senior pastor was reprimanded for going against church policy, but no efforts were made either to remove him or rescind his ordination. The retired pastor feels that considering the amount of pressure that came from the GC president, both the NAD president and union and conference officials handled the matter with "the softest touch possible." Both the lesbian who was baptized and her partner endured very distressing events, but both remain Adventists.

In fact, there are considerable differences from one congregation to another. This was well illustrated by two interviews I completed back-to-back in Los Angeles. One of the questions on the interview schedule for pastors asked, "How many gay members do you have?" When I asked this of the pastor of a large Hispanic church, his first response was "none," which he quickly changed to "maybe one." He then told me of a member who had been disfellowshipped because of his homosexuality, but had later been re-baptized because he claimed to have been "cured." However, the members shunned him when

he attended church because they did not believe his claim. The pastor explained that he did not speak to him either, because this would have offended the congregation's lay leaders. My next interview was with the pastor of a predominantly white church only a few miles away. He told me that his youth leader, who was highly admired, was widely known to be gay and that he and his partner often sang duets in services.

Most North American Adventist churches follow an unwritten, unstable version of "don't ask, don't tell." This means that it is acceptable if an LGBT member is single and discreet. It may be acceptable for a couple, especially a lesbian couple, to attend together as "friends": some lesbian couples have been able to live together, and even follow one another from one city to another as they change church-related jobs, without raising overt suspicion. However, if a member is open about a same-sex relationship, severe problems frequently emerge. Consequently, the most stable same-sex relationships—married couples—are likely to attract trouble. Some pastors and members want their congregations to be safe places for LGBT Adventists to worship, free of harassment from the pulpit or from members. However, because the church hierarchy has embraced an antagonistic position and some members may voice negative opinions, many are loath to risk conflict. Consequently, only a handful of congregations are known to be accepting of acknowledged same-sex couples. Sadly, such accepting situations can also be fragile and uncertain, for a loving pastor can be replaced by a crusader, new antagonistic members may set out to "cleanse" the church, or the conference can suddenly intervene, and in each case a previously loving community may then become a poisonous environment.

One example of such a dramatic change occurred at San Francisco Central Church, where several LGBT members had found a spiritual home and also support in a ministry to reach out to members of the broader gay community. That ministry folded in 2004 when one leader died and his partner then moved away. This allowed two ultraconservative newcomers to the church to change the accepting dynamic, kill the outreach program, and intimidate the remaining LGBT members. Another example occurred at the North Oshawa Church in Ontario, Canada, which had supported and integrated a gay couple. Later, however, the conference intervened

and, in a vicious process, a new pastor was appointed and new, compliant lay leaders elected. Both the gay couple and the former leaders were made to feel so unwelcome that they formed a new, independent, congregation.

An LGBT Adventist can also be left without a spiritual home if he or she needs to move to another area. In the late 1980s, a Kinship member was nominated to be head elder of his church in suburban Philadelphia. Surprised by this development, he felt it necessary to inform his pastor that he was gay, and was assured that his sexual orientation would not disqualify him; when he added that his roommate was his partner, the pastor remained steadfast. Some years later, the gay elder moved to the opposite side of the metropolitan area, and began to attend a nearby church. However, when he gave the pastor there the same information, he was abruptly disfellowshipped. He was so hurt by the experience that he switched to an accepting church of another denomination.

When I moved to Asheville, NC, in 2015, I was told by the pastor of the church I attended that I was welcome to attend services but that I should not attempt to move my membership to the church for I would then be rejected. While I had been asked to play the organ and to lead song services for about three months after I started attending the church, once my sexuality became known via the grapevine, I was never again asked to do anything. It was apparently assumed that I was sexually active: I was never asked about that. While attending there I endured a virulently anti-gay sermon preached by a lay member and a presentation by “Coming Out” Ministries, Ted Wilson’s favorite ex-gay group, whose depiction of “the gay lifestyle” was false and offensive to me.

Many Adventist pastors do not know how to minister to gay members. I have heard numerous complaints about derisive statements about homosexuals from the pulpit, and even insensitive jokes at their expense, from pastors who are apparently oblivious to the fact that there may be closeted LGBT persons sitting in the pews. Some pastors have also betrayed those who have confided in them.

The typical Adventist congregation creates opportunities for its heterosexual youth to bond, and there is excitement when one shows romantic interest in another. However, LGBT youth have no such opportunities, and if one brings a boy- or girlfriend he/she has met elsewhere, they are immediately suspect. So they are obliged to go to

gay bars or to search online for a partner. This makes it much more difficult to create an “Adventist home.”

The evidence suggests that Adventist congregations and pastors usually offer their LGBT members conditional, rather than unconditional, love. Because of this, the best way for a gay or lesbian member to survive there is to remain closeted—but this prevents strong bonds from developing because such members must try to hide who they really are. This forces them to turn instead to the gay community for genuine, caring friendships. The closet is an uncomfortable space in which to be confined. LGBT Adventists of older generations often put down deep roots in their churches when they were young because they found love there while they struggled secretly with their sexual orientation. Once they came out to themselves they realized that the love they had felt might be conditional, but they often remained active in their churches because of both the strength of their faith in the Lord and the fact that Adventism had become such an important part of their identities. Given the negative situations that they often endured, it is amazing how many remained committed to their congregations. However, this is much less common among the current generation of youth; because of the availability of information on the internet and of support groups in public schools, they tend to “come out” at a much earlier age, and to realize that their churches are so unwelcoming that they frequently look for a loving environment elsewhere. Is this the result that Adventist churches and denominational leaders desire?

