

Long-Distance Fun in 1975 —and a New Day Dawning

The first year Roy Branson taught at the seminary, students could feel a new day dawning. We were considering church mission in relation to political society, and it was like waking up. So far, we'd been schooled in personal and predictive religion: how to find acceptance with God, how to understand the end-time apocalyptic scenario. But Jesus now had *public* significance. We were starting to hope not just for heaven but also for earth—for healing and renewal on earth.

That was academic year 1967-68. A paper I wrote for Roy—it had to do with Christianity and war—became an essay in the first-ever issue of *Spectrum*. I was hooked on the new thinking he stood for, and it felt very much like an *Adventist* project. We were not abandoning our heritage but amending it.

I did not belong to *Spectrum's* founding circle. I did not know the players (but for Roy) and had barely set foot in Boston, where all things Adventist Forum were then centered. But after a year of ministerial internship in Idaho, and brief flirtation with formal study of philosophy, I became one of the original (associate) editors of *Insight* magazine. I had edited my college newspaper at Walla Walla, and published some feature writing. During the next four years I would learn lots more about the nuts and bolts of putting out a publication. Knowing now how *way leads on to way*, it seems

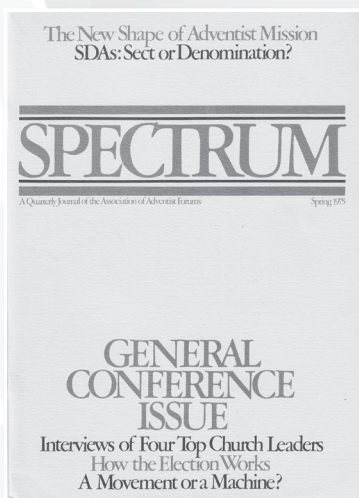
clear that I was already on a path to lifelong connection with *Spectrum*.

When Molleurus Couperus, the physician who had edited *Spectrum* from its start in 1969, was ready to step down, Adventist Forum leaders established a Board of Editors to oversee the *Spectrum*

ministry. Roy Branson's combination of fresh imagination and commitment to church life made him an obvious fit for editorial responsibility. But by now I had left *Insight*. Under an agreement that would return me to pastoral ministry in a year, I was teaching journalism at Walla Walla. I don't know exactly when my name got into the conversation about *Spectrum*, but it wasn't long until Roy and I were imagining an editorial partnership. He had the aforementioned qualifications, and I shared many of his convictions. I also knew the basics of publication. We could shift printing proper to Walla Walla's Color Press near me (such proximity then seemed to matter). We had great long-distance fun—hours on the phone, the satisfactions of productivity—and I am now able say that once upon a time—for three years or so—I was coeditor of *Spectrum*. That is a little-known fact, but it means a lot to me.

Three main things happened during the period of 1975-1978. Roy and I both favored a shift from formal scholarship to formal scholarship *plus*: now essays and creative writing would have a place—just as (along with visual art) they still do. I argued for a format change—from the staid look of an academic journal to the more informal, eight-by-eleven look of journals like *The Atlantic* or *Commentary*. Roy went to bat for article “clusters”—individual issues with both a focus on some theme and room for other pieces.

Here's what remained: Molleurus Couperus's passion for issues that afflict the Adventist soul, and my seminary ethics teacher's complacency-smashing conviction that received tradition thoughtfully reconsidered, could energize Adventism. Honest thought could amount to nothing less than a new day dawning.



Continued from page 2 some historic drama. Wayne tells his side of the story.

Personal and communal narrative inspire this issue. In homage to the 1975 journal structure I created a “cluster” of articles for this journal. It’s an historic mother cluster! Recent Weniger Award for Excellence laureate Kendra Haloviak Valentine creatively explores the story of Job. Her La Sierra University colleague, Sari Fordham, writes about her family’s arrival in Uganda in the mid-70s in an excerpt from her book, *Wait for God to Notice*. Fordham’s work was both a Sarton Book Award Finalist and received Honorable Mention for General Nonfiction at the 2021 Los Angeles Book Festival. Speaking of family, they can evolve in surprising ways. Based on his research, zoologist James Hayward tells a fascinating tale of the descendants of George McCready Price, the famous Adventist creationist.

The 1975 issue of the journal focused on the upcoming General Conference Session. While most of our journalistic work around this year’s meeting will occur on our website, Gil Valentine’s case studies in Adventist leadership offer some strong story beats for those still trying to dance to the “rhythms of Adventist organizational life.” The prolific historian also recently

received the Weniger Award for Excellence and has a new book out titled *Ostriches and Canaries: Coping with Change in Adventism, 1966-1979*. Finally, Jonathan Butler wrestles with the angels and demons of Adventist historiography. While reviewing a recent book by Gabriel Masfa who teaches at Babcock University in Nigeria, Butler plots the rise and progress of historians grappling with the powers that be.

