

*"Watchman,
what of the night?"*

*"The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,
the hour and the end!"*

Eze. 7:6 (Moffau)

Some Assessments

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Editor's Preface

This issue of *WMN* is basically on one subject, divided into three articles. The break-a-way churches in both the Potomac and Rocky Mountain Conferences have broken away over two factors: 1) Differences in belief, and 2) Differences in organizational structure of church governance. We were able to obtain a copy of the Statement of Faith of Grace Place in Colorado, and have reproduced it in part wherein the key differences are apparent. The departures in some areas are major, while other areas reflect the same declension from basic Adventism as in the main body itself.

This assessment would not be complete if we did not note the issue of congregationalism which marks the governance concept of these new churches in contrast to the conference churches. Congregationalism has much to commend it, since the actual functioning of the main body is slanted toward the hierarchical form of church governance. The ideal under which the Adventist Church professes to function, the representative, is outlined in the Writings. The problem is, it is not carried out in practice. One Federal Judge of the American court system has described the Adventist Church governance in these words: "Next to the Roman Catholic Church, the Adventist Church is the most centralized of all the major Christian denominations in this country." Congregationalism could then be considered as a reaction to a church which has abandoned its original type of structuring.

Both of the break-a-way churches discussed in *WMN* have looked to Willow Creek as a model by which to operate. Since many of our readers do not know about Willow Creek, we have summarized an interview with Bill Hybels, the senior pastor of the Willow Creek Church, by two editors of *Christianity Today*, which he invited to come to Willow Creek so that he could answer the questions which critics have raised about the "seeker-church movement" of which Willow Creek is the prototype.

In the editorial, "Let's Talk It Over," we have commented on basic aspects of the whole developing picture.



Some Assessments - 3

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has embarked on a new experiment called "Church Planting." At the Rocky Mountain Conference's annual retreat for its Executive Committee last year at Glacier View Ranch, Ron Gladden, newly appointed Mid American Union Church Planting Consultant, "challenged the committee to understand the importance of recognizing the difference between territorial church placement and targeted, market sensitive church planting." (*Rocky Mountain Conference Update*, November 5, 1997, p. 1) He illustrated his point by comparing Denny's restaurant chain and Taco Bell. Both are food providers but are targeted to different tastes.

This very illustration should sound warning bells. Do we give a message to meet the religious tastes of a given population area, or do we have a message that changes the "tastes" of people? The Everlasting Gospel, which was committed to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, was to go to every nation, tongue and people regardless of their "taste" preference. If they do not like the "taste" of the goodness of the Lord's provision in the everlasting gospel, they are free to worship the beast and his image. You do not set up a church to adapt to the "taste" of a given area, but to give any given area the opportunity to know and understand the "taste" of truth, pure and unadulterated.

Gladden emphasized one "absolute" in his illustration of the food franchises: "The quality of the food must remain consistent from franchise to franchise. Thus as the Adventist Church moves forward with church plantings, our doctrine must remain focused and faithful to the church's understanding of our role in prophecy. There is always room for individual style in communicating truth, but communication styles must not compromise the balance and clarity of the church's voted decisions." (*ibid.*)

Applying the illustration further. If one goes to Denny's in one place and then in travel finds a Denny's in another place, his same taste desire is met. In other words, no matter how consistent from franchise to franchise, there is no attempt to alter the tastes of those who are Taco Bell oriented. Was the truth committed to the Church in the beginning just one truth among many, or was it really the truth as it is in Jesus? Observe closely that Gladden does not say that there should be no compromise with Biblical truth, but no compromise on the "church's voted decisions." If the church in general session can vote what is truth, then cannot a local church also vote what it perceives to be truth? This is exactly what has happened in the Rocky Mountain Conference. A "company" formed as the Christ Advent Fellowship (CAF) under the pastoral care of Elder Clay Peck, has broken away from the Conference and voted its own perception of truth. At this annual retreat, the executive committee voted that "CAF is no longer recognized as a company of the RMC as of Novem-

ber 5, 1997." The group was denied the use of the name, Christ Advent Fellowship, and the members of the group were urged to transfer their membership to another church in the Rocky Mountain Conference. Those who did not so choose would be retained as "members of the conference church in regular standing." [Is not Dr. Desmond Ford still a member of the Pacific Union College Seventh-day Adventist Church "in regular standing"?] Besides the matter of doctrinal integrity, the question of the form of church organization has now surfaced - should it be congregational, or remain as professed by the Church - representative?