The possibility of a church voting to become an “affirming congregation,” which has become important in several mainline denominations, has only recently emerged within Adventism. A website dedicated to encouraging Adventist congregations to craft welcoming statements, with examples of what various churches have voted, was created in 2018, largely through the efforts of Chris Blake, professor emeritus at Union College. The goal of the site, AdventistChurchWelcomingStatements.org, is to give site visitors “biblical inspiration for creating a welcoming statement, a list of actual welcoming statements, and tips for creating a welcoming statement for your church.” It notes that,

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has officially published many encouraging statements

https://adventistchurchwelcomingstatements.org/



The website adventistchurchwelcomingstatements.org provides instructions on how to craft a welcoming statement, along with listing churches with similar welcomes.

welcoming *all* people . . . In practice, however, Adventist churches at times have been exclusive and repellent. We have closed doors to people who didn't behave like us or think like us or look like us. We have cared more about being right than about being kind. We have confused acceptance with agreement. We have been too motivated by fear. We have turned away thirsty seekers of the free water of life . . . Now is the time to be more intentional concerning the openness and warmth of our local church climates. As important as a mission or vision, a welcoming statement gives the church a face.

The site lists twenty-seven Adventist churches and their welcoming statements: twenty-four from the US, three from Australia. Here are two examples:

The Charlottesville Seventh-day Adventist Church welcomes you and people of every race, appearance, belief system, sexual orientation, nation, gender, economic level, age, and ability.

(Florida Hospital Church) We are . . . single, married, divorced, female, male, straight, LGBTQ, poor, rich, old, young. At FHC, we welcome any member of the community to join us in worship. We don't care if you're a practicing Christian or got lost in traffic and

wound up here by mistake. We want to offer you grace and peace as you begin or continue your faith journey.

I found this statement the most striking:

La Sierra University Church is a church "between," bridging generations and communities . . . We are also seeking reconciliation with those we have left out. Though we have said, "You are welcome here," we realize that many in the LGBT community, in particular, do not feel included. We confess that we have fallen short. Aspiring to follow Christ's command to love one another, we resolve to work for change in our church community to be fully welcoming and affirming for all LGBT people. As we work to make concrete changes and open new conversations, please hear us when we say, "ALL are welcome here."

I decided to explore how LSUC came to embrace this statement. Pastor Chris Oberg, the first, and so far only, woman lead pastor at an Adventist university church, had come to understand and care about the struggle of LGBT Adventists. Consequently, when the film *Seventh-Day Adventists* (see below) was released in 2012, she insisted that it be shown in the church sanctuary, not another space, and she was there to introduce it. The church was jammed, with over 1,500 present for the showing. Pastor Oberg then spent the next six years fostering dialogue, preaching on compassion, inclusion, and welcome, and many in-depth church-board conversations, until ultimately the collective consciousness of the congregation was raised, and it was ready to be really accepting and welcoming. As is true in many churches, the community included several LGBT people, including students, and many allies. These included a gay couple, Gabriel and Chase Uribe, both





<https://www.sgamovie.com/about>

The filmmakers, Stephen Eyer and Daneen Akers, with David and Colin from the film *Seventh-Gay Adventists*.

graduates of LSU, who became committed to participating in the process. In 2018, when the LSUC Board formed a Welcoming Statement Taskforce to suggest the next steps in making the church truly welcoming, Gabriel was one of those appointed to it. While crafting the statement, it became clear that equally important to marginalized people is a safe space to gather and be at home, for a statement can only do so much. Along the way, many were surprised to hear a simple request for a Sabbath School class for LGBT people where they could grow their devotion to God and study Scripture, not foster some other agenda. Consequently, the Task Force chose to begin not with a welcoming statement but with something more tangible, an explicitly welcoming Sabbath School class catering to the needs of LGBT people. It felt that this would help demonstrate that the sentiment expressed in the statement was real and not mere words. The class was voted by the board in September 2018 and launched the following month, with Gabriel and Chase as the teachers; it was named the Kinship Class. The committee then completed the welcoming statement, choosing to include the reconciling, confessing language quoted above. Although Gabriel had not thought an apology was necessary, the

committee decided that it was important because of the long history of damage by faith communities, including Adventists, to their LGBT siblings. At the beginning of 2019, the Task Force brought the statement to the board and then to a business session of the congregation. Both the class and the statement had been endorsed without a single dissenting vote.

When Gabriel and Chase married in 2017, they wanted their pastor to tie the knot. However, this was impossible because Adventist authorities have absolutely forbidden Adventist pastors to have any roles in performing same-sex weddings. However, to the surprise of the couple, every member of the LSUC pastoral staff attended their wedding in order to celebrate with them and show their love for them.

The contrast between the university churches at La Sierra and Loma Linda seems strange and unexpected. While LLU has become welcoming to LGBT people, the LLU Church, which is situated on its campus, makes no such statement; unlike La Sierra University Church, it has lagged behind the university. This is so even though its senior pastor, Randy Roberts, is also a vice-president of the university and in that capacity has approved the changes made by the university. When asked about this, an associate pastor told me that there has not been a negative comment about homosexuals in a sermon for several decades, and explained that it is difficult for LLUC to address this issue because of the diversity of views within the congregation: it is a “big-tent” congregation. This means that LGBT members can participate in services but should not expect overt statements of support; that is, the church is still in a “don’t ask/don’t tell” mode. It is therefore not a surprise that most of the LGBT students who attend church services do so at one of two overtly accepting congregations, one of which is independent from the denomination and conference. It surprised me that most of the LLU administrators interviewed were not aware of this disparity between the official positions of the university and the church that bears its name until I asked them the reasons for it.

Films

When the LGBT members of the San Francisco Central Church were made unwelcome, they withdrew and ultimately formed a new independent congregation.

They were joined in this by some heterosexual allies. Two of these, Daneen Akers and Stephen Eyer, a married couple, were filmmakers. Their experience persuaded them that they should make a film to help heterosexual Adventists understand and appreciate their LGBT brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. The result was the film *Seventh-Gay Adventists*, completed in 2012, which told the stories of three gay and lesbian couples. This has now been viewed by thousands of Adventists in several countries. A second film, *Enough Room at the Table*, was completed in 2016. More recently they released a series of short films focusing on the stories of individual LGBT Adventists. These films have been important in helping many Adventists to become supportive.

