

Australian Seventh-day Adventists and 1980:

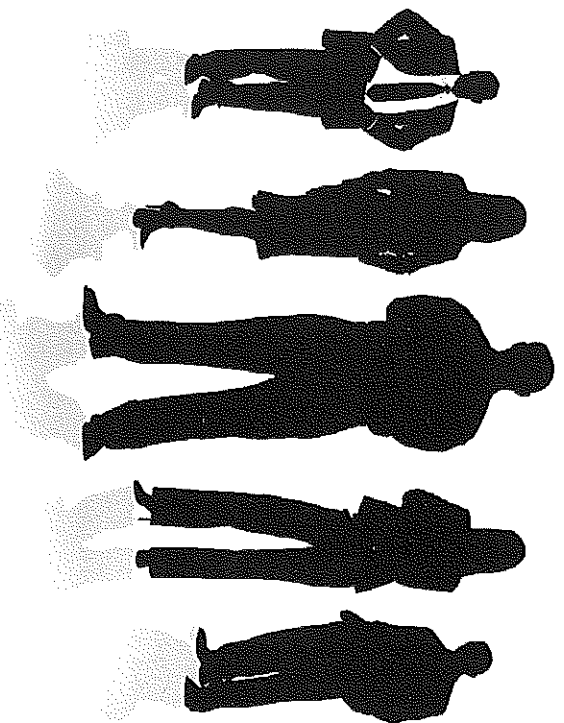
Toward an Historical Perspective and Normalisation of Relationships

PART 1

ARTHUR PATRICK

SINCE I FIRST MET Desmond Ford early in 1950, and he recommended me for acceptance as an Andrews University student in 1967, and called me as a member of his Department of Theology staff in 1973, we were comparatively close associates during the crises years of the South Pacific Division from 1974. The issues at that particular time clustered around Righteousness by Faith, the Sanctuary, Ellen White and the Age of the Earth. I saw the development of the "Concerned Brethren" party, and sat through the interminable Biblical Research Committee meetings before and after the Palmdale Conference of 1976. I was by conviction within the Church's Community of Faith, and certainly no partisan of its most brilliant son, Desmond Ford, and never did I unthinkingly support Desmond Ford. Hence I applauded the consummate wisdom of the Righteousness by Faith consultation and its report entitled the "Dynamics of Salvation," first published in *Review and Herald* 31 July 1980. I distinctly remember the Division President, Pr Keith Parmenter, asking my opinion about Dr Ford's transfer to Pacific Union College. I agreed with him that such a change might give Desmond a fresh opportunity to express his talents for the benefit of the Church, and I settled down to engage with teaching under the chairmanship of Gordon Balharrie. There was a pervasive sense of bereavement in the Department of Theology due to Des's enforced absence, but in essence the work of the Department continued strongly.

I had critically reviewed Desmond Ford's book, *Daniel*, before it saw the light of day in 1978, and rated it as far the most useful volume on Daniel produced by the Church since the tome from Uriah Smith's pen about a hundred years earlier. Even after the debacle of Desmond Ford's address on 27 October 1979, only about 2 per cent of his *Daniel* needed any revision. To read



his 900 page submission is to become aware he is a loyal son of the Church who was desperately trying to solve issues that were proved unsolvable during years of committee meetings under the leadership of President RR Figueir. Ford should have been acclaimed for his sterling effort in writing the Glacier View manuscript, instead he was "de-frocked," sacked and spurned in disgrace.

The Church failed to observe where the controversy relating to the Sanctuary had arrived, and it misread the strength of Robert Brinsmead's anti-1844 thrust. How different it would have been had the Church even been able to read Desmond Ford's (1979) book on Ellen White. It was totally oblivious to the short chance it had to engage its young people in serious Bible study, especially focused on the meaning of Daniel and Hebrews. Shortly after Glacier View, I along with a party of other Australasians, stayed at a wonderful retreat in the Blue Mountains. There I read the Glacier View consensus statements with my RSV Bible open in my right hand, and was amazed that for the first time the Church I deeply loved was actually helping (not hindering) me from understanding the book of Hebrews.

These remarks are written to provide a very brief frame of reference for the document posted here, entitled "Australasian Seventh-day Adventists and 1980: Toward an Historical Perspective and the Normalisation of Relationships."

On 11 February 2013, Joan and I (with our daughter Zanita) returned two days earlier than expected from our New Zealand holiday. The Chemotherapy from August to January was clearly successful, but from the end of January I was aware of a new enemy within, which turned out to be peritoneal carcinoma of vigorous type, untreatable.

Therefore, since 11 February 2013 I have been in Bed 638, Sydney Adventist Hospital.

(Now something written by Adrielle, my middle daughter).

'As Dad said above, he has advanced and untreatable peritoneal carcinoma. Although that is very sad for us all, we are relishing the time we have with Dad. He is in excellent spirits, and has embraced this stage of his illness as he has embraced so many challenges in his life. That is, with the will to do his best with the task at hand. This means he is making the most of the excellent

Australian Seventh-day Adventists and 1980: Toward an Historical Perspective and Normalisation of Relationships PART 1

palliative care that is available to him, and is comfortable, peaceful, cherishing family, dispensing love and blessings to us all. He is not just thinking of family though, and has had us busy sending off emails to many people. His last major editing task is to see Post 100 uploaded, along with a few suitable words of introduction. Whereas he felt the content of this paper should be confidential at the time it was submitted eleven years ago, he can find no reason why it should be kept confidential any longer.

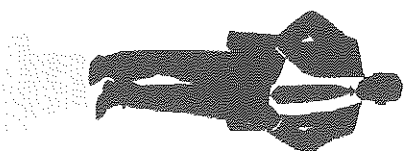
AUSTRALASIAN SEVENTH-DAY

ADVENTISTS AND 1980: TOWARD AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE NORMALISATION OF RELATIONSHIPS

Summary: *With the passing of two or three decades since the conflicts of the 1970s and the 1980s and the related loss of ministers, teachers and members in the South Pacific Division, it now seems possible to map this historical period constructively and to suggest redemptive patterns for the church to adopt in the immediate future. Specifically, this submission suggests that the church currently faces relational more than theological issues, since the theological matters are potentially resolved by consensus documents already available. However, the theological basis of this proposal needs careful assessment by the Biblical Research Committee to test whether it is in fact sustainable and relevant for the current situation.*

Seventh-day Adventists (Adventists), more than most other Christian groups, find it is fruitful to understand themselves in terms of a number of dates: 1844, 1863, 1888, 1901, 1907, 1919, 1950, 1957 and so on. For Adventists who live in Australia and New Zealand, 1980 is another crucial year. This presentation, a confidential submission to the Biblical Research Committee (BRC) of the South Pacific Division (SPD), explores in a preliminary way two possibilities: whether 1980 may be viewed constructively in historical perspective and whether it might be possible to normalise relationships that became tense in the 1970s and early 1980s.¹