CAF was an "important experiment" of the Rocky Mountain Conference. The leadership of the conference went all out to find a workable solution to the problems which arose. They "pled with CAF leadership not to follow the foot steps of Richard Frederichs and the Damascus church." (See *WWN*, May, 1998) At a conference constituency meeting in June, the delegates were informed that "administration was very much in favor of trying to find a way to keep the experiment alive." The conference leadership deemed that "CAF has done a wonderful job in so many ways of winning the confidence of its target audience: the burned, bored and bypassed." (p. 2) It is obvious that the experiment with CAF was not targeted toward the non-Adventist as the new experiments planned for by the conference will be, but rather to the Adventist disillusioned with the status quo. Whatever group targeted, the issue focuses on truth, whether it is truly Biblical or "church voted decisions" of what is truth. (A church as a whole, or congregationally can vote what they consider to be truth, or what they will accept as truth, or they may simply affirm in a statement what the Bible declares is truth)

One of the factors of "the sad ending of this most important experiment" listed by the conference was over "defining our beliefs or theology." (p. 1) There were others, but let us note first the theological factors. In the issue of the *Rocky Mountain Conference Update* from which we are quoting, there is summarized what is perceived as "the three distinct attributes of theology" which make Adventists "unique:" - "the gospel, the Christian walk, and Preparation for the soon return of Jesus." (p. 4) In noting these three distinctives, and what is written in regard to each, there is little, if anything, that could be seriously questioned. Yet I can read, except for the allusion to the Messages of Revelation 14, the same things in Evangelical journals.

In the confrontation between the Conference and CAF, three professors from Andrews University attempted a reconciliation. While commendatory of certain aspirations of CAF, the signed statement of the three professors, Dederen, Knight, and Kilcher, expressed concern over certain doctrinal stances of CAF including the Sabbath, "ministry-authority" of Ellen G. White [a new role?], the SDA Church as a remnant people, the teaching in regard to

the pre-Advent judgment and 1844, and the concept of tithing.

Since doctrinal authority can be stated in a "church's voted decisions," what doctrinal beliefs have been voted by the new congregational successor to CAF, Christ Advent Ministries (CAM)? Their "Statement of Faith" is prefaced with the affirmation - "In essential beliefs we have UNITY. In non-essential beliefs we have LIBERTY. In all our beliefs we have CHARITY." In the Statement proper it is stated:

1) The Scriptures - "The sole basis of our beliefs is the Bible. ..."

2) God - "There is but one God,... eternally existing in three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

3) The Father - "God the Father is an infinite, personal Spirit who concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of humanity. ..."

4) Jesus Christ - "Though fully God, He became fully man. ... We believe in His virgin birth, sinless life. ... In His first coming Jesus inaugurated the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God by achieving the salvation of His people and establishing the New Covenant community."

5) The Holy Spirit - "The Holy Spirit has come into the world to reveal and glorify Christ. ..."

6) Humanity - "God created humans in His own image. ... When they chose to sin by disobeying God, they became alienated from God. ... We are totally incapable of pleasing God in and of ourselves. ... Originally created to live forever, because of sin we grow old and die. The first death is spoken of more than 60 times in the Bible as a 'sleep.' Death is an unconscious state. ... Heaven and hell await the saved and lost after the second coming of Jesus, depending on our response to His saving love."