Ted Wilson, the conservative president of the GC, saw the “danger” of the impact of these films on Adventist opinions. He responded by embracing “Coming Out” Ministries as the officially approved face of LGBT Adventists.

Guiding Families

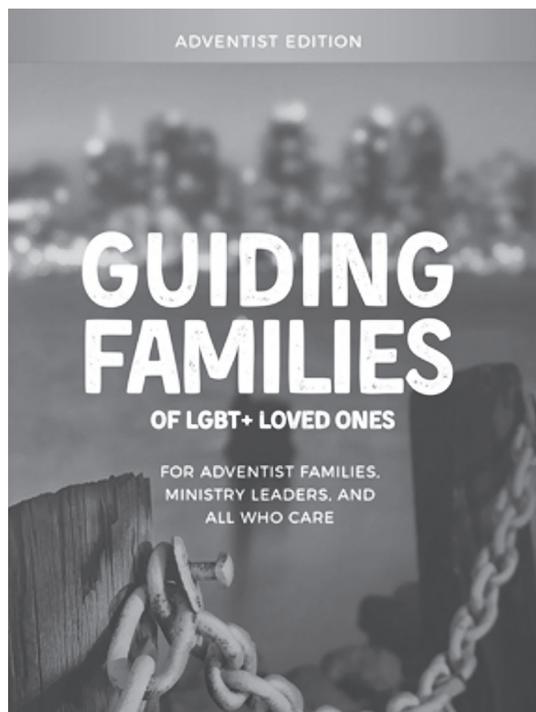
After the Adventist NAD issued a statement in 2015 emphasizing sexual behavior rather than orientation, it became increasingly aware of the practical issues concerning responding to LGBT Adventist children that were posed increasingly by parents, churches, conferences, youth and family ministries, schools and colleges, Pathfinder leaders, and summer camp directors. Rapidly increasing numbers of Adventist teens were coming out as LGBT, parents and church and program leaders were asking urgent questions, but the Adventist Church seemed to have no good answers. Several Adventist-related books focusing on the theology of sexual orientation had been published in recent years, but there was nothing addressing the issues that were being raised. The accounts that the division leaders

were receiving of parents rejecting their LGBT children because they believed this is what the church required, of LGBT students being bullied in academies and colleges, of churches which did not know how to respond to their LGBT youth, and of suicides among them, led the NAD officers to decide to prepare material for the families of LGBT loved ones. Realizing that the NAD Director of Family Ministries was not a suitable candidate to do this because he believed that sexual orientation was a personal choice, the officers gave the responsibility to Kyoshin Ahn, the NAD Undersecretary (now Secretary).

Ahn appointed an ad hoc NAD Commission on Human Sexuality, which worked with him on the project. Those chosen did not include anyone from SDA Kinship because church leaders continue to view it negatively, but one of the seven members chosen was a transgender woman. The Commission considered several options, and chose to use an existing book, *Guiding Families*, written by Bill Henson, a conservative Evangelical with considerable experience working with LGBT people. Henson agreed to let them modify his text to fit Adventist culture. There was some worry about crossing the GC leadership: “we don’t want to be demonized by them.” There was some outcry from Adventist fundamentalists such as Fulcrum7, who

wanted a more doctrinal approach, and from “Coming Out” Ministries, who had been the face of the church in these matters under the Ted Wilson administration, and who resented losing that position in this project. However, all proceeded smoothly thanks, I was told, to strong support from Dan Jackson, the NAD president.

The largest change in the original Henson manuscript was the decision to employ just-released data from a study of LGBT Adventists, by social science professors at Andrews University led by David



Kyoshin Ahn appointed an ad hoc NAD Commission on Human Sexuality, which eventually led to the *Guiding Families of LGBT+ Loved Ones* resource.

The accounts that the division leaders were receiving of parents rejecting their LGBT children because they believed this is what the church required, of LGBT students being bullied in academies and colleges, of churches which did not know how to respond to their LGBT youth, and of suicides among them, led the NAD officers to decide to prepare material for the families of LGBT loved ones.

Sedlacek and Curt Vanderwaal, in a Q&A segment. This showed that Adventist LGBT youth are seriously at risk of suicide, especially if they face considerable bullying or are rejected by their families, both of which are common experiences. The data showed that 81% of them were afraid to tell their parents, and that they were much more likely to receive support from friends than from their families or churches. The book advises parents concerning how to respond to their gay children in order to retain close ties to them, how to express acceptance and avoid alienating language, how to welcome their partners and LGBT friends into their homes. It teaches that responding with love and acceptance is a necessary condition of being faithful to the Bible.

Guiding Families is thus a very different kind of Adventist publication. Unfortunately, it has not been publicized by the media that are controlled by the GC, such as the *Adventist Review*, *Ministry*, and the *Sabbath School Quarterly*; the NAD controls nothing like them. Nor has any report of the Andrews University data appeared in the *Review*. Changes in ministerial training are sorely needed, but this too is under the GC. At this point, 18,000 copies of the book have been distributed; 6,000 of these have gone to teachers in Adventist schools, but the NAD does not have the resources to train teachers to use the resource. I was told that the main purpose was to make copies available to those who sorely need them: but how best to inform those about the availability of the book? The suggestion that it is better not to distribute it among members who could be upset by its thrust highlights the

Adventist problem.

The approach adopted in *Guiding Families*, together with the dramatic changes towards LGBT students and faculty members by Adventist universities and colleges in North America, together amount to major changes in Adventist responses to its LGBT youth there.

LGBT Adventists Around the World

Adventism has grown rapidly in recent decades, especially in the developing world. This has resulted in a decline in the proportion of the membership located in the United States and Canada, which now stands at only 6% of the total. The membership in most other parts of the developed world—Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and Japan—is quite small. Nevertheless, the Adventist Church is now a global church, with members in almost every country, and it is especially strong in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, parts of Asia, and the South Pacific Islands.

