

The Vennita Marcussen Letter

This is not an easy thing to write about, for our sympathies are with Jan. But we have been deluged with requests to explain the situation. What is going on? People cannot find out, and phone calls and letters are not providing the information needed.

Please do not consider that the problem was Jan's fault. As this report will reveal, he was not.

We hesitated to discuss the matter, hoping that everything would work out all right. But friends who know the facts have phoned me repeatedly and said, "Vance, you must warn the flock! You can't sit back and not tell them."

Add to this the problem that few seem able to contact Jan or Vennita by phone. Callers are often greeted by an answering machine which tells them to leave a message and they will be contacted. After my own conversation with Jan in December, a message left on his answering machine has brought no reply.

So, as gently as I can, here is some information:

But, first, it should be clearly understood that all this crisis began because Vennita wrote that bombshell letter in November 1997. If she had not done that, everything would have remained quietly under wraps. I knew about her baptism into the Reform Church by early September, but said nothing. (However, I did not know how determined she was to gain additional conversions, or I would have.)

Here is a brief note I was going to include in the January 1998 *Checkpoints*, but pulled. It will provide you with some background information:

THE BOMBSHELL LETTER—Yes, most everyone knows what it is. Vennita Marcussen has gone public with her announcement that she has joined the Reform Church—and she has done it in the most publicized way she could—by giving her husband's mailing list to the Reform Church!

Like many faithful believers, Vennita wanted to unite with a purified organization. She came into contact with representatives from the Nicolici branch of the Reform Church (both branches call themselves the Reform Church or the Seventh-day Adventist Re-

form Movement).

The Reform leaders very likely withheld a number of salient facts about the organization from her. But that is to be expected.

On May 25, 1997, she was baptized at a Reform Church camp meeting in Tennessee.

In the weeks and months which followed, she wavered between keeping quiet about the fact, as her husband wanted her to do, or going public, as the Reform leaders were urging her to do.

But, once a person unites with the Reform, he is not really his own anymore. For the sake of his assured salvation, the pressure is strong on him to obey the leadership, especially since that leadership, even when it meets in its small committee, is declared to be "the Voice of God." And who wants to disobey God?

She was told that she needed to make her husband's mailing list available to the Reform Church, so they could circulate it. There was wavering for a time.

The matter came to a head when Jan, in an effort to hold things together, asked his wife to sign a statement, assuring interested inquirers that she and her husband were still faithful Seventh-day Adventists.

When, contrary to her expectations, Jan published that statement in his mid-November newsletter, Vennita, working with Reform leaders, decided to let them mail out a letter over her signature, announcing that she had joined the Reform Church—and that everyone she knew or had influence with—ought to consider doing so also.

Her letter contains little information about the Reform Church, interspersed with sentences from the Spirit of Prophecy. This is because the Reform Church has little to offer other than claims that it is the only purified body of believers in the world. It will quote the Spirit of Prophecy, and declare that the positive quotes refer to itself and that the negative ones apply to apostate Adventists (which, by the way, are all those who do not unite with the Reform. So you are already an "apostate Adventist"!)

But the truth is far different. Although the members are very fine people, the excessive control exercised by leadership over the members, their misuse of funds to maintain control of members, their sheep stealing from the other main branch of the Reform,

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and their luxurious personal lifestyles—are all repugnant to any truehearted child of God who learns about their practices.

I was told about Vennita's baptism several months ago by a friend in the Northwest, but determined to say nothing for the time being. Yet when Vennita had the Reform Church mail out her announcement and appeal on their postal permit, it was clear that the time had come to publish a full report on the Adventist Reform Church.

That is the reason for the six-part set of tracts on the Reform Church and the book on the same subject.

—That concludes the *Checkpoints* article, which I omitted from the January issue. (The reason for that omission will be explained below.)

Several years ago, Vennita first made contact with the Reform Church. She gave them money and the friendship became so warm, that she got Jan to secretly publish some of their papers, as though Jan authored them.

People who knew of the matter wrote me that this was wrong, but I said nothing. Those papers could very well have included Reform Church doctrinal errors. For a number of years, Jan published those materials, with only the dates, titles, return address, and covers changed. Intriguingly enough, all this was done with the full approval of Reform Church leaders. They knew they were drawing the net in closer and closer and would, ere long, make a big catch—hopefully, a large number of historic believers.

A consistent problem here is that Vennita would pressure Jan to do things which, I am sure, he would not normally have done. Vennita has tended to be the pusher and Jan the one out front giving the talks.

Jan has a problem on his hands. He needs your prayers.