7) Salvation - "Salvation has been purchased for us by the finished and perfect work of Christ at the cross. ... Men and women are freed from the penalty of their sins not as a result, in whole or in part, of their own works, goodness or religious ceremony, but by the undeserved favor of God alone - through His grace alone. ... When we turn from our self-ruled life, and accept Jesus as our Saviour and Lord we are saved - the gift of eternal life is ours at that moment. God declares righteous all who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation. ..."

8) The Church - "All true believers make up the church world-wide and should assemble together in local churches for worship, teaching, prayer, and fellowship..."

9) The Sabbath - "Because God rested on the seventh day from His work of creation, and Jesus rested on the Sabbath after His completed work of salvation on the cross,

the Sabbath has become a symbol in time of God's finished work in Christ (Heb. 4:9-10). Since the principle of a seventh day of rest is clearly taught in the OT and not untaught in the NT, we choose to conduct our religious worship services on Saturday. Rather than creating nonbiblical religious Sabbath-keeping traditions like the Pharisees at the time of Christ, we celebrate the Sabbath as a symbol of Christ's finished work. God may and should be worshipped on every day of the week, therefore we do not intend for the day of worship to be a point of contention of division with other Christians." [in full]

10) Last Things - "We believe in the literal, personal, visible appearing of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment. ... The lost will receive the penalty of sin which is death. They will not burn throughout eternity, but will be consumed and come to an utter end. Since nobody knows when Christ will come, believers should avoid speculations. ..."

This "Statement of Faith" formulated by CAM, also known as "Grace Place," and the RMC conference's generalized statement on what makes Adventism "unique," share one thing in common - the complete omission of the sanctuary typology which formed the foundation of original Adventism. Until we can get our Atonement theology straightened up, freed from the errors with which tradition has laced its teachings, we shall continue to miss the real purpose of our existence, and continue to grope in misunderstandings and schisms. Until we are willing to do so, the charge against the teaching by Barnhouse during the SDA-Evangelical dialogues in 1955-1956 that "it is stale, flat, and unprofitable," will continue to haunt us.

While Grace Place affirms clearly their belief in the Trinity as taught by Romanism; Eternal Security which marks the Evangelicals; the Universality of the Church as held by the World Council of Churches; and omits in their perception of Last Things the Millenium of Revelation 20, they do have some positive declarations of faith - the Bible as the sole basis of Beliefs; Salvation is God's free gift to us, through grace alone; Death is an unconscious state; and the total annihilation of the wicked. The one statement which marks this declaration as unique is the statement on the Sabbath, which we have quoted in full. In some twenty odd years in evangelism, I thought I had confronted every item on the Sabbath both pro and con, but this is the first time in my ministry that I ever read the Sabbath doctrine presented as this statement does. In one brief phrase - "not untaught in the NT" - the whole of the arguments used by Sunday promoters based on NT perceptions is swept away. At the same time the statement in one faulty perception nullifies the uniqueness of the Sabbath over the other six days. We are to serve God, not worship Him, six days. God has limited the worship of Himself to the Sabbath. But their position removes all barriers to ecumenical fellowship, and even transfer of membership from a Sunday keeping church to Grace Place and visa versa.

Basically the statement of faith on the Sabbath is hinged on the Evangelical concept that the atonement was finished on the Cross. It is made to be a symbol of the sacrifice which Christ did provide through the cross. But Jesus had already given those symbols in the Upper Room, the evening before His death on Friday. He, as a common priest, ministered at Calvary, but by His resurrection, He was called to be an High Priest to minister a final atonement. A new phase of His office of Sonship began (Acts 13:33; Heb. 5:5-6).

The RMC did well to take the action which they did, but they are in difficulty in challenging some of the positions stated in the CAM "Statement of Faith" inasmuch as the Church has affirmed and continues to affirm its adherence to the teachings set forth in *Questions on Doctrine*. Grace Place, as well as Dr. Desmond Ford, whose teachings are echoed in their "Statement of Faith," are merely the "chickens come home to roost" from the SDA-Evangelical Conferences. They are carrying to the ultimate conclusions the compromises made at the conferences by the Church's leadership.