It was noted above that SDA Kinship has grown rapidly since 2001. In January 2020, 1,278 (38.6%) of its members were located in seventy-nine countries outside North America. Europe and Australia have their own Kampmeetings. Countries with active clusters of members include Australia, New Zealand, Germany, England, the Netherlands, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, the Philippines, Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho.

The situation of gay and lesbian Adventists in much of the developing world is grim. There are undoubtedly thousands who live in total isolation because they have

never heard of Kinship or have no means of making contact with it. Many of those who have contacted Kinship have yet to meet another LGBT Adventist face-to-face. Moreover, they typically confront a church even more rejecting of homosexuals than in North America, and they often live in cultures that are hostile.

While traveling the world doing research on international Adventism, I asked pastors and administrators wherever I went how many homosexual members they had, and tried to find opportunities to meet and interview gay members personally. One in Lima, Peru, explained that he had left the church as a youth because he had realized that it had no room for him. Indeed, he was aware of many homosexuals who had been Adventists—all had exited the church, either because it had disfellowshipped them or because they had realized it was a hostile environment. One gay couple in Buenos Aires, Argentina, had grown up in one of the largest congregations there, but it had disfellowshipped them after discovering their homosexuality. Still being Adventists at heart and wishing to worship God in an Adventist setting, they began to attend the headquarters church as visitors, not members. However, they were soon told explicitly that they were not welcome at its services.

When I conducted interviews in Africa, I was almost always told that there were no homosexuals there. However, an LGBT group in Uganda led by a former Adventist pastor contacted Kinship over a decade ago. It had over a hundred members, twelve of whom actually joined Kinship. About twenty of the group were Adventists and the rest came from other communions, including about ten who were Muslims; all shared the experience of being cast out by their religious groups. Several had been expelled from their schools and homes when their sexuality was discovered. All of them also faced a situation where homosexuality is illegal and can result in long prison sentences. That is, they face harassment and ostracism from both church and state. The group was formed when the former Adventist pastor gathered them together into a nonsectarian worshiping community. The pastor, who was disfellowshipped after discovery of his homosexuality in 2002, spoke to me with excitement about finding Kinship on the Internet. A young woman assisted him, leading the lesbians in separate activities. The pastor told me that he felt that God had called him to minister



SDA Kinship Colombia posted this photo of an event on their Facebook page.

<https://www.facebook.com/sdakinshipcolombia/photos/a.215020679135181/355282735308974>

to homosexuals, especially Adventist homosexuals, in Uganda. He said that many gay Adventists continued to be hidden in the church, living miserable closeted lives. However, once discovered, or even suspected, they were disfellowshipped—often secretly. He mentioned that some gay Adventists had committed suicide after being discovered. When I asked another gay former pastor, who had fled to the US after he was discovered and fired, about the impact of growing up as gay and lesbian Adventists in Uganda, he replied, “It is the most difficult thing you could ever think of—they tell you that you are already condemned, going to hell. No one tells you that God loves you.” LGBT lives there became even more difficult after legislation was enacted criminalizing same-sex intimacy with lengthy prison terms and calling for the death penalty for repeat offenders.

This law was enacted at the instigation of the association of clergy in Kampala at a time when the president of the Uganda Adventist Union was its leader. On December 17, 2012, the Ugandan daily newspaper, *New Vision*, published an article reporting that the

president of the Adventist East-Central Africa Division, Dr. Blaisious Ruguri, a Ugandan, had delivered a speech at an Adventist church in Uganda in which he had declared that Adventists “fully” supported the government’s “Anti-Homosexuality Bill.” The article quotes Ruguri as saying:

Our stand is “zero tolerance” to this vice and to western influence on this crucial issue because God says no to it. We are together with the President and the Speaker and we fully support the Anti-Homosexuality Bill. I call upon all religious ministers, all Ugandans, and all Africans to say no to Homosexuality. Let us stand for our sovereignty as Ugandans and as God fearing people even though the heavens fall.

Kinship has lost contact with the Ugandan group since that time, and is uncertain and deeply concerned about the fate of its members.

In other parts of Africa, Kinship’s membership in Kenya has grown considerably, and its leaders have worked with groups of pastors during camp meetings there during the past two years. The groups in Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and South Africa are also active.

Adventism has become very prominent in the island state of Jamaica in the Caribbean. Approximately 10% of its population is Adventist, and several Adventists have occupied prominent positions in government. In the last decade, they have risen to the highest positions. In 2009, Patrick Allen, an Adventist pastor who was then president of the Adventist Church in Jamaica, was installed as Governor-General, the head-of-state, a position he continues to occupy. In March 2016, Andrew Holness, another Adventist, and his Jamaica Labour Party, won an election and he began his second term as prime minister, a position he still holds.

It is embarrassing that Jamaica is widely described by rights organizations as among the most dangerous places in the world to be a homosexual, with the authorities often turning a blind eye to assaults and murders of gays, lesbians, and their allies. In 2004, Human Rights Watch issued a scathing report, “Hated to Death: Homophobia, Violence, and Jamaica’s HIV/AIDS Epidemic.” In 2012, it reported that “attacks on homosexual people or people perceived

as being homosexual or transgender appear to remain commonplace.” Severe anti-LGBT laws help to sustain the antagonistic atmosphere.

The Adventists now holding the top positions, and the Adventist Church itself, support the anti-LGBT laws. In a November 2011 interview with *The Gleaner*, Andrew Holness, then in his first term as prime minister, rejected calls from Britain’s Prime Minister David Cameron that he repeal Jamaica’s “anti-buggery” laws, which criminalize same-sex intimacy with jail times of up to ten years. In November 2012, Sir Patrick Allen complained in an address: “There is mounting pressure on states such as Jamaica to recognize specific rights for lesbians and gays, with even threat of withholding financial assistance from those who do not.” In August 2013, the Jamaica Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists published an article, “Same-Sex Marriage is Not a Human Rights Issue,” on its website. This stated that the Adventist Church in Jamaica has “been very strident in its opposition of any softening or repealing of the buggery law.”