It may be presumptuous for any one human being to interpret a date that is as multifaceted as 1980.² Clearly any such attempt must be informed by an impressive array of specialists as well as the perceptions of an entire community of believers. An *Old Testament* scholar may well say that at the heart of the matter is



the interpretation of biblical apocalyptic in general and the Book of Daniel in particular. A *New Testament* devotee may well affirm that the relation of the Old Testament to the New and the interpretation of Hebrews must be understood.³ A psychologist may well posit the idea that *personality theory and group behaviour* are crucial considerations. An administrator may well suggest that *managerial responsibilities and organisational leadership issues* are of prime importance. A systematic theologian may well point out that 1980 illustrates at once the volatility of *eschatology* within a believing community and the constant tension between continuity and change in Adventist hermeneutics. A sociologist is likely to claim that the crux of the issue is where Adventism was located at that particular point in time on *the continuum between sect and denomination*. A scientist may worry that 1980 is a template illustrating how the church may be tempted to control research and researchers.⁴ A pastor is apt to observe that 1980 is especially concerned with *relationships in a community of believers*. A Reformation historian may identify 1980 as the time when Australian Adventism had an unprecedented opportunity to affirm the *Reformation doctrines of righteousness by faith and the Priesthood of All Believers*. Other historians might declare that the situation can only be understood if a number of influential *personalities* are considered in the context of the time: Ellen White, Dr Desmond Ford, Dr Russell Standish and Robert Brinsmead at the very least. The same professionals are also likely to point out that historical perspectives are only possible after the passage of a suitable amount of time.

Each one of these important viewpoints has a measure of validity yet an identifiable limitation. Probably most of us perceive that *all of the above considerations and many more must be considered* if Adventists are to understand 1980 in a comprehensive and thus sustainable and unifying way. In the ultimate, the conclusions offered by church leaders must be valid in view of all the known evidence and understandable to rank-and-file believers if they are to win widespread support from congregations and members that currently nurture an array of opinions.

I. The Range of Perspectives

To ask Adventist retirees, employees, male members, female members and young people to interpret 1980 is to be made aware of great diversity. The range of perspectives is likely to include recognition of the role of the Concerned Brethren and others who share their mindset; the stance of the Standish brothers and those with reactionary viewpoints who are apt to criticise the church for slowness in dismissing ministers as heretics; the viewpoint of those desiring to justify the church as patiently and correctly solving a doctrinal problem; the continuing bewilderment of many at the way the church handled biblical, historical, theological, ethical and administrative issues; sadness and even anger at what is perceived to be ongoing intolerance or bigotry, and so on. It is relevant, therefore, to assess the sources that inform each of these opinions and the many variations that cluster around each of them. This paper will attempt to reconcile the known data, hoping thereby to be of some assistance as the church seeks to move coherently toward a brighter future.

† The thesis of this document might be introduced in this way. During the 1970s the Seventh-day Adventist church in Australasia made significant progress in better understanding and presenting “the everlasting gospel” but it failed to win the support of certain older members to whom, in hindsight, it needed to deliver more effective pastoral care. In addition, viewpoints similar to those of the Concerned Brethren were promulgated by a variety of independent groups, some clustered around Dr Russell Standish and ministers who tacitly or openly supported his emphases; others developed similar mindsets that have since become known through such publications as *Anchor*, *Alma Torch* and *The Protestant*. A well-known advocate of the gospel emphasis,

Australian Seventh-day Adventists and 1980: Toward an Historical Perspective and Normalisation of Relationships PART 1

Continued from page 3

Dr Ford, offered suggestions in October 1979 whereby the church might resolve certain important conflicts with reference to the interpretation of Daniel and Hebrews.⁵ However, in the ensuing months, a *rejectionist* impulse further inflamed the already powerful *reversionist* impulse by the worldwide distribution of Dr Ford's suggestions. A more thoughtful attitude was also identifiable at the time, well illustrated in the work of the Sanctuary Review Committee that met at Glacier View during August 1980. Twenty-two years after the central year of the crisis it seems imperative for the church to understand and nurture this stance, a *transformationist* response.⁶

Even within this volatile context the church was able to vote a new statement of its fundamental beliefs in May 1980; a consensus statement on the gospel was published worldwide in July; consensus statements on the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary and the ministry of Ellen White were voted in August. Yet the perception of several key administrators in Australia was that Dr Ford must be dismissed as one way to resolve the conflict within the church; however, it now appears that in the consequential processes the church lost sight of the significance of the July and August consensus statements and it pre-empted the positive elements of Consultation I held in August 1980. The church also may have side-lined several other important considerations as it facilitated the dismissal of Dr Ford: for instance, to protect a portion of fundamental belief 23 it seems to have disregarded the import of several other fundamentals and ignored central aspects of Ellen White's counsel as it attempted to protect her from perceived peril. Considerably because of Dr Ford's symbolic importance at the time and the difficulty experienced by several key church leaders in grasping the complexity

of the issues, the Australian church entered a period of crisis that saw the loss of many employees and members.⁷ In hindsight, it appears that the dismissal of Dr Ford exacerbated rather than resolved the crisis; indeed like any literal or professional martyrdom it seemed to necessitate encores.⁸ Two decades later there is a deep longing in the hearts of a large number of loyal Seventh-day Adventists in the SPD to foster unity and a cooperative approach by the entire denomination so that the church of the future will be a winsome place for the nurture of its members (particularly its mobile youth) and the pursuit of its mission.

Put even more simply, at their General Conference of 1980 Adventists struggled for consensus as they formulated a fresh expression of their fundamental beliefs. On the Friday afternoon of the session it was decided that the most-discussed fundamental, number 23, must be voted without further discussion. In the *Adventist Review* of July 31, readers were made aware of *The Dynamics of Salvation* statement authorised by 145 participants, the largest group ever assembled by the church to offer counsel on a specific doctrinal issue.

The church had no time to observe at length the import this document held for the discussion of the sanctuary. Even so, during August the interpretation of fundamental 23 was canvassed by 115 of the 125 persons nominated from many parts of the world to attend the Glacier View meeting, and a significant consensus was achieved.

However, by largely ignoring the relationship between these consensus documents and their far-reaching significance, good men unwittingly led the Australian church into the most destructive crisis in its history. Now, with the calm perspectives of twenty years, the church can better map its past and sketch a more promising future.