In both the report in the *Adventist Review* by its editor on the break-a-way church in the Potomac Conference, and the report from the RMC on its break-a-way church, a common denominator is in evidence. The conference president, Elder James Brauer, stated - "I just wish CAF leadership was willing to work together on the same team. But they are committed to following every detail of their vision, built on a Willow Creek model, which is exclusively congregational in its decision making." (*op. cit.*, p. 3) What is the "Willow Creek" model? This we will note, but first, what about "congregationalism"?

#

Church Governance Models

There are three different forms of church government - congregational, representative, or hierarchical. Theoretically, the Seventh-day Adventist Church uses the representative type, but is not amiss to the hierarchical. The governance form put in place by the two break-a-way Churches of the Potomac and Rocky Mountain Conferences is congregationalism. Three scenes which I have observed in my lifetime come to my mind over this issue.

On an Easter Sunday night I was baptized in a congregational Baptist Church by its pastor, a Rev. Vietz, a man whom my mother highly respected, and whose wife was her close friend. Shortly thereafter, he accepted a call to pastor the Ft. Scott, Kansas, First Baptist Church. The pastor to follow had just completed advanced seminary training in Chicago. Dr. Rice immediately began instituting changes making it more "user" friendly. The prayer meeting became a "box-supper" evening. I remember one such midweek service at which a business meeting had been scheduled. The older conservative element as well

as others had become perturbed by the modernistic changes introduced into the Church. I recall the impassioned speech by the grey-haired Head Deacon (The highest lay officer of the Baptist Church). It was definitely focused on the need to remove the pastor. The vote by a narrow margin retained him. My mother decided that she could do a better job at home with my sister and me. She withdrew from the Baptist Church. The vacuum was filled in the providence of God by a credentialed retired Bible Worker of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In those days, every two years, the Conference session was connected with the annual Campmeeting. One of the first Campmeetings that I attended included such a session. Elder R. S. Fries was the president. Evidently, some of his policies were not popular. He had been pastor of the church in Des Moines, Iowa, the largest in the conference, prior to his call to be president. He had begun a radio program over WHO which covered the state. His successor in Des Moines was Elder Dewit S. Osgood, who continued the radio ministry. I do not know what the issue might have been, but after a vehement floor debate and a further committee meeting, Osgood replaced Fries. This was my introduction to "representative" church government.

After graduating from Union College, I accepted a call to the Texico Conference. The president was Elder Vance LaGrone, a very conservative man, and well liked by the laity of the conference. His father, Elder G. A. LaGrone had been a long time worker in the Conference. Evidently, Elder LaGrone and the Union President, J. W. Turner, did not see eye to eye, and at the conference session a move was on foot to remove him from the presidency. I was on the Press Committee for the Campmeeting, and assigned to interview various speakers and write a news release for the local newspaper. One visiting minister was Elder L. H. Christian. He graciously gave me some details of his ministry and what his messages would seek to emphasize. After the visit, he said to me - "Young man you know how to vote tomorrow, don't you?" The laity in the conference were a formidable block behind Elder LaGrone. I went to the session; I sat on the back row. I again observed "representative" church government in action. The result, Elder R. R. Bietz became president, and began his long term of administrative service which culminated in a Vice Presidency of the General Conference.

There is no question but that the *Testimonies* recommend this form of church governance. The observation reads:

Every member of the church has a voice in choosing the officers of the church. The church chooses the officers of the state conferences. Delegates chosen by the state conferences choose the officers of the union conference; and delegates chosen by the union conferences choose the officers of the General Conferences. By this arrangement, every conference, every institution, every church, and every individual, either directly or through representatives,

has a voice in the election of the men who bear the chief responsibilities in the General Conference. (Vol. 8, pp. 236-237)

This would be a very workable plan if starting at the local church level, the delegates chosen by the church would meet with the church in a called business meeting, and having in advance the issues which were to be discussed at the session, whether men or recommendations, ascertain the thinking of the individual members. The same could apply on the state level in addressing the issues to be raised at the Union session, again whether men or recommendations. I have never known this to be done. I do recall an incident while teaching at Madison College. I was among others asked to serve as a delegate of the College Church to the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference constituency meeting. I went to the session with the College President, Elder Horace C. Beckner. As we entered the auditorium, where the session was being held, we were given a booklet with departmental reports, and the list of conference officers. Later in the session, the Nominating Committee brought in its report. The chairman indicated that there would be but minor changes. Elder Beckner took out his booklet to note the changes, and lo, they had already been recorded prior to the session.