In the first decade of this century, a Jamaican member of the Metro New York Adventist Forum, who had been living in the US on a student visa while completing his education, appealed to be granted permanent residence on the ground that he, as a gay man, would be in serious personal danger if obliged to return to Jamaica. The American authorities agreed with his assessment of the situation in Jamaica, and granted his request.

AIDS

The Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) was first diagnosed in 1981, although it was known initially as Gay-Related Immuno-deficiency Disorder (GRID) because it was first found among gay men in America. At the first Adventist conference that focused on the disease, sponsored in 1990 by the *Adventist Review* and Sligo Church in suburban Washington DC, Fritz Guy challenged Adventists: “It would seem that responding to AIDS would be a natural for Adventism, because we claim that healing and caring are part of our mission, and because a sexually transmitted disease is immediately relevant to our understanding of the wholeness of man.”

In fact, however, church leaders were slow to recognize that AIDS impinged on Adventism. Since it was seen as

When he saw his first AIDS patient in January 1983, he realized he was strongly prejudiced against homosexuals and drug users.

However, as he interacted with his patients and learned their stories, he realized that if Jesus were in his place He would reach out to such patients, and he accepted this as his calling.

a gay disease, many Adventists saw it as God's judgment on willful sinners and a sign that the end of the world was imminent. That is, they were repelled, and frozen in inaction, because of their own homophobia. While the disease raged and gay Adventists died, the GC broadened the Adventist definition of adultery to include homosexual behavior as a legitimate ground for divorce, and it sued SDA Kinship in an attempt to force it to change its name. When *Message*, the missionary magazine addressed to African Americans, published a cluster of articles dealing with AIDS, it omitted any reference to homosexuality and drug abuse, fearing that this could be interpreted as approval of such lifestyles.

Neither did the hospitals in Adventism's large hospital system in the United States go out of their way to treat people with AIDS (PWAs). Indeed, Loma Linda University Medical Center became the object of special criticism following reports of neglect and demeaning behavior toward PWAs. The reasons given to explain this pattern included fear of infection, moral disgust with the patients, and the risk of financial problems attendant on providing care for patients who often lacked medical insurance, yet often required long stays in hospitals.

This pattern was very different from the role played by Adventist hospitals during the polio epidemic of the 1950s, when they had stood at the forefront. Indeed, their work among children who had contracted the disease had so impressed the members of a prominent Ohio family that they had donated a 400-bed hospital, the Charles F. Kettering Memorial Hospital in suburban Dayton, to the church. Adventists had viewed the children as innocents, but they saw those infected with AIDS differently.

Adventism's major response to the AIDS epidemic was to affirm its stance against "sexual immorality." The epidemic never became a focus during the hype about Adventism being "the Caring Church." There was no systematic education of clergy or church members in North America, and little coverage of it in Adventist schools, in spite of studies showing that students there were engaging in at-risk behavior. Neither did the church raise its voice in advocacy on behalf of PWAs. Most Adventist PWAs slipped away from their congregations without putting them to the test, and their families were shamed into silence. I interviewed several mothers of PWAs during the 1980s and 1990s, and not one of them had told her pastor, her Sabbath School class members, or her church friends about the cloud that hung over her family.

A few church members became prominent AIDS activists. One was Eunice Diaz, who became active in 1981, almost as soon as the disease was identified, while working with the Los Angeles County Health Department. Later, while employed by the Adventist White Memorial Medical Center, which is located in the major barrio in Los Angeles, she tried to bring people together around AIDS. However, the hospital administration demanded that she drop the issue because the visibility she brought the hospital created a "negative image." As a result, she resigned her position in 1988 and became a health care consultant for government and private agencies. Within months after she left the Adventist hospital, President George H. W. Bush appointed her to the National Commission on AIDS, which was commissioned to advise the president and Congress on all matters pertaining to HIV and AIDS.

When church periodicals trumpeted this news, Diaz responded sadly: “With the minimal response of our church, I don’t go around waving a flag saying I’m a Seventh-day Adventist.” She explained, “The church has turned its back on the AIDS issue because it cannot come to grips with the issue of homosexuality. The leadership of the church is afraid of becoming identified with something it finds embarrassing.”

Another prominent Adventist activist was Harvey Elder, a physician and specialist in infectious diseases at the Veterans Hospital in Loma Linda, California. When he saw his first AIDS patient in January 1983, he realized he was strongly prejudiced against homosexuals and drug users. However, as he interacted with his patients and learned their stories, he realized that if Jesus were in his place he would reach out to such patients, and He accepted this as his calling. By the mid-1980s, he could see that a frightful epidemic was spreading, and, after meeting with Eunice Diaz, the two set out to prod the Adventist Church to become involved. Both were appointed to the GC AIDS Committee when it was created in 1987, and served on it for a decade. However, they became frustrated when its meetings did not result in actions. Dr. Elder responded by launching a lonely crusade aimed at persuading Adventists to embrace the disease and PWAs.

The AIDS Committee failed in its attempt to put AIDS on the program of the GC Session in 1995. However, its members were given twenty minutes to address the Annual Council of church leaders in 1996. Since many pastors interested in the disease found that speaking about it led people to suspect that either they or their children were gay, the committee’s speakers urged the GC to acknowledge that AIDS was a major crisis. They also asked that the church advise heterosexual couples in areas with high rates of infection to be tested before marriage and to use condoms if one of them was found to be HIV-positive. They also urged that the Adventist seminaries teach about AIDS, if only because the students needed



SDA Kinship Connection/June 1992

Eunice Diaz was appointed by G. W. Bush to the National Commission on AIDS.

to be prepared to preach suitable sermons at the funerals of PWAs. In spite of considerable opposition to the use of condoms under any circumstance, all of the items were approved. However, the committee members were deeply disappointed when there was little attempt to implement the voted measures.