In addition to the hymns, I’m honored to share some creative expression on the cover by one of my former students. Katie Aguilar took time away from her legendary Hollywood studio job to visit an *iglesia Adventista* in Los Angeles and design an image that to me evokes the tensions between past and future, personal and communal, prosaic and profound. Speaking of creative meaning, Sigve Tonstad poetically explores the current story of Ukraine. Spaced throughout the issue as a sort of Greek chorus, I hope Tonstad’s rhythmic meditations provide soulful rhyme where reason fails.

As you read this experimental version of the journal, I pray the visual, lyrical, and narrative moments provide you space to consider the ways your own history connects to our communal story in meaningful ways.

DEDICATION TO FAMILY HISTORY

I dedicate this issue to my uncle, Dwayne E. Carpenter. A graduate of Pacific Union College, he was a student of historian Walter C. Utt. My uncle completed his first PhD from the University of California, Berkeley, in the mid-1970s. As he tells the story, barely in his mid-twenties, he sat so nervously clutching his briefcase on his lap during his first job interview that even he understands why he wasn’t hired. As some do, without other options, he threw himself into the publishing work. The Berkeley Seventh-day Adventist church had a new, openminded, energetic pastor. Inspired by the changes that seemed possible in the 1970s, the church bought a printing press and named their periodical *New Wine*. My uncle was the editor and they ran a review of Ronald Numbers’ *Prophetess of Health*. There was some conflict with the conference. The *New Wine* press lasted just two issues. (Let’s ignore this ominous numerical coincidence.)

Out of a job, my uncle turned to the familiar: academia. Already a scholar of medieval Spanish literature and history, he explored religion

and law. He completed his second PhD from the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, and spent most of the 80s teaching at Columbia University.

I interviewed him recently for some family history and he told me a new anecdote. It was around this time that he attended an Adventist meeting in Boston where attendees were invited to discuss freely (sound familiar). For his presentation, he distributed the newish statement of fundamental beliefs and each person was invited to mark their level of conviction by each one. Afterward he realized he himself didn't believe enough to stay an Adventist and in a later visit to family in northern California, my uncle asked the Berkeley church to remove his name. Returning to New York, a Jewish friend of his said "you no longer have a religion, so you're nothing then." Now searching for a religious identity, he began attending services at prominent synagogues in New York City and then attending lectures at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He eventually converted despite the rabbi doing his job according to rabbinic law, trying to dissuade my uncle three times. A scholar with the spirit of adventure, he published in several disciplines, spent time in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, and recently retired from Boston College as Professor of Hispanic Studies and cofounder codirector of the Jewish Studies program. He's a mensch to me.

Growing up he was just my dad's brother who liked to play backgammon, or any game of chance, with us for hours. He also spoke six languages and traveled around Europe annually which added a sophisticated and heterodox flair to our family gatherings around Christmas. He prayed in Hebrew and kept his bathroom light taped on during the Sabbath hours. But he also fully joined the family fun as we opened presents and ate my grandmother's sugar cookies.

As I began to explore my own Adventist faith, the pieces of his story that I heard here or there from relatives began to act as a continental counterbalance to my singular certitude. Going on 16 I mentioned that I had read the 17th century philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal's *Pensées* (a gift from my father). I dropped this as a nervous teen eager that it might connect us in conversation. He not only engaged, but recommended Søren Kierkegaard. I read most of Kierkegaard's work and several biographies. Thanks to my uncle's thoughtfulness I have since leapt from existentialism into critical discourses that continue to break open the world.

As my awareness of faith transformed, so did my sense of my uncle. No longer just another family member, he became a witness to a new life through true conversion. Not the cheap kind, this is personal evolution in which some parts of the past are, with some pain—to oneself, family, and friends—ironized. He modeled a significant way that the periodic modification of truth defines existence. Our old conversation subject writes:

"Particularly in our age, irony must be commended. In our age, scientific scholarship has come into possession of such prodigious achievements that there must be something wrong somewhere; knowledge not only about the secrets of God is offered for sale at such a bargain price today that it all looks very dubious. In our joy over the achievement in our age, we have forgotten that an achievement is worthless if it is not made one's own."

My Jewish uncle contributed to helping me forge what's "true" for me. As I grew, he grew from non-Adventist relation to an avuncular guide for the perplexed. I'll always be a Seventh-day Adventist. I have a different approach to my beliefs than my dear uncle—I value Adventist ideas both confessionally and culturally. Thanks, in part to him, I continue to appreciate the irony and the serendipity and the possibility for change. This conversion is evolution. Some changes will occur. I believe embracing this irony of essence in motion intertwines the personal and communal into an ultimately meaningful story.

Endnote

*Kierkegaard, Søren, *The concept of irony, with continual reference to Socrates: together with notes of Schelling's Berlin lectures*. Trans. Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 327.