Really the bottom line is not the form of governance. It is the spirituality of the men operating the structure. It is even conceivable that the hierarchical form could accomplish the purposes of God for His church if the men in control were truly men of God. Congregational churches could accomplish the work of God world-wide even as the Baptist Church does in its mission outreach. Again, it is not the structure, it is the men operating the structure, and the truth upon which the structure rests.

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Willow Creek

Located amidst upscale homes in one of Chicago's most affluent suburbs is Willow Creek. It "is not a Fortune 500 company, although its sleek, glass-walled building, winding lake, and carefully manicured landscape might suggest it. Nor is it a civic center, although its 5,000-seat auditorium and state-of-the-art audio-visual trappings would provide a perfect setting for a symphony performance or Broadway show. Instead Willow Creek is a church, in fact, with 15,000 people attending its services each week, the South Barrington, Illinois congregation has become the second-largest Protestant church in America."

Its senior pastor, Bill Hybels goes "against pastoral stereotype. His high-energy style and entrepreneurial spirit gives him the air of a corporate CEO." His success has been attributed to the fact that his ministry and church does not have the air nor the feel of a traditional church. This approach is called *seeker sensitive*. Willow Creek is

the undisputed prototype of the seeker sensitive/megachurch movement.

What is the seeker-sensitive movement? Hybels responds that "it is nothing more than a growing awareness among thousands of church leaders that local churches lost their evangelistic effectiveness many decades ago and that something should be done about it." Willow Creek is his solution to that loss. Based on "numbers" his solution has proven successful. However, from his own Evangelical community he has received flak. The very titles of the books written against the Willow Creek experiment vividly reflect the thinking of the opposition. John MacArthur wrote - *Ashamed of the Gospel*; Douglas Webster - *Selling Jesus*, and Os Guinness titled his - *Dining with the Devil*. "The overreaching concern, common to almost all of the critics, is that seeker-sensitive churches compromise the gospel by tailoring their messages to non-Christians, that the use of polished entertainment, feel-good sermons, and marketing techniques subtly alters the gospel that is being communicated."

One Evangelical theologian, David Wells, has said that he honestly believes that Hybels "doesn't think he's compromising the gospel by using cultural devices, but he seems blinded to the fact that culture is not neutral." To this MacArthur adds - "The simple reality is that one cannot follow a market-driven strategy and remain faithful to Scripture. Preachers who concern themselves with user-friendliness cannot fearlessly proclaim the whole counsel of God."

The present Willow Creek church was originally 20 miles from where it is now. In building the new plant, Hybels conducted a survey of the community in which they are now located. If the respondent answered, "No," to the question - "Do you actively attend a local church?" - Hybels asked them to help him understand why they stopped going to church. From this survey, he learned that the number one reason was the fund-raising techniques used, and that the services were boring. He didn't stop asking for money, but in doing so, was aware of the sensitivity of the community against "too aggressive" fund-raising techniques. The second objective - boring services - Hybels determined that whatever they did Biblically in their services, they would add "some variety so that people [wouldn't] die of boredom."

What was added and why it was added gives an insight into the thinking of Hybels, and also an understanding of why certain Evangelicals have levelled the charge that they have. Willow Creek uses "drama, contemporary Christian music, and multi-media presentations," but Hybels argues - "But they are never used for the sake of titillation." He asks - "Who was the master composer? Who created the arts? Whose idea was it to communicate the truth through a wide variety of artistic genres? I think it was God."