It is still true that the church in North America has never really made AIDS its concern. According to the committee, “We don’t have any idea of the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the North American church. There is still so much shame and stigma that family members do not speak and those at risk do not attend church.” Although Adventist hospitals now treat PWAs as they do those with any other disease, Dr. Elder told me that he was “not aware of any SDA hospital that has made AIDS a priority.” When the GC Health department sponsored a conference on AIDS at Andrews University just before the GC Session in June 2005, only two of the one hundred attendees were from North America. A survey of the churches here, in an attempt to discover levels of interest in the topic, found that AIDS was not seen as a major problem when compared to other medical problems. Only about 20% of respondents expressed some interest, the majority from black congregations.

An AIDS epidemic broke out in Africa shortly after the disease was identified in the United States. It was also transmitted by sexual contact, but this time it was primarily heterosexual. When I interviewed Bekele Heye, president of what was then the Eastern African Division of the Adventist Church, where AIDS was rampant, in 1990, he told me that “AIDS is not an Adventist issue!” This was because he associated it with sexual promiscuity, and since the church forbade that, he was not interested in the disease. The lack of interest no doubt contributed to the fact that I had found Adventist hospitals in his division cavalier about the risk of spreading the contagion through the use of untested blood supplies and through reusing needles when I visited in 1988–89. Heye also ignored the

facts that thousands of new members were pouring into the church there and he could not speak to their sexual habits before their baptism. Indeed, I also stumbled on considerable evidence of sexual promiscuity among church members and pastors during my three research-related visits to Africa. Heye's attitude was therefore totally unrealistic.

As late as 1996, in an article titled "AIDS and the Church in Africa," Saleem Farag, former long-term head of the Health department in the Eastern African Division, and Joel Musvosvi, ministerial secretary of the division, made no mention that Adventists had AIDS or that the disease had affected the church. Neither was there acknowledgment that African Adventists were often highly promiscuous. Instead, the authors referred to US data and urged emphasis on morality and evangelistic opportunities among PWAs.

The GC AIDS Committee had chosen to focus its efforts on education to prevent the spread of the disease in the developing world, and thus on promoting "moral behavior" there. This focus allowed church leaders once again to avoid dealing with homosexuals, for AIDS in these regions was found primarily among heterosexuals. However, with the evidence that an epidemic was galloping through Africa, it started to dawn on church leaders that AIDS was just another disease rather than God's judgment on homosexuality. Nevertheless, the church took a long time to recognize that the infection rate among Adventists in Africa was high. In fact, GC President Robert Folkenberg did not realize that the church was infected until Dr. Elder warned him that a significant number of pastors there had the disease and Folkenberg himself saw firsthand during a subsequent visit to Africa that pastors and midlevel church administrators were dying. Dr. Alan Handysides, head of the Department of Health at the GC, gained the attention of administrators when he pointed out that the cost of medical care for one church employee with AIDS equaled the salaries of four or five pastors. It was not until the new century that church leaders in Africa acknowledged that multiple sex partners, incest, and rape are major problems within the church there. Independent studies show that the average number of sex partners that African Adventists have is only slightly lower than for people in the general population. Adventists' discouragement of the use of

condoms, primarily because of Saleem Farag's views while health director in the Eastern African Division and support he received from the GC, made the situation even more dangerous. Africans tend to see things in black-and-white terms, and ultraconservatives among them coined slogans such as "conduct not condoms." This view started to change only after the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) embraced the issue and introduced a new pro-condom slogan, "Protection for People with an Unregenerate Heart." Early in the new century, GC President Jan Paulsen endorsed the use of condoms at an AIDS Conference in Africa.

When I visited South Africa and Zimbabwe in 1999, I found churches in Swaziland that had only women and children members because their husbands were away working in the mines. Pastors there told me that the men returned once a year to see their wives and "give them AIDS," which many had contracted as a result of active sexual lives while away. In Zimbabwe, I saw the results of a confidential survey among unmarried members of the largest Adventist congregation in Bulawayo, where more than 80% of the males and 75% of the females admitted to being sexually active. I was dismayed to learn that the promise of confidentiality for respondents who admitted to having had a homosexual experience had been broken.

Dr. Handysides became head of the GC Health department in 1998. By the following year, he realized that AIDS was an enormous problem for the church because of the large number of members in Africa, where the epidemic was worst. He pushed successfully to have an AIDS office established in Africa and headquartered in Johannesburg. That office worked to persuade Adventist universities in Africa to teach a course on AIDS in their ministerial training programs as both a warning and a call to minister to PWAs, to make every Adventist church an AIDS support center where PWAs can sew and bake goods for sale, and to help reduce the transmission of AIDS from mother to child through testing and treating. However, the shoestring budget of the office severely hampered the director's efforts.

Dr. Elder's crusade took him to Africa many times after 1989, where he endeavored to raise the consciousness of the church about the epidemic. When he felt that too little was being said to the church youth there, he designed an AIDS course which was taught in four of the African Adventist

universities. “I fervently hope that [the course] changes the attitude about the infected, and helps the students realize what are dangerous behaviors,” he told me. “When it comes to protection, being an Adventist does not work nearly as well as a condom!” Dr. Handysides concurred; he explained that HIV/AIDS challenges some beliefs that Adventists have about their purity, such as the assumption that they will not be infected by such an epidemic.

An Adventist AIDS conference in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 2003, represented a turning point, at least in acknowledging that Adventism had been slow to respond to the epidemic, that many Adventists were infected, and that those who had contracted the disease frequently faced stigmatization in their churches. Pardon Mwansa, then president of the division, bravely acknowledged that a member of his family was infected with AIDS. He insisted that Adventists acknowledge the disease as their problem. Elder had insisted that the conference schedule a separate meeting for union presidents and health educators, and Adventist PWAs. As a result of his urging, presidents who attended the meeting confessed to the PWAs that they had sinned against them by lying to them about God and about them to their members.