ENDNOTES

1. This quinquennium will mark thirty years since I was first appointed to the BGC of the (then) Australasian Division. In retirement, that mythical period of inactivity between the end of paid employment and death, I value continued engagement with several things. First, the opportunity to learn about and attempt to alleviate some of the pervasive trauma in the church, due to a range of causes, among them doctrinal and organisational matters and the issue of sexual abuse and misconduct now so constructively addressed by the SPD Ethical Standards Committee. Secondly, doctoral dissertations-in-progress that illumine the Adventist experience. Last year, for instance, three doctoral candidates blast me by allowing me to critique their research and writing. Thirdly, since 5 October 2001, I have devoted perhaps 400 hours to exploring whether or not it may be possible for the church to normalise a number of quite varied relationships that became tense in the 1970s and thereafter. There is some cross-fertilisation between these three areas; further reference to each of them will be made at later stages in this submission.

2. For convenience, the climactic year 1980 is used as a way of signifying the period of conflict in general, but particularly the years 1974 to 1983 inclusive.

3. The vibrant discussion of Consultation II (1981) and its outcomes provides an Adventist context for such biblical exploration.

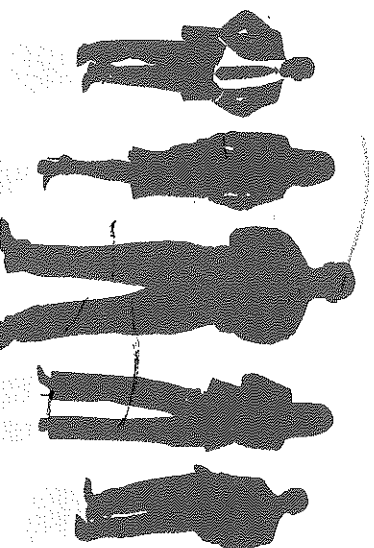
4. A physicist, Dr Lynden Rogers, has written two papers that merit consideration, one offering perspectives on the effects of the conflict on the church and the other suggesting reconciliatory options. They are entitled "The Cost of Glacier View" and "Some Perspectives on Dr Ford, Glacier View and the Current Reconciliation Initiative".

5. To understand the Forum address of October 1979, one needs to examine the nature and content of the related discussion of the time in California and other parts of the Adventist world. Unless this specific context is understood, the remarks made cannot be evaluated objectively.

6. My use of these three terms derives from a presentation made by Robert Johnston of Andrews University to a meeting of the (then) Andrews Society of Religion Scholars some twenty years ago. Johnston drew on cogent sociological insights that suggest when a large amount of new information inundates a group, three responses are apt to occur: reversion, transformation and rejection. This is an instructive insight. Johnston should not, however, be held accountable for the application I make of this schema.

7. This interpretation is based on oral history and abundant written sources. Should any aspect of it be questioned, the SPD archival resources can offer copious further data.

8. Our Lord warned that in attempting to uproot tares, His servants may uproot wheat. This effect is likely to be compounded if His servants mistake wheat for tares. A longer history of the way in which Christian groups deal with perceived "tares" is available in Catholic history as *bon* and *excommunication*, in Amish polity as *shunning*, and in Jehovah's Witness practice as *disfellowshipping*. Each of these responses has its own tradition; for instance, in 1411 the Bishop of Verden stated: "When the existence of the Church is threatened, she is released from the commandments of morality. With unity as the end, the use of every means is sanctified, even cunning, violence, simony, prison, death. For all order is for the sake of community, and the individual must be sacrificed to the common good." It was such thinking that in part, made the Reformation necessary.



Australian Seventh-day Adventists and 1980:

Toward an Historical Perspective and Normalisation of Relationships

PART 2



ARTHUR PATRICK

II. A Tentative List of Relevant Considerations

Since that time some successful attempts have been made to reach out to reversionists of various types; in principle, *transformationist* options have often been affirmed; less enduring attempts have been made to reach out to *rejectionists*.⁹ The intervening years seem to indicate that the stance of Dr Standish well symbolises the tendency toward reversion, with Robert Brinsmead modelling the polar opposite stance of rejection. Some observers locate Dr Ford with Brinsmead, whereas others contend that he exemplifies transformationist attitudes.¹⁰

In the perception of many in the SPD, the church's administrators missed an opportunity to envision a new future

when Dr Ford returned to Australia in August 2000. An official letter dated 30 May 2001, conveying an action of the Presidents' Council taken three weeks earlier, circulated to all administrators and many ministers in the SPD, seemed to favour the maintenance of barriers; yet it observed that the church's relation to Dr Ford may involve a number of issues "some of which are very sensitive because of the divided opinion which exists in our church." This letter has awakened a Division-wide discussion within the church, leading to a growing conviction that it may be fruitful for the church to prayerfully, thoroughly and openly consider a cluster of related matters that are relevant to Dr Ford's situation and that of many other persons. The matters that might be considered include but are not limited to the following list which in whole or in part conveys the considered opinion of a significant proportion of the church's employees and members.

1. The consensus documents formulated by the 145-member *Righteousness by Faith Consultation* and the 115-member *Sanctuary Review Committee* remain relevant in the ongoing life of the church. They indicate there is no substantive doctrinal reason for Dr Ford's **exclusion** from the church's fellowship and mission. They also provide a basis for a renewed understanding between the church and the Standish brothers and they offer a way to initiate a fresh dialogue with persons who are at various stages on the continuum between commitment to and rejection of Adventism.¹¹

2. Dr Ford has demonstrated an outstanding commitment to and a particular effectiveness in the proclamation of core Adventist teachings such as "the everlasting gospel," the Sabbath, the Second Coming of Christ, the nature of humankind/the state of the dead and healthful living. He presents confidently such other doctrines as the pre-advent judgment and the ministry of Ellen White. His lifestyle is exemplary as far as Adventist standards are concerned. Therefore, there are compelling reasons why the church should encourage his **participation** in its life and witness; to do so would be an effective way to invite into church fellowship many others who feel the church has consigned them to a spiritual limbo since 1980.

3. The way in which many non-Adventist Australians (evangelical and other Christians and even non-Christians) are currently responding to Dr Ford's ministry indicates that Adventist **mission** may be enhanced by a welcoming attitude and a sense of partnership with him. To open the church to this possibility may bring a new energy into its outreach.

Australian Seventh-day Adventists and 1980: Toward an Historical Perspective and Normalisation of Relationships PART 2

Continued from page 5

4. The perspectives of two decades since the Glacier View consultation, characterised by far-reaching doctrinal growth in the church worldwide, indicates that the perceived differences between Dr Ford and the church are being progressively diminished. Therefore, the church has in 2002 a more realistic **opportunity** to rise above the controversial patterns of the 1970s and early 1980s. Constructive recognition of this reality could exercise a leavening influence on relationships in the church, drawing people from a wide spectrum of thought into more effective unity.

5. Since in his public teaching, preaching and personal Christian experience Dr Ford has remained faithful to Adventist convictions, values and lifestyle (including the Sabbath and the binding nature of God's law), it is relevant to document the vast difference in his **attitudes and behaviours** from those portrayed by rejectionists in books, pamphlets, periodicals, videos and websites (see such sources as *formeradventist.com*) as they attack the church.¹² It is likewise important to review the stance of Dr Standish in terms of such criteria. Clarity and charity in this dimension of thought could have far-reaching effects on relationships within the church.