Just as Eve was drawn to the forbidden tree, Vennita traveled more and more frequently to the Nashville church office of the Nicolici branch of the Reform Church. She always received the warmest of welcomes there. Knowing that through her and Jan they might be able to reach many Adventists, the reformers (as they call themselves) encouraged her to be baptized. Jan pled with her not to do this; but Vennita, who has a very strong mind, decided she would go ahead with it.

On May 25, 1997, she was publicly baptized at a Nicolici-branch camp meeting.

Jan hoped that the news would not travel outward; and, at first, Vennita agreed to be quiet about her changed church membership.

But word has a way of spreading. The baptism was quite publicly done. (The leaders wanted it that way so the word *would* spread!) We were told by sev-

eral folk in various parts of the nation, yet we still said nothing.

On September 26-28, Vennita openly attended another Reform Church camp meeting in Arkansas. Regardless of Jan's pleas, Vennita had fully united with the Nicolici branch, and that was where all her interests were.

Finally, to quench the growing number of questions, Jan got Vennita to agree to sign a statement which he could share with those who might inquire. This she did. But then Jan mailed it out to his entire mailing list in his mid-November newsletter.

The entire statement is reprinted on the next page. Reading it, you will notice that it really does not say much, other than an inference that Jan and Vennita are together as faithful "SDAs." Yet such an impression did not fit into the plans of the Reform Church leaders. They wanted a clearer call to be given—to separate from apostasy. (And, of course, in their thinking that could only be done by joining the Nicolici-offshoot of the Reform Church, an offshoot of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. To be anywhere else was to "remain in apostasy.")

The Reform church officers had been encouraging Vennita to openly declare her faith, and this signed statement was a step backward; it was an indication that she was still apparently one with "SDA people around the world."

It is a hallowed part of Reform Church teachings that all Seventh-day Adventists who are not in their branch of the Reform Church are lost. (In this sense, they are like the Shepherd's Rod, which teach the same thing). "Outside the church is no salvation" is the creed of Rome and a number of churches which have followed.

Jan's objective in preparing the letter was to show that he and his wife were still "in the faith" and still solidly Adventists.

When Jan next mailed out the signed statement to his entire mailing list without telling Vennita, her new friends used this as a reason to urge her more strongly to clearly come out in the open regarding her new faith. Combine this with Vennita's strong personality, and the result was inevitable.

So Vennita took a complete copy of Jan's mailing list, apparently without telling Jan, and gave it to the Nashville office of the Reform Church! They typed the entire mailing list into their mailing list files.

A six-page letter, plus a two-page ad sheet, was then prepared and mailed out. It is "typical Reform Church" in content—a little talk about how the Reform Church is the only pure and true church in the world, interspersed with sentences from the Spirit of Prophecy, as if they prove those assertions.

The ever-present teaching of the Reform Church is "if the leaders tell you to do something, you do it; it

must be of God.” Under the guidance of her spiritual leaders, Vennita felt overwhelmed. In the letter she wrote that she felt “the frown of God” and “had no rest day nor night” until it was written (*p. 1*).

Vennita’s Bombshell Letter was dated November 17, 1997, but not mailed out until closer to the end of the month. It began arriving in the mailboxes about the 10th to 15th of December.

Pages 7 and 8 consisted of a rather lengthy advertising list of various Nicolici-branch Reform Church publications. The churchmen who helped produce that letter were determined to make a strong impact.

As soon as I learned about the letter, I immediately set to work preparing the six-part Reform Church tract set and a booklet for more permanent reference (*Why I Do Not Join the Adventist Reform WM-805-810* and the book: *The Truth about the Adventist Reform Church*).

While working on it, I received phone calls, faxes, and letters asking what was going on. Here is an example:

“Date: December 11, 1997

“Fax to: Vance Ferrell

“Subject: Literature received from Vennita Marcussen

“Dear Brother Ferrell,

“Today’s mail brought the following regarding Vennita’s ‘conversion’ to the SDA Reform Movement.

“The entire mailing is about 8 pages. We fax to you only the first page and the page showing their teachings and who is doing it.

“Who is Peter D. Lausevic?

“Do you have anything written up on this “Movement”?”

“We are interested only in identifying what this truly is. From reading it, I feel it is a ‘wolf in sheep’s clothing’ movement.”—*Massachusetts*.

Peter Lausevic is a leading Nicolici branch pastor-evangelist, and was mentioned in Vennita’s bombshell letter. We are told that he was a key figure in bringing her into the Reform Church. (But think not that “evangelist” means that he holds public meetings to convert the lost. They never do that! As has always been done down through the years, their workers only attempt to convert Adventists. They may, and do, call themselves the “fourth angel” of Revelation 18 which comes to earth to strengthen the giving of the third angel’s message to the world, but that is laughable; they do not even give the third angel’s message to the world, much less add any power to it!)