The Adventist Church learned to respond to heterosexual Africans who transmitted AIDS through multiple partnering as it came to realize the extent to which Adventists were infected. However, it continued to do next to nothing about the disease in the United States because it started there as a gay disease—and it continues

to reject both gay Adventists who put themselves at risk of contracting AIDS and those who live in committed relationships as equally promiscuous because the sex of both groups is not within heterosexual marriage.

Conclusion

To what extent does its one-time slogan, “The Caring Church,” describe Adventism? As measured here, the official Adventist Church fails the test because it has proven itself more concerned with rules and image than with the needs of its people.

Despite the failure of the “change” program it supported, and the sexual exploitation of young, fragile counselees by its director, church leaders helped restore him to a place where he could resume his activities, and they have continued to insist that only homosexuals who struggle to change their orientation or to be celibate will be accepted. The prejudice of these leaders led them to sue SDA Kinship in order to distance themselves from LGBT Adventists, and it prevented them from seeing the relevance of the AIDS epidemic to Adventism, especially in places that initially considered it a “gay disease.” It also continues to withhold support for civil rights for LGBT groups. Indeed, it has endorsed attempts by the religious right to take away recent gains.

However, if we focus on the broader church, beginning with members, congregations, and educators rather than the institutionalized hierarchy, then there are some reasons for hope. The scholars and pastors who participated in Kinship Kampmeetings had their awareness of the situation of LGBT Adventists transformed, and consequently often

became allies. Over the past twenty years many of these have served on an advisory council, where they work with Kinship towards making our church more truly caring. In recent years, church members, congregations, and other church-related entities have become more aware of the presence of LGBT people in the church, its families, and colleges. This has been largely the result of the efforts of SDA Kinship and some truly remarkably caring individual church members, and the publications of *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today*, which have encouraged a new openness among readers.

<https://spectrummagazine.org/news/2019/seventh-day-adventist-kinship-international-celebrates-40th-annual-kampmeeting>



In July 2019, Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International celebrated its 40th annual Kampmeeting in Portland, Oregon. Similar to, yet different from, traditional Adventist camp meetings, this is a time when LGBTQ+ Adventists, their families, and supportive allies come together to worship, socialize, and tell their stories.

The main message of the Adventist Church and the GC to its LGBT members continues to be far too often that Adventists “love the sinner, but hate the sin.” This attitude, in fact, judges the faith and lives of the people whose sin is “hated,” and may best be translated as “we will truly love you only when and if you meet our standards.”

There has been a remarkable change in the tone of the stories that newcomers tell about growing up gay in the Adventist Church since the first Kinship Kampmeetings forty years ago. Their early designation as “horror stories” is rarely apt today in North America or much of the rest of the developed world, even though the stories often still reflect pain, confusion, isolation, and rejection. A number of factors have made a remarkable impact: the very existence of SDA Kinship International; the fact that LGBT Adventists currently find Kinship more easily and at a younger age; the ready availability of information on the web; and changing attitudes in society and church, especially among many Adventist parents. This is not yet the case in the developing world, where both church and society still typically reject gays and lesbians and where “horror stories” continue to abound.

SDA Kinship International continues to make an extraordinary contribution in the name of the church, often to the latter’s chagrin. Kinship is reaching out with increasing effectiveness to young Adventists who have questions about their sexuality; no longer does it need to send mailings to Adventist campuses, because most young homosexuals find it easily on the web and most American college campuses now have a Gay-Straight Alliance or an LGBT support group. It nurtures LGBT Adventists spiritually, encourages them to think through the ethics of being a gay Christian, and fosters stable relationships among them.

As outlined in this paper, LGBT Adventists have reasons for hope because of recent changes in the attitudes towards them displayed by key Adventist universities in the developed world, such as Loma Linda and Andrews universities; because of a new awareness at

the NAD illustrated by its publication of *Guiding Families*; the emergence of a few “welcoming congregations” in the US and Australia; and the support shown them by increasing numbers of progressive Adventists, as illustrated by the many thoughtful and aware articles published by *Spectrum* and *Adventist Today*. Nevertheless, the main message of the Adventist Church and the GC to its LGBT members continues to be far too often that Adventists “love the sinner, but hate the sin.” This attitude, in fact, judges the faith and lives of the people whose sin is “hated,” and may best be translated as “we will truly love you only when and if you meet our standards.” It thus offers conditional rather than unconditional love. This is neither welcoming nor caring.

Consequently, a profound distaste for LGBT persons, and a fear of them, continues to exist among large numbers of Adventists. The question asked in the title of an article about an intersexed person that was uploaded to the *Spectrum* website in January 2020—“Is There a Place for Bob and Others Like Her in the Adventist Church?”—remains truly pertinent. It suggests that perhaps the best way for Adventists who wish that their church would care for its LGBT members and children is to work towards helping the churches where they worship to become truly welcoming congregations.



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When Scripture Meets Life:

BOOK REVIEW OF *UNCLOBBER: RETHINKING OUR MISUSE OF THE BIBLE ON HOMOSEXUALITY*

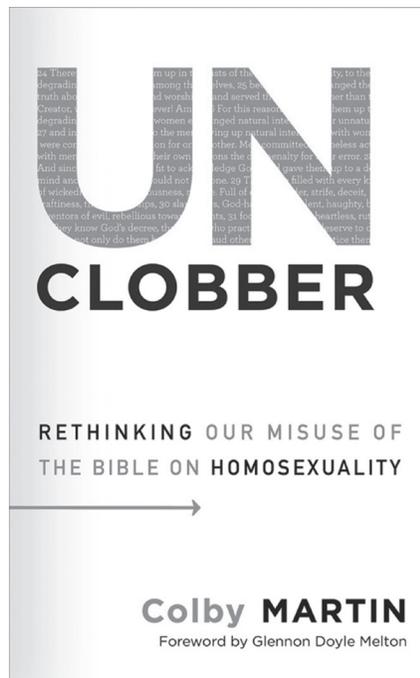
BY CHRIS BLAKE

It's a familiar response. Somebody says, "Well, I love LGBT+ people, but I have to follow the Bible."

But.