6. Given the development of **spiritual gifts** now available to the church in the South Pacific Division, embracing the human sciences, biblical studies, historical and systematic theology, administrative practice and other related skills and insights, the church is now mature and resilient enough to develop unifying patterns for the immediate future with respect to Dr Standish, Dr Ford and a host of others that are still currently in relationships that are characterised by some tension with the church.

7. A range of responsible studies such as those by Jonathan Butler and Harry Ballis indicate that the church—may by the conscious adoption of alternative methods, respond more constructively to perceived **diversity** in the immediate future and thus more effectively foster responsible unity.¹³

8. In a letter dated 15 March 2001 the General Conference president stated in part: "The door is open for reconciliation and healing. At the same time Desmond Ford has to walk through it and find it in his heart to seek healing with the church. I think he knows what he must do to be a part of reconciliation." Since this is not a matter of private discussion, it is appropriate for the church at large to be

made aware of the component factors and the expectations that underlie the president's comments so that all who so desire may cooperate intelligently in a **reconciliatory process**.¹⁴ Certainly many Adventists perceive that a need exists for the church to explore and offer reconciliatory options to widely diverse individuals and perhaps groups.

9. Anecdotal evidence claims that statements made by such Adventist leaders as Neal Wilson, Robert Spangler and thousands of others attribute their fuller understanding of **the everlasting gospel** to Dr Ford. From a review of Dr Ford's relations with the church in the distinct historical epochs 1955-1972, 1972 to 1980, 1980 to the present, it does seem to be appropriate for the church to acknowledge that Dr Ford has been a catalyst for constructive theological and experiential development in this core area and perhaps in such others as the church's understanding of eschatology and the ministry of Ellen White. Many loyal Adventists perceive the corporate church as ungrateful at best in its attitude in this respect. Throughout the SPD, many loyal Adventists credit Dr Ford with facilitating their more mature understanding of the gospel; their children often wonder why the church (according to their perceptions) appears ungrateful, intolerant, vindictive, unjust unloving, ungracious, "fascist" (that is, dictatorial) or "the church that shoots its own wounded". For the church to more consciously lead its members to focus directly in attitude and action on Christ and salvation would issue in constructive outcomes. A crucial strand in Ellen White's writings may be summarised in one of her vivid sentences: "Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world" (*Evangelism*, page 188).

10. A comprehensive survey of the fifty-per-cent-plus of the church that are **women** may disclose constructive attitudes to this long-standing conflict situation which might enhance the ability of the church to deal with it more effectively than by reliance upon male perspectives only.

11. A comprehensive survey of the church's current ministers, teachers, and retirees may indicate **a widespread interest in reconciliatory initiatives as well as constructive insights** into how such processes might occur.

In his letter cited above (compare his letter dated 30 January 2002) the General Conference president states: "I do not believe the church made a mistake or was unfair in its handling of this situation." This opinion is quite understandable in that the president has no access at the church's headquarters to thousands of pages of documents which detail the actual experience of Australian ministers, teachers and members during the crisis period, nor does he have available on location advisers with a comprehensive understanding of the events, nor does he have the option of effective oral history because of his geographical location. There are important differences between the situation in Europe, North America and Australia. Therefore, a significant body of opinion deems that it may be realistic and redemptive for the Australian church to appoint an independent commission including representative women and men with the relevant expertise to hear the available evidence and offer sustainable and unifying counsel.¹⁵ Another opinion is that, given the present interpretations and options for research, several doctoral studies during the next few years may best illumine the situation.

III. Some Procedural Considerations

If a commission were to be established, part of its task might be to receive data clarifying whether or not between 1978 and 1983 (the years of most intense crisis) the response of the Australasian church was constrained by a range of related matters such as the following.

1. By both failing to call and refusing to call the Biblical Research Committee (BRC) to advise on the matters under discussion. The BRC was appointed for this purpose but was not convened for the purpose because of the decision to handle the issues "administratively". An appeal that the BRC be convened was considered to be a serious breach of ministerial responsibility. This stance seems to have



Australian Seventh-day Adventists and 1980: Toward an Historical Perspective and Normalisation of Relationships PART 2



facilitated rather than prevented the drift toward polarisation.

2. The failure to publicise effectively the unifying consensus statement achieved at great expense by the Glacier View conferees, with which Dr Ford was "thrilled" in 1980 and which Dr Standish "discovered" in February 2002.

3. The improper use of the Glacier View ten-point list of differences between Dr Ford and traditional positions, a factor that intensified division. Indeed, the use made of this minority statement gave it precedence over the statement voted by the Sanctuary Review Committee of 115 persons.

4. The perceived illegality (on the basis of national law) of Dr Ford's Australian trial and dismissal, as events that occurred in his absence. It should be noted that one viewpoint is that churches are not bound to observe secular laws; another perspective is that the Adventist church should exceed rather than quibble about the moral principles of secular law. Be that as it may, the nature of the investigative and decision-making processes surrounding the dismissal of perhaps a hundred other employees does need appraisal.

5. The failure to respond transparently to the underlying reasons for such dismissals: the pressure campaign of the Concerned Brethren which for years had sought the termination of Dr Ford due to his presentation of the gospel, a conflict clarified largely in his favour by *The Dynamics of Salvation* statement; the alleged but non-existent link between Dr Ford and Robert Brinsmead; the incorrect allegation that Dr Ford had rejected the ministry of Ellen White. All these created flow-on effects, exacerbating the conflicts and spurring the dismissals that occurred. A result at the time seems to have been an impulse to achieve a form of *ecclesiastical* (as opposed to *ethnic*) cleansing.¹⁶

6. The divisive impact of administrative preaching that made it seem necessary to dismiss Dr Ford in order to protect the church. The profound significance of the stick insect or *Praying mantis* symbolism discussed openly before Glacier View might be noted as one example.

7. The use of the church's media (including *Record*) in ways that polarised the church by preventing the publication of accurate information and by allowing the publication of biased and false information without correction.¹⁷

These and related perceptions may, after due investigation, be seen to sustain a pervasive belief that the church owes a substantial number of former employees an apology. That such convictions persist after two decades as a deep source of bewilderment and sadness indicates the church should not claim it made no mistake or was not unfair until such concerns have been investigated. On earth it is expected that justice is both *done* and *seen to be done*. The teaching of the pre-advent judgment in this discussion affirm participants in this discussion affirm testifies to the justice of God. The church's understanding of theodicy is a main component of the application it makes of Daniel 8:14. Therefore, the integrity of the church remains under serious question until this matter is investigated.