As I was preparing the material on the Reform Church, I tried, just as others were doing, without success to get Jan on the phone. Then a friend in the Northwest did make contact and told him I was going to produce some kind of write-up on Vennita’s startling announcement.

So Jan phoned me. He told me he was not in the Reform Church. When I said that my forthcoming series on the Reform Church did not mention the Marcussens, but that I planned to briefly note the bombshell letter in the January *Checkpoints*, Jan asked that I not do so. I agreed to not do so at that time. At my request, he then got Vennita to phone me about an hour later.

Speaking with her was entirely different than conversing with Jan. Her mind-set was very determined. Vennita expressed her firm belief that she was in the true church, would remain with them, and that others should be in it too. Nothing else seemed to matter.

That need not have surprised me, for the bombshell letter and its contents should have been sufficient to convince me of that. That letter burned all the bridges.

Just as she did in the letter, she told me that she loved to travel with Jan and visit with the people who attended his meetings. Yet the stolidity of her sentiments, as expressed over the phone, were very troubling.

“I love traveling with my husband for his speaking appointments. I love distribution as well as selling the National Sunday Law books. I love working together with him to save souls.”—*Vennita’s Bombshell Letter, dated November 17, 1997, p. 3*.

It was clear that Vennita intended to quietly try to convert those who attended Jan’s meetings to the only true church! Remember that she had been taught that there is no salvation outside the Reform Church!

It is for such reasons that I am writing you this at this time. The flock needs to be warned.

I hesitated to write this, *but Vennita got all this started—and now God’s people must deal with it*. She may not like the fact that I am writing this, but she is not in a position to complain. Her views are extreme. Because Jan did not unite with her in the Reform Church, she wrote in her very public letter that she feared he was likely to be a lost man.

“I did not know my husband was going to put a page with my signature on his mid-November 1997 newsletter until it was already printed . . . I love the Lord with all my heart as well as my dear husband, and my church. I don’t want my husband to

Vennita Marcussen

Letter

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fight against God or His church. I don't want him to die like William Miller. I don't want people to sympathize with him against God's appointed agencies."—*The Bombshell letter*, p. 3.

Anyone who believes others will be lost if they believe and practice historic Adventism—but do not join the Nicolici organization and submit to the control of their leaders—is an unsafe guide to others.

As stated in my tract set and book, those leaders exercise strong control over their members, far greater than is done in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Ellen White wrote that when one man permits another man to control his mind, both will be under the control of the devil. It is a serious matter (*read TM 347; 78, 208-216, 301-304, 347-348, 366; 491-502; 6T 397*). Satan uses organizations and institutions to obtain control over men:

"Organizations, institutions, unless kept by the power of God, will work under Satan's dictation to bring men under the control of men; and fraud and guile will bear the semblance of zeal for truth and for the advancement of the kingdom of God."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, 366.

Somewhere in the *Testimonies*, Ellen White speaks strongly about a young man who was misled by offshoots and counseled by the spiritual leader to steal the mailing list of the *Review*, which he did.

During my phone conversation with Vennita, I had but begun to speak about some of the many (many!) problems discussed in the history of the Reform Church, when Vennita refused to hear any of it. She instantly brushed it off with the comment, "Oh, that was long ago! Everything is different now!" In her view, her new organization had achieved perfection and its leaders could do or speak no wrong.

So, as soon as the call was completed, I immediately contacted a friend who once had been a leader in the Reform Church; but, through the years, he had remained in close touch with the organization and its members.

He told me that nothing had changed! Nothing! The problem with their schools, their evangelism, their mind-control, their financial misuse, and their doctrinal errors—was the same as earlier!

So I added an introduction to the book (which is not in the tract set), which quoted his statement on the matter.

Unknown to me, at the time that I was preparing

that tract set and equivalent book, Elder Ralph Larson had set his pen to action also. As our readers well-know, Elder Larson is a man of many years' experience. After reading Vennita's open letter, he wrote her an open letter; copies of which he has shared with others. *We will reprint it on the next two pages of this study.*

At that same time in December, Jan convened a pre-scheduled week-long seminar in his area.

A warning needs to be sounded to those of our people who attended that public eight-day gathering. I do not have their names, and have received no indication that anyone else warned them! So this tract will be the means of alerting them.

However, it also represents the first time, to our knowledge, that possible serious risky ventures have been presented to our people in special independent ministry meetings. So a general alert is in order also.

As I have warned in earlier years, do NOT give your savings to quick-money experts—wherever you may encounter them!

The following information came from Jan, Vennita (through a third party), and two of those who attended that seminar:

Jonathan Gibbs lives in California. A conference pastor who obtained a Master's degree at Loma Linda, he says, he is now working closely with a conference office in carrying on his activities (although not currently employed by them). He says his work involves real estate, business, and an exchange program in offshore banking.