In other words, those who are loyal to God must, unfortunately, consign those who are "wired differently"—who are attracted to people of the same sex and who may decide to marry one of "them"—to be condemned, forever lost. Banned from full participation in Christ's body. Shut out of God's kingdom. So goes one *but* argument.

This discussion involves not



only LGBT+ people. Millions of cisgendered, open-hearted Christians (often millennials) have turned away from "church" because of its exclusionary practices. You and I know many of these nomads and exiles by name. They cannot stomach the sanctioned mistreatment—perhaps in complicit silence—of others who are, it turns out, differently oriented through no choice of their own. Those who remain in a church community such as Adventism may wage battles with organizational structures at every level, from the General Confer-

UnClobber, by Colby Martin, pours out the compelling story of an evangelical pastor's dealings with LGBT+ people from a biblical and compassionate framework.

ence all the way to the top at the local church.

As Jay, a youth pastor in an evangelical church in my town, handed me a book, he looked me in the eyes and commented, "I think you might like this." *UnClobber*, by Colby Martin, pours out the compelling story of an evangelical pastor's dealings with LGBT+ people from a biblical and compassionate framework. Along the way, the author, who is not gay, loses his job and retains his integrity.

What makes *UnClobber* noteworthy is the interweaving of Martin's intense personal narrative with scriptural exegeses of six "clobber texts." Chapter headings demonstrate this artful weave:

1. When the Head and the Heart Can't Get Along
 2. Rethinking Our Misuse of the Bible
 3. How Facebook Got Me Fired
 4. Reframing the Story of Sodom (Genesis 19)
 5. Unfit to Be a Pastor
 6. Redefining the Boundaries (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13)
 7. In Search of the Unicorn
 8. Reconciling a Fractured Community (Romans 1:26, 27)
 9. Imagine a Church Where . . .
 10. Revisiting Forgotten Words (1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10)
- Epilogue: As You Go in Your Journey

Unlike similar books dealing with LGBT+ people and the Bible, this one is accessible, fresh, and deep. The writing is tight and the syntax varied. Rob Bell notes, "Funny, smart, and brilliantly paced! Colby has

written *that* book."

Martin's hermeneutical approach is evidenced in his examination of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.¹

My hope, then, is to explore the two Clobber passages in Leviticus and see if we can grasp what it meant back then for an act to be considered an "abomination." And why would that have been the case? And how are we to understand these verses today in the twenty-first century? Are they indeed biblical imperatives that the church should still be holding up?

Encountering the thorny passage of Romans 1, he muses, "Romans was the place where I spent the most time wondering, 'Is there any other way through this? Do these two verses have the singular power to hold back millions of men, women, and children from full inclusion in the Kingdom of God?'"²

He also expends effort in practical life applications, observing:

When my friends Rebecca and Valerie, with their nine-month-old daughter Ella, are told that family members won't be coming to Thanksgiving because of their "sinful lifestyle," I think we're misusing the Bible.

When a judge in Utah rules that a foster child be removed from a married same-sex couple and placed in a home with a mom and dad, because he believes it's better for the emotional stability of the child, I think we're misusing the Bible.³

The author's recounting of his own spiritual, emotional, and cognitive journey is taut and resonant.

The letter that went out to the members of the church and the statement shared from the pulpit was light on details. "Because of Colby's theological positions," it read, "on issues that our leaders believe are central to Scripture and a life after God . . . we feel it is time to bring his time of service to an end." Before their letter went out, I gave them my blessing to say what the theological position was, but they didn't take me up on it. Don't Ask. Don't Tell was back on, it would seem.⁴

One weakness of the book is that Martin does not always make adequate allowances for precise gender-identity language.⁵ For example, the book's subtitle ought to carry quotation marks around "homosexuality." Bisexual people are not homosexual. Many transgender people are not homosexual. Non-binary people may not be homosexual. The term *homosexual* registers as a regressive red flag to LGBT+ people: *Here we go again.*

Ron Lawson's critique in this issue of *Spectrum* chronicles a searing indictment. Jesus confides to His followers at the end of His earthly life, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12, NRSV). He could well be referencing pervasive and oppressive cultural systems of His time involving racism and slavery, treatment of women, and sexual orientation—all of which are still with us. If we cannot bear to fight against these systems now, after 1,990 years, when will we?

Brian McLaren reflects in his testimonial, "Colby Martin's highly readable and deeply engaging new book offers a third option: a different way of aligning head and heart through a fresh look at Scripture. Writ-

UnClobber is a worthy read—balanced and brave and scripturally based—one that can bring to all Christians biblical permission to treat LGBT+ people fully as human beings in God's family.

ten with a theologian's intelligence and a pastor's sensitivity, this book is the resource thousands have been waiting for."

For those who are suspicious or disdainful about the premise of the book I would simply say: *Read it.* I am sending copies to friends and Adventist thought leaders, if only to raise the possibility of the existence of a third option. *UnClobber* is a worthy read—balanced and brave and scripturally based—one that can bring to all Christians biblical permission to treat LGBT+ people fully as

human beings in God's family.

No *but*s about it.

Endnotes

1. Colby Martin, *UnClobber: Rethinking Our Misuse of the Bible on Homosexuality* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 82.
2. Martin, 115.
3. Martin, 22.
4. Martin, 100.
5. Additional practical examples can be found in the "On Identity" resource by accessing Open Dialogue Resources > Workshop Resources. <https://opendialogueresources.org/workshop-resources/>.



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A Prayer of Thanks for Community

FROM CORRYMEELA, A PEACE CENTER IN NORTHERN IRELAND

God of the friends who change our minds,
God of friendships that change who we are:
We give thanks that in being with and for others,
We become something different ourselves.

Instead of pretending to know
Another's experience, or believing
The worst of what we've heard;
We can assume that what's best in us
Is also true for others.

To lead with trust instead of fear
Is to have the faith
That you are God not just with one,
But with all; not just for us
But for everyone.

In finding you in the lives of others,
We find more of you within.

Amen.