Based on this concept that God is the author of all that Willow Creek has added to their services to eliminate boredom, Hybels argues:

Then why has the church narrowed its options and selected a talking head as its only form of communicating the most important message on the planet? Even though preaching is the primary way the truth of God has been and should be communicated, we add texture and feeling and perspective to it through the use of music and media and drama. And anyone who has witnessed our presentations would never use the words, "mere entertainment."

Hybels declares that those who would use the term, "entertainment" to describe the services at Willow Creek "have never experienced Spirit-anointed drama, multimedia, and contemporary Christian music."

Other aspects of the format followed, as well as the outreach of Willow Creek are of interest. When asked about how they deal with doctrinal questions which might arise, Hybels responded - "Our elders just study the Scriptures, led by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we seek counsel from the outside. We'll call in different theologians and have them sit with us and mentor us in a topic. But in the final analysis, our elders will make the call."

Willow Creek perceives that the Church exists for a four-fold purpose of exaltation, evangelism, edification, and social action. They seek to emulate what they perceive is a church model given in Acts 2 - teaching, fellowship, prayer, and Communion. Hybels perceives the traditional churches as merely "teaching centers," rather than biblically functioning communities utilizing all the various gifts of the individual. He says, "what I am trying to help the body of Christ understand... is I Corinthians 12, where it says there is one Spirit, but many ministries."

In the area of social action, Hybels complained that while they get press about their buildings, budget and drama, he believes the spotlight should be focused on the fact that they gave 85 vehicles to single moms in 1993, that 350 people a month were fed from their food pantry, and that they gave in 1994, \$250,000 to local benevolent ministries. He said "These are the real signs that Christ is being honored in the church."

Willow Creek is a megachurch. Its 15,000 members sit in theatre seats under a roof of a 352,000-square-foot building located on a 120-acre campus. There are no crosses, steeples, or stained-glass windows. No creeds are recited, or hymnals used. The church's week-end "seeker-services" are geared to reach the unchurched, employing professional-quality drama and contemporary Christian music.

"Because of Willow Creek's size, the Church leaders feel participation in small groups is essential to the spiritual support of its members. And in keeping with its

megachurch status, Willow Creek is loaded with specialized ministries for virtually every need among its believers: programs for four age divisions of youth, three categories of single adults, married couples, divorced persons, single parents, and physically and mentally challenged individuals, as well as outreach services to the homeless, the poor, and prison inmates, are just a few of the selections from the church's huge and diverse menu.

Willow Creek's success has not gone unnoticed. Three times a year the church sponsors a conference at which 500 church leaders gather to see how it is done." At those conferences have been Adventist ministers. The leadership of the Church is now seeing and feeling the results in the Potomac and Rocky Mountain Conferences.

(All direct quotes and data in the above summary report are taken from *Christianity Today*, July 18, 1994, pp. 20-25. The CT article is an interview with Bill Hybels himself as he answers critics of the seeker-church movement. The article is titled - "Selling the House of God?")

Let's Talk It Over

As I was writing the above summary of the seeker-church movement, one text kept ringing in my ears - "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (I Cor. 1:21). The Greek culture in which Paul was seeking to establish companies of Christian believers was drama and art oriented. He had been at the very center of that culture in Athens, but in coming to Corinth, where commerce was mingled with the arts and drama, Paul was "determined not to know anything [among the Corinthians] save Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (2:2). Later when he wrote to them, he plainly stated- "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1:23). He did not adapt his methodology to meet either the Jews or the Greeks. He did not dramatize the cross, he did not take the music of the Greeks and make it contemporary Christian music.

Paul did not measure his success by the "numbers" game. When he made his last report to the elders of the Church in Jerusalem, while James could point to "the many thousands of Jews which believed," Paul declared "particularly what things God has wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry," and if required, could only point to "home churches," not megachurches established where he had ministered (Acts 21:19-20; Rom. 16:5; I Cor. 16:19).