He met Jan at an Adventist meeting in California, and told him that he believed in his ministry and wanted to help him get a million dollars to help it succeed even better. He said he liked one of Jan's videos and wanted to help him circulate it very widely to the general public. This sounded good; and Jan, by his own statement to me, was interested.

Gibbs may be a fine man (just as, of course, we know Jan is); but I must express my opinion, that it is not safe to invest with any individuals or groups which promise you a high, fast, return on your investment, no matter how fine the individual may be who offers to so invest your money!

Gibbs told Jan that he was working through the Barkley Bank in London, as well as another offshore bank—and was receiving 2-3 percent interest daily on his investments.

He told Jan he wanted to help him make a mil-

lion videos, and that offshore banking investments could help him do it. Investments on Jan's part could make this possible.

At this juncture, let us stop and consider what we have here. A man who is purportedly wealthy, and becoming wealthier everyday, assures you that you too can become wealthy—and that he wants to help you become wealthy. But, first, you must give him some of your money.

Well, that just sounds fine. But, wait a minute, if the wealthy man wants to help you so much,—why does he not supply the nest egg from his own wealth, invest it, and then give you the profits accruing from it? If yours is a tax-exempt organization, he can deduct everything he gives you from his taxes—and lose nothing!

But if you have to put in your own money, you carry the full risk of losing it, and you may have to pay brokerage fees also.

Gibbs may be a very fine man and his plans to enrich his friends excellent ones,—yet, no offense to Gibbs, the fact remains that a large number of the fraudulent scam artists in our country are doing the same thing! It is the leading phone fraud in America today. They offer you a mint of money, but first you must send them some money for a month or so. Then the money will flood your mailbox.

(Another current phone scam to be aware of is to offer you something free, get you to tell them some of your private information in order to obtain it, such as your web passcode, charge card number, etc. Then, after they hang up, the information is quickly used or sold for others to use,—so purchases can quickly be charged to your account.)

So Jan asked Gibbs to come speak at his forthcoming December seminar in southern Illinois. Two of the men who attended that seminar (from homes thousands of miles apart from each other) contacted me afterward. They expressed deep concern regarding what they were told at those meetings. (I was also told that Jan may not have attended some of those meetings.)

They were also concerned that a number of those in attendance seemed interested in accepting the proposition. Gibbs may be a very fine man, but any financial manager will tell you that you dare not invest money in fast-return opportunities, for they always involve a very high risk of loss.

According to their report, Gibbs told the assembled believers that he was going to match every dollar that came into his ministry with a dollar of his own.

Jan said he had not known Gibbs for more than six weeks before he invited him to speak daily at the seminar. (On the average at the meetings, which went from Sabbath to Sabbath, Jan gave one talk each day

and Gibbs delivered two or three. In addition, we are told there were also three other speakers.)

(One of those in attendance said that Gibbs was an excellent pianist; but, in his estimation, he played in a very jazzy style. He did not want to play slow pieces, such as “*Amazing Grace*.”)

Gibbs is an extremely charismatic individual. According to two of those who attended the seminar and listened to all his presentations, Gibbs said:

- Ellen White is not what we thought she was.
- It is all right to be baptized in the Adventist Church while eating pork or oysters.
- We should get used to the idea of being called “Catholic,” since it only means “universal.”

Those in attendance were urged to invest money with Gibbs, so he could place it in offshore banking and reimburse them, many times over, within a very short time. According to what was reported to me, he told them:

- If they take out the profit each time, in five weeks, \$10,000 invested with Gibbs would earn \$10,000 back; and on and on.
- If the profit is taken out each time, at the end of 26 weeks the \$10,000 invested would produce \$40,00.
- But, if the profit is left in (rolled over), the total profit at the end of 26 weeks would be \$90,000.

How can this be done? Gibbs says that the money is invested at “border banks” (banks just outside the U.S. borders); and, when people make a money exchange, the exchange money yields a 30% profit.

When I spoke with Jan about this, I explained that—even if the scheme was financially safe,—for Jan to make that profit off someone else's misfortune would be a species of theft. They had lost money that he was gaining. Jan said he had never thought of that before.

Jan was already involved, but told me on the phone that he was going to immediately separate from such investments.

However, we have heard no word that any of those attending that seminar were later warned of the situation. And there is no assurance that, even though Gibbs may be a fine, honest, man,—others may not present similar dazzling financial offers to our people. The others may not be as helpful as Gibbs might be.

So I send out this alert to the flock, to be very cautious about “investments.” Experts who have studied the various types of gambling tell us that the most dangerous thing you can do is to make a winning, even a small one. Why? because then you will be

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