To summarise: If even some of the perspectives in sections II and III of this presentation are sustained after thorough investigation there is both an evident need and an encouraging potential for the church to address at the present moment. There is a role for all Adventists (leaders, ministers, teachers, other employees, members) in any attempt to normalise relations between the church and some of its former employees and members. As a subset of that process, there are important matters that can be righted with Dr Ford and the fact that his situation retains something of the symbolic value that it had in 1980 indicates that the church should not underestimate its present opportunity. There is an evident desire in the hearts of many Adventists to foster responsible consensus and to seek effective patterns of cooperation in the immediate future. This desire may well signal the fact that the present is an appropriate time to plan constructive initiatives for the church so that conflicts of this nature (involving personality factors,

historical understandings, biblical insights, theological convictions, administrative roles and practices) do not impede the church's attempts to proceed coherently with its mission. A successful outcome only seems possible if such fundamental beliefs as 11 and 13 are taken into account in the discussion of fundamental 23, and if both grace and truth are accorded their biblical roles. ✱

ENDNOTES

- These terms are used in a sociological rather than a pejorative or judgmental mode.
- Among the many opinions considered recently, I find Brinsmead's perceptions highly significant.
- Each of these points needs to be shaped toward the needs of revisionists and rejectionists more fully than is possible in this short document.
- For some, the issue turns on the reception or non-reception of tithes. Some claim that Dr Ford has not solicited tithes through *Good News Unlimited (GNU)* in North America; he did not approve the solicitation of tithes by GNU in Australia; he does not control GNU in Australia; he has consistently in private and in public urged Adventists to stay with the church, not leave it. Others contend that since Dr Ford's focus is the gospel, there would be no problem if he did receive tithes, especially from persons who by reason of their denominational affiliation would not offer it to the Adventist church.
- As illustrated by the current discussion surrounding Australia's Governor General, the understanding of sexual abuse has undergone dramatic growth in the past decade. Another issue undergoing fresh appraisal is the issue of spiritual abuse in various dimensions of church life. Some of the relevant questions are posed in such books as Ronald M. Enroth, *Churches That Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Dwight Carlson, *Why Do Christians Shoot Their Wounded?* (Downers Grove: OM Publishing, 1994).
- This process might begin with a consideration of applicable *Ministry* articles, including David Brubaker, "Church Fights and the 'third voice' middle," November 2001, pp. 20-21. However, without adequate "listening" to both the implied concerns of the president and the existing concerns within the church's membership, little progress can be anticipated.
- It may be as challenging to carry such a process to a successful conclusion as it is to develop effective understanding between Aboriginal and Anglo-Saxon Australians.
- Compare a recent analysis of *The Remnant Herald*, November 2001, page 1058.
- It is stating the obvious to point out that in a subanalysis of this length there is no attempt to cite the evidence that supports most of the observations made; indeed, it is impossible to do so in a paper of this length. However, I am happy to offer data on any point at the request of the BRC. With reference to point 7, one illustration is appended on page 11. This matter may well be investigated usefully in a forthcoming doctoral dissertation.

Australian Seventh-day Adventists and 1980: Toward an Historical Perspective and Normalisation of Relationships

PART 3

ARTHUR PATRICK

IV. Observations Relating to Theological Issues

Without doubt, three issues of theological significance in Australia during the 1970s and early 1980s were Righteousness by Faith, the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary and the ministry of Ellen White. For a minister or teacher to demonstrate enthusiasm or contemplation relating to any one of these matters could at the time be deemed sufficient grounds for individuals or groups to clamour for the said worker's dismissal. For a minister or a teacher to appear to be unorthodox in two or more of these fundamental issues compounded the perplexity of some administrative minds and indicated prompt dismissal as a necessity. From the comparatively irenic ethos of 2002 it is hard to picture adequately the intensity of the epoch under consideration.

As indicated above, the Righteousness by Faith Consultation gave Adventists a way to understand each other and their faith in this respect; thus it paved-a-road toward responsible unity and active cooperation. The Sanctuary Review Committee, consensus statement, *The Ministry of Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary* offered a similar potential for that area of doctrine. The conflict relating to Ellen Whites' ministry elicited a short consensus statement at Glacier View and creative solutions during the 1980s but the dilemmas were not acknowledged as resolved adequately until the 1990s. Therefore, at this point this presentation will make some more detailed references to the church's historical understanding of Ellen Whites' ministry.



The year 1970 forms a watershed in Adventism worldwide with reference to the life and thought of Ellen White, but this fact was but dimly perceived in Australia until the 1980s and beyond. By 1976 the research of Dr Ron Numbers was becoming well known in North America and Europe and by a small number of Australians. From 1978 there were whisperings in this country about the "fallacious" claims of Walter Rea that Ellen White used literary sources in her writings but there was limited effective understanding. Probably only a handful of Australians were aware of the profoundly important research of Donald McAdams. Although the Ellen G. White/Seventh-day Adventist Research Centre was opened in 1976 to serve the SPD and gave access to tens of thousands of pages of Ellen White letters and manuscript as well as microfilm and "hard" copies of primary sources from the church's beginnings to the present, no Division leader was ever able to engage in any extended research in this new facility

during the crisis years. A few illustrative events will be cited to offer an overview of the way matters were handled between 1978 and 1983.

During 1979 the Division decided to publish a book on matters currently under discussion in the churches, including the ministry of Ellen White, the topic on which I was assigned to write. The task consumed much of what would otherwise have been my vacation; the script was delivered in March 1980, entitled *Ellen White in the Eighties*. The text sought to express, in language accessible to the laity, responsible, consensus positions in view of the studies of the 1970s. Read in 2002 it is a tame document indeed; at the time it was so shocking to the Division administration that its reception was long unacknowledged and the intended *Record* articles and book were abandoned forthwith.

As the tensions relating to Ellen Whites' ministry intensified, I submitted papers to the Division developed to answer the

Australian Seventh-day Adventists and 1980: Toward an Historical Perspective and Normalisation of Relationships PART 3

specific questions that were arriving in a constant stream at the Research Centre. I was advised that my answers were different from those emanating from the church's headquarters. I replied that the church had made me custodian of its memories from 1844 to the present and that I was trying to offer answers that took all the data into account. So a Reading Committee was formed to read my papers and decide which could be offered more widely as reliable information for the church. Only one document achieved the imprimatur of the Reading Committee: a short list of selected documents held by the Centre. An exploration of the abundant documentation that is extant provides an almost diary-like account of the church's thought-patterns of the time.

I proposed that a *Spirit of Prophecy Resource Committee* be appointed to review the data in hand, to seek a comprehensive understanding of the matters under discussion in the churches, and to release appropriate information. I was appointed as a member of that committee. Papers I presented to it sometimes took many months to receive acknowledgement and much longer to be evaluated. After an almost-two-year process it was agreed by the committee that specific ideas under discussion (later embodied in a *Ministry* article published in April 1991) were accurate but that no person outside the committee should be offered the information with which the committee was working or the conclusions it had reached.