Hybels suggests in his response to the questions asked of him that anyone who would use the term, "entertainment" to describe the services at Willow Creek "have never experienced Spirit-anointed drama, multimedia and contemporary Christian music." Has Hybels forgotten there are two "spirits" contending for the souls of men? His church model, so he claims, is Acts 2. There is recorded the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in power, but I do not find drama, or any other "earthy" props used to bring convictions to the Jewish worshippers assembled - just preaching

which called sin by its right name - murder - the will to kill God. There was no adjustment to the cultural background of those Jews, proselytes, or God-fearers "out of every nation under heaven." The Spirit did only one thing, permitted the message to be given in the language they understood best - "the tongue wherein (they) were born." Perhaps Hybels believes that by drama, and multimedia presentations accompanied by contemporary "Christian" (?) music, he is speaking to this generation in the language wherein it is born. One of the hallmarks of the early Christian Church was that it was other-worldly. Only as the Christian message and worship was diluted and mixed with the religious forces which it confronted, did the great apostasy begin its work, and Christianity became a dominant religion in the Roman Empire. The numbers game took over. When a tree is shaken to obtain the fruit, all the fruit is bruised; and when gathered together without regard to its condition, it is not long till the whole is spoiled. It is hand picked fruit, one by one, that merits the label, "top grade".

It also should be obvious as one reads the "Statement of Faith" drawn up by Grace Place in Colorado, that the "other world" which is Christ's kingdom is put on hold. While it is true that no one knows the hour of Christ's second coming, and that we should "avoid speculations," our emphasis should not be that of adjustment to the present hour. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (I Cor. 15:19). It is the blessed hope that truly motivates. This is the genuine spirit of true Adventism.

If the Statement of Faith of CAM in Colorado is reflective of all Adventist groups who wish to pattern their congregational church after the Willow Creek-style, it should be obvious to any one professing basic Adventism that something is wrong. The bottom line on the Sabbath is that we will worship on the seventh day, but if some one elects to worship on another day, there will be no quarrel, for are we not all believers in Christ, and therefore but one church? This is ecumenism, and the denial that God has a unique message to be given to the final generation.

What is the answer? The simple answer is "the truth as it is in Jesus." Translating this into reality becomes much more difficult. Does this mean that we preach just "Jesus" as the ideal person tailored to the culture in which we live, or do we preach truth, pure and unadulterated, since He is the truth, the way and the life? Jesus can be popularized so as to be acceptable to many. But to preach truth based on a plain, "Thus saith the Lord," as demanding a life-style at variance with the world, its philosophy and practices, produces a far different reaction. The crowds followed Jesus so long as they were recipients of His miracles which gave them a longer lease on this world, but when He set forth truth as a total commitment to a different way of life, He finally walked the "last mile" to the Cross, alone!

The Statement of Faith reflected a different issue in regard

to truth - the problem within Adventism itself. Is the uniqueness of the truth entrusted to Seventh-day Adventism exactly what the Rocky Mountain Conference countered with in response to the "Statement of Faith"? Hardly. The deeper issue today is the doctrine of the sanctuary, and how the type and antitype is to be understood. The present fracturing in Adventism is the result of nobody really wanting to honestly lay aside traditional concepts and take the Bible and read it for what it says, and find an interpretive understanding of the types given by God to ancient Israel, which harmonizes all the other revelation given by the same God in prophecy, and in Jesus Christ. Until we do, we are going to continue to see "congregational" groups jettisoning the sanctuary truth as "flat, stale and unprofitable" while others clinging to traditional concepts will continue to believe that which they know not, nor why.

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An Observation: As we were completing (3/20/98) this issue of WVN, a sister called from a New England State asking if we had carefully considered the last lines of the news report (as reproduced) on the new Frederick, Maryland Church - "glass windows including an eight-foot circular depiction of a risen Christ over the altar area." [WVN-4(98)] The sister had many times as a Roman Catholic seen this same arrangement in old Roman Churches. She indicated "the circular window symbolized the communion wafer," and the "altar area" designation was Catholic, but a term possibly of the staff writer's choosing.

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