I was appointed to attend the 1982 International Prophetic Guidance Workshop in the United States. It was a deeply moving experience to at last have scores of the best informed minds in Adventism consulting on the issues that were effervescing in the world church. General Conference president Neal Wilson had set out the church's agenda effectively in major *Adventist Review* articles. More than 900 pages of documents distributed to workshop attendees conveyed accurate data on most of the important issues that were in dispute relating to Ellen White. For instance, instead of denying that Ellen White taught the Shut Door on the basis of visionary experience, the actual documentation was distributed and the workshop discussed whether we should say her visionary experience was *wrong* (the preferred option of some) or that she *misunderstood* it (the preferred option of others).¹⁸ We now had essential data on the issues of literary relationships, the role of Ellen White's literary assistants

and advisers, plus a host of other similarly-important matters. However, the low-key articles I prepared upon my return to Australia were deemed by the church leaders of the time to be so unacceptable that I was told that I might choose to keep a copy of them in a "personal file". Furthermore, I was prevented from sharing effectively the papers presented at the workshop.

It was a source of distress to me that the Division president and secretary who were handling the church's theological turmoil "administratively" were not able to participate effectively in the significant updates offered early in the 1980s by Dr Robert Olsen and Pastor Ron Graybill. In discussion of the massive amounts of fresh information that was available, the Division secretary stated wistfully how much he wished he had time to read. The most hopeful event in my calendar for the second half of 1982 was the opportunity to present five hours of lectures in Victoria for the assembled union, local conference, *Signs* and other workers. Pastor Geoff Game presented a somewhat selective but remarkably positive account in *Record* and, as far as I am aware, no negative comment was received. The substance of these lectures is recorded in sixty pages entitled *The Minister and the Ministry of Ellen White in 1982*. A similar presentation was requested for the Greater Sydney Conference ministers in October 1982, but within a two-hour time frame. The outcome showed that either it was an impossible task or I was unequal to it; the benediction was scarcely over

when the telephones at the Union and the Division offices were ringing, signalling an end to attempts to share effectively data relating to Ellen White.

This story has never before been told in this detail to a group of Australian Adventists. Why tell it now? Simply to facilitate an understanding of the level at which information was controlled in the 1970s and early 1980s; to illustrate the evident fear amongst church leaders that ordinary members might become aware of facts now recognised as basic for all Adventists; to highlight the need of mature pastoral care for workers and members in a situation of turmoil. The lack of information amongst church members meant that scores of ministers faced dismissal if they attempted to understand and interpret the waves of data flowing over them. One illustration must suffice at this point, though its import could be multiplied by other examples.¹⁹

By the early 1980s there was intense pressure on the Australian church to clarify the alleged relationship between the writings of Ellen White and the work of other authors. The church's official paper, *Record*, published an article designed to calm the discussion, suggesting that Ellen White's so-called "literary dependence" was in the order of 0.002 per cent.²⁰ This response by the church was viewed as deliberate dishonesty by many readers, but the protests received did not issue in any correction. Later, of course, the four-volume Veltman study indicated that in *The Desire of Ages* the literary relationship was something like 30 per cent, some 15,000 times greater for that volume than the figure suggested as an over-all estimate in the *Record* article.

One conclusion from the observations offered in section IV is stark and unmistakable. Ministers and teachers may be unable to retain employment once they appeared to question seriously the doctrinal authority of Ellen White. The first action of the church's leaders when biblical questions were raised in October 1979 was to publish an article setting forth Ellen White answers.²¹ Thereafter it became increasingly clear that Adventist workers were expendable if the evidence that was accumulating called them to revise the traditional understanding of Ellen White's ministry. In 2002 the church fosters a constructive attitude toward Ellen White; this fact raises the question of whether or not it is appropriate for it to distance itself from certain specific actions taken in 1980 and beyond.



Australian Seventh-day Adventists and 1980: Toward an Historical Perspective and Normalisation of Relationships PART 3

Continued from page 9

V. Some Broadly-based Potential Initiatives

Probably all of us think of ourselves as members of "the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven," Hebrews 12:23; as numbered amongst the "faithful souls" that from the beginning "have constituted the church on earth," Acts of the Apostles, page 11; as ordained by the nail-pierced hands of Christ to proclaim good news to a perishing world. Some of us may accord the same status to both Russell Standish and Desmond Ford.²² The issue that the Australian church currently has on its corporate desk is not how to control a couple of aging Christians officially barred from speaking in an Adventist setting and, in the case of Dr Ford, told by a local church pastor that he may attend church but he may not make a comment in a Sabbath School class. The actual questions are basic, simple and very easy to express. *What does it mean to be Christian and to act Christianly? What does it mean to be Seventh-day Adventist and to value the diversity evident in the worldwide Adventist family? What does it mean to belong to the church of the living God, where spiritual gifts are valued and focused toward nurture and mission?*

If this attempt at analysis is seen as useful for the church, it may be helpful for those who envision a more unified future to proceed with an awareness of the following:

First, the doctoral dissertation completed at Andrews University by Rolf J. Poehler in 1995, entitled "Change

in Seventh-day Adventist Theology: A Study of the Problem of Doctrinal Development," offers a helpful framework of understanding. Poehler has written a very comprehensive work (590 pages, available from www.umi.com), covering the concept of development in Christian and Adventist thought with special reference to Ellen White. Poehler's core concepts are also available in a shorter volume published in 2000, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching: A Case Study in Doctrinal Development* (Europaischer Verlag Der Wissenschaften: Peter Lang). A comprehensive grasp of the nature of doctrinal development in the Adventist church is of fundamental importance in discussing any particular aspect of Adventist thought.²³

Secondly, Dr Fritz Guy's volume *Thinking Theologically: Adventist Christianity and the Interpretation of Faith* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1999) is a mature statement of theological method. Such a book might be considered as a procedural manual for a more constructive and united future.

Thirdly, Dr Richard Hammill in chapter 16 of his book *Pilgrimage: Memoirs of an Adventist Administrator* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1992) sets out crucial matters that need careful consideration with reference to 1980. As the General Conference administrator who had responsibility for several key issues, his testimony is invaluable.

Fourth, Dr Richard Davidson, the respected teacher of the sanctuary doctrine at Andrews University who gave a series on the sanctuary at the recent North New South Wales camp meeting demonstrated clearly that a number of the positions taken by Adventists in the 1950s and onward are untenable in the present. Indeed, in his Thursday lecture Dr Davidson said he has torn selected pages from books of that era as he does not want his children to see them. Dr Davidson is a past-president of the Adventist Theological Society; that fact indicates he is a trusted figure amongst many Adventist conservatives. It is imperative that individual Adventists and local congregations keep up-to-date with the developing understanding of such important doctrines as that of the sanctuary so that they can be faithful to their responsibility whenever the church chooses to consider such doctrinal matters in a General Conference setting.²⁴

Further, it is impressive to note the way in which such people as Dr Alden Thompson, a long-time teacher of Bible

and Adventist history at Walla Walla College, have sought to define appropriate limits for diversity in the Adventist church. Dr Thompson's material will reward investigation, perhaps beginning with <http://dlearn.wccedu/classes/reih457or> some of the many articles he has written, for instance "We Need Your Differences," *Adventist Review*, 2 November 1989, pages 17-20.

In summary of section V, it can be said that to understand the development of Adventist thought throughout the movement's history, to adopt well-honed methods for "doing" theology, to review perceptively the work of the Sanctuary Review Committee and the subsequent progress made in the church's understanding and proclamation of this teaching, to appreciate responsible diversity in a community of faith—such endeavours may go a long way toward resolving past problems and charting a new future for Adventism. ✱

ENDNOTES

18 Since that time a constructive deduction has gained increasing support: the Shut Door Interpretation may have been a providential detour, one that allowed the believers time to study and reflect and stabilise before the Holy Spirit directed them to begin a new phase of their ministry. For some Adventists this provides a prototype for understanding subsequent deductions relating to the sanctuary.

19 It should be noted that Dr Ford was confronted with issues of revelation/inspiration during the 1960s to the extent that he developed constructive approaches to Scripture and the writings of Ellen White that proved effective during intensified dilemmas of the 1970s. Thus his volume *Physicians of the Soul* (1980) was ahead of its time and remains an appropriate reference-point for his current understanding of Ellen White's writings. On the other hand, Dr Standish fosters perspectives on Ellen White that stimulate rejection of her ministry amongst those with enquiring minds.

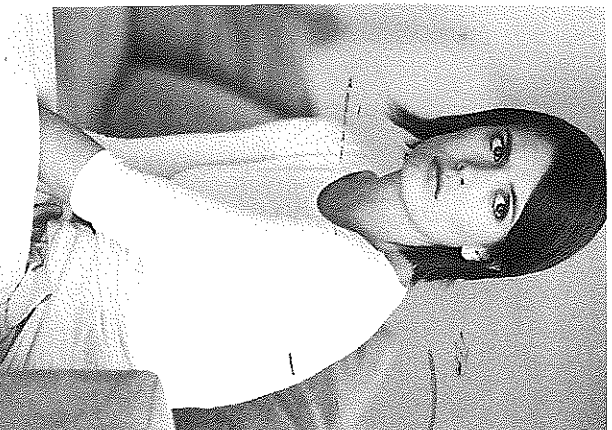
20 Robert J. Wieland, "Ellen White's Inspiration: Authentic and Profound," *Australasian Record*, 31 May 1982, page 9.

21 See *Record*, 10 December 1979, pages 6-7.

22 Robert Brinsmead says he has moved beyond Adventism but he remains interested in the wellbeing of the church. His particular focus currently is Jesus and His relationships with people. He appears able to assess accurately and charitably the stances of Russell Standish and Desmond Ford.

23 It would be fruitful for master and doctoral candidates to explore the application of these dimensions of Adventist thought to the Australian situation as Poehler has done for the global situation.

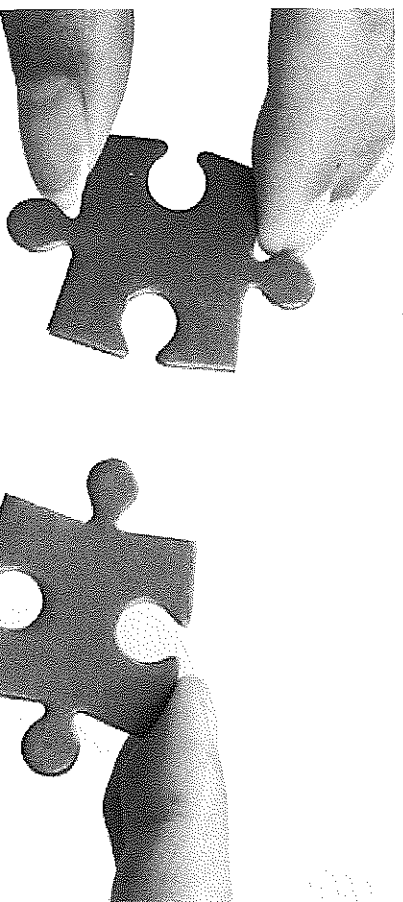
24 Much research on this matter is already available; one or more doctoral dissertations could draw it together more effectively.



Australian Seventh-day Adventists and 1980:

Toward an Historical Perspective and Normalisation of Relationships

PART 4



understanding of Bible truth and better ways to communicate it in worship and outreach. While this implies that uniformity is an impossible and even undesirable objective, unity will characterise a diversity that is held in fellowship by bonds of mutual trust and Christian love.

American church historian Robert Handy identifies two powerful impulses within Christianity: the desire to preserve the precious events and divine revelations of the past on the one hand, and the desire to be open to the future on the other. Handy suggests these values dwell within each Christian and each group of Christians; they are ever to be held in creative tension; whenever one impulse prevails over the other there is conflict, turmoil, anguish and chaos. For another perceptive writer, Paul Johnson, "Christian history is a process of constant struggle and rebirth—a succession of crises, often accompanied by horror, bloodshed, bigotry and unreason" that also give evidence of "growth, vitality and increased understanding."

In 1980, the ardent desire to preserve the precious events and divine revelations of the Adventist past prevailed over the desire to be open to the future. There was a pervasive crisis that seems to be marked by bigotry and unreason when the church turned upon its own employees and members, denying the doctrine of spiritual gifts and its biblical ecclesiology. Rather than continuing the conflicts of the past or ploughing again the troubled conceptual ground of 1980, let us thank God that we have the best-ever expression of Adventist fundamental beliefs (1980), the comprehensive conspectus of "The Dynamics of Salvation" statement (1980), the instructive consensus statement "The Ministry of Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary" and the perceptive SPD document "A Strategy for a Better Appreciation of the Ministry and Writings of Ellen G. White." This context seems to facilitate ways to enable the church we love to grow and be vital and experience increased understanding.

ARTHUR PATRICK

VI. God and Personal Faith Within a Diverse Community

God is Absolute Truth. He has chosen to reveal Truth by enlightening the minds of His servants and inspiring the Bible; by demonstrating Truth in our human situation through the life and teachings of Jesus; by illuminating the understanding of believers through the gift of the Holy Spirit as they search the Word. In these last days, Ellen White's ministry is a lesser light leading to the greater light of Scripture.

If such summary statements are valid, they need to be applied to the Adventist experience. The massive amount of new information that inundated the church in the 1970s can be interpreted best in the light of the way the Lord had led and taught the Second Advent Movement in its past history. For the first time Australians had access to tens of thousands of pages of unpublished Ellen White letters and manuscripts; Millerite and Sabbatarian periodicals from the 1840s to the present;

historical books and much more. Whereas God is Absolute Truth, human perceptions tend to be partial and relative. That is why the gifts of the Holy Spirit are so crucial amongst believers. The church would be at a loss to understand its faith without its literature: books, pamphlets, *Review, Ministry, Signs, Record* and so on. We tend to repeat history destructively if we do not learn from it constructively. To understand the past thoroughly we need primary sources; the Lord has given them to us in abundance. During the 1970s and early 1980s the church related to primary sources chiefly as *threat*; in 2002 we can relate to them as *opportunity*.

So, one of the important issues of the present is how we as individuals and as congregations relate to the Seventh-day Adventist church as a worldwide community of faith focused on Scripture, faithful to the guidance of God through Ellen White and open to the ministry of the spiritual gifts so clearly promised in the Word. To be a Seventh-day Adventist is to have no creed but the Bible, to cherish the church's fundamental beliefs as the teachings of Scripture, to be open to the leadership of the Holy Spirit toward fuller

Australian Seventh-day Adventists and 1980: Toward an Historical Perspective and Normalisation of Relationships PART 4

Continued from page 11

The Sum of the Matter

It was a healthy experience between 1992 and 1996 to journey as a chaplain with a few dozen terminally-ill patients and to receive a diagnosis of cancer in 1994.

Realisation of our human temporality means the future impacts the present in significant ways, inviting us to ask ourselves what we should do and say as we live buoyantly on the cusp of eternity. The Biblical Research Committee to which this confidential submission is addressed was appointed by the South Pacific Division in 2000 to offer conceptually-coherent, pastorally-aware guidance until 2005. With that task in focus and this document as context, I wish to offer **five summary comments**. In the main, the first two of these are procedural, the next two are biblical historical and the final one is theological.

We Adventists have not always done well in helping our community of faith understand the various interpretations of 1844 that have flourished since Hiram Edson's clock tolled midnight on October 23 in that disappointing year. This reality has several implications: one is an awareness that formulations and strategies need to be offered with charity for those who may not be able to accept consciously every majority definition in a given era. History teaches us that the heresies of one generation can become the orthodoxies of the next; expeditors at times need to confess (as did that sterling educational administrator Richard Hammill) that they have dismissed employees whose essential sin was to attempt the exploration of terrain that the church would subsequently traverse. A current task for church leaders is to understand this dimension of Adventist heritage and **to lead the church in a conflict-resolution mode**. Some of the conceptual patterns for this process can be developed from an understanding and application of the historical framework offered by Rolf Poehler and the methodological suggestions made by Fritz Guy. Further, since our mission is focused toward a non-Adventist world, we may need to plan its delivery with the assistance of authors like Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart.

In Revelation chapter 2, according to an interesting strand within Adventist interpretation, the church of the first Christian century is symbolised by Ephesus. The New Testament documents reveal early Christianity as embracing Jewish and Old Testament heritage yet being open to the newness arising from the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. What it means to be Christian was challenging to the extent that diversity characterised

the unity of the developing movement. A similar diversity has always characterised Seventh-day Adventism; this is modelled and even celebrated in the writings of Ellen White. A present task of the church is **to envision and facilitate clarity on the great issues of faith and exemplify charity with reference to peripheral matters**. This will mean an effective dialogue and dialectic within a community of faith replaces the less productive ethos of conflict and division.

During her lifetime, Ellen White was the most creative person within Seventh-day Adventist ranks; conservative in the best sense, yet open to the future in remarkable ways as she lived the message of Proverbs 4:18. We have done her a great disservice by attempting to make her the arbiter of doctrinal disputes on the Shut Door, the moral versus the ceremonial law, the Daily, the King of the North, Armageddon, the Omega and a host of other issues. The people in Australia who claim most insistently to be the only true supporters of Ellen White are apt to call for the church to "stand firm" with reference to their ideas about her and their conclusions from her writings. The primary sources the church now has available indicate that to accede to their appeals will further diminish the church and destroy the effectiveness of Ellen White's ministry. One of our challenging tasks during this quinquennium is **to further processes whereby the church will better understand and respond to the real Ellen White**. The South Pacific Division strategy document adopted in 1999 is an effective point of reference for this process.

The greatest problem of the church's response to the dilemmas of 1980 may have been in its relation to the doctrine of spiritual gifts; for instance, to assume that the analyses of a handful of administrators should transcend the implications of a document voted by 115 persons; to navigate the most turbulent waters ever experienced in Australia with a few administrators charting the course when at least the counsel of the Biblical Research Committee was needed; to assist or allow the Record to polarise the church by failing to present accurate information and publishing biased and inaccurate information without correction. Such are straws in the wind of the time, indicators of tendencies that polarised the church and exacerbated conflict and schism. In 2002 we can empathise with the difficult situation faced by our leaders of that tragic time; we cannot with integrity follow their example. Reconciliation and healing require us **to foster a vision of the church that is faithful**

to the Adventist version of the Protestant doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers, inclusive of all the spiritual gifts that God has placed in the church.

It seems, therefore, that a primary initiative of the Biblical Research Committee needs to be the assessment of the adequacy or otherwise of a foundational idea of this submission, that, in the providence of God, the potential resolution of the theological conflicts of 1980 was largely achieved in a series of consensus statements including *The Dynamics of Salvation, Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary* and others relating to the ministry of Ellen White as summed up in the South Pacific Division strategy document of 1999.

Thus an effective way forward appears to be *to nurture an accurate understanding of the way the Lord has led and taught the church through such instruments in their historical context and subsequent application*. With these achievements as points of reference the church may be able to draw many latent revisionists and incipient rejectionists toward effective understanding of its message and viable cooperation in its worship and witness. **This transformationist stance may be best heard in the "third voice" aptly described in *Ministry*, November 2001, pages 20 and 21.**

Conclusion

With the Bible as our only creed, with the broadly-based, mature documents cited above as our agreed points of reference, let us covenant to deal graciously and truthfully with each other as we look for and seek to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus will our church better pattern after the winsome ecclesia of the New Testament and recapture something of the ethos characterising earlier Adventism at its best.

An inevitable by-product will be relationships that evidence we have been with Jesus. One full of grace and truth who enjoins us to love one another according to the measure of the love He has demonstrated for each of us. He calls us to seek lost coins and lost sheep; to welcome home prodigal sons; to let wheat and tares grow together until the harvest; to proclaim "the everlasting gospel ... to every nation, tribe, language and people". Let us be about our mission.

Thus will Adventists in the South Pacific Division be enabled to walk more unitedly and effectively into the future, remembering God's leading and teaching in their past—including 1980. ✱