

# The Australasian Controversy in the 1980s

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Australia and New Zealand have been something of a bellwether in our denomination for over a decade. When Desmond Ford gave his landmark attack on our historic positions back in October 1979 (see our lengthy refutation, *How Firm Our Foundation—Part 1-8 [FF-8-15]*, now in our *New Theology Tractbook*), not everyone recognized it as the tip of an iceberg. At the time, he was a teacher at Pacific Union College, and this could appear to be an oddity.

Yet when we learned of the history of the Australasian Controversy, from the early 1960s onward, we knew that deep trouble was ahead. At the time (spring of 1980), the present writer predicted that Australia was ten years ahead of us, and what happened there would follow here in due course. In general, that has occurred.

Some of you will recall Colin and Russell Standish's disclosure of that apostasy down under. They narrated it on a cassette tape.

When I heard the tape, I typed it out and published it (*Australasian Controversy—Part 1-3 [FF-5-7]*, now in our *Doctrinal History Tractbook*). Later, I interviewed Colin by phone and obtained an update, which I also published (*Australasian Controversy—Part 4-5 [FF-37-38]*).

We mailed out thousands upon thousands of those tracts, and others in our *Firm Foundation Series*. The notoriety became so uncomfortable for Australasian Division headquarters, in Cooranbong, Australia, that they petitioned the General Conference for permission to change their name to the "South Pacific Division"! That was done, but the apostasy did not end with a name change.

That same year, 1980, a friend phoned from Oregon or Washington (do not recall which), and told me that, when he protested the modernism the pastor was bringing into the local church, the young man arrogantly told him, "We are going to win; you are going to lose. Every year more pastors like me are graduating from our colleges and seminary. We are going to take over the church!"

So the battle had begun in earnest; and we, here at Pilgrims Rest, switched from focusing on writing Sabbath and missionary tracts, to notify you of the progress in the apostasy and provide you with the doctrinal materials you need to meet it.

In the years which followed, steady progress has occurred in Australia and New Zealand, here in North America, and gradually extending outward to the other continents. As we told you years ago, it is the graduates of Avondale College, in Australia, who are sent to India and Africa to man the churches and teach in the schools.

But, by the early 1980s, our colleges and universities in North America were also diligently at work, molding the men and women, sent to them, into young modernists. Repeatedly, I have been told by tearful parents of how they lost their children, after sending them to PUC, SMC, Andrews, or one of our other institutions of "higher education."

The present report is about certain developments which occurred in Australia and New Zealand in the 1980s. In earlier tract studies, we have noted the ever-increasing tightening of controls over local churches there, as faithful historic Adventists were ejected and began forming separate small churches. As for the division college, Avondale went from bad to worse. Liquor drinking; tolerance of sodomy; rock concerts; and any, and all kinds, of amusement on the holy Sabbath.

But other developments were also taking place.

Recently, a friend in Australia sent us a copy of a 36-page journal, *Adventist Professional*. The masthead says it is a quarterly magazine, priced at A\$100 a year, and published by "the Association of Business and Professional Members Limited, an organisation of Adventist lay business and professional persons established in 1961."

This particular issue (dated Autumn 1997) was devoted to a special subject, and was entitled, "A Time for Healing: Adventist Administrators Reflect on the 1980s."

For a few minutes, let us see what it has to tell us. All bracketed comments are ours, unless otherwise stated at the end of the bracketed notation.

The editorial on page 2, “*The Problem Is the Way We Have Acted*,” is by Arnold Reye. A retired teacher, principal and educational director, he says that the church in Australia has claimed to be a “caring church,” but has failed to be one.

“As individuals and as a church we have caused incalculable harm to people, individual people, by our failure to recognise and address the human relational side of conflict. When the church dismisses a pastor on doctrinal grounds (or any other grounds for that matter) it appears neat, tidy and objective . . . but the human cost can be devastating.”—p. 3.

The second article, “*The Nineteen Eighties from the Perspective of the Conference Presidents: Sydney Adventist Forum reported by Arnold Reye*,” is a resume of messages brought by church leaders in a round table discussion at a November 23, 1996, Adventist Forum meeting in Sydney. Seven men who were presidents in the 1980s spoke.

One was Ken Low, president of the Victoria Conference from 1978 through 1985.

“He [Low] noted, however, that he took up his presidency without the benefit of training in administration. He offered this criticism: ‘As far as I know, the church has never trained a person specifically for administration.’”—page 5.

During the discussion, the several presidents spoke primarily about the pastors, teachers, and members who left during the 1980s. In their opinion, some left because Desmond Ford was not castigated more by leadership; some because he was not treated as more of a hero. (However, the faithful in Australia have told us repeatedly that, for the past 20 and more years, it is the historic believers, not the Fordites, which have been persecuted and hounded out of the churches.)

Page 11 begins the “*Questions and Answers*” which followed the panel discussion. Here was the key question from the audience:

“*Question*: Are you aware that there is no official recognition that Glacier View [meetings] of [June-July] 1980 even happened? The *Adventist Encyclopedia* [edition revised since that date] has nothing to say about the 1980 event. Glacier View is mentioned only as a place [it is the Colorado Conference summer camp], and the name of Dr. Desmond Ford does not appear.

“Are you aware that 33% of the delegates to Glacier View could not agree on Fundamental 23 [of

the 1980 doctrinal statement]? Are you aware that 66% of those same 112 Glacier View delegates voted that Desmond Ford remain an educator within the church, and did the church waste \$700,000 to convene Glacier View when the democratic decision was simply overruled?”—pages 11-12.

We reported at some length on the Glacier View meetings and the protest letters immediately afterward by a great majority of Pacific Union College and Andrews University administration and faculty—that Ford not be fired, but retained as a teacher! (See our Glacier View studies, WM-19, 21, and 23; now in our *New Theology Tractbook*.)

Whoever presented the above question knew a lot. If 66 percent of the delegates in 1980 wanted Ford retained in the ministry and as a teacher, that is extremely revealing—in view of the fact that those 112 delegates were selected from the cream of Seventh-day Adventist denominational Bible teachers, editors, and administrators from around the entire world! Those modernist administrators, teachers, and editors have been taking the denomination down the road to rampant liberalism ever since.

Claude Judd, Trans-Australian Union president, in his reply to that “question,” said that no such vote was ever taken at any of the formal meetings. However, we do know that a lot of straw vote activity occurred.

The *Cottrell Poll*, commissioned by the General Conference before Glacier View even convened, clearly revealed that a large number of our college and university religion teachers were modernists. They had been taught it at the non-Adventist universities where they obtained their doctorates. (Results of this important poll will be found in *The Cottrell Poll* [WM-22], now in our *Schools Tractbook*.)

“The group [of delegates attending Glacier View] was very representative: a few administrators, a few scholars, and a few leading lay persons.”—Judd, p. 12.

At one point, during the question and answer session, Dr. Trevor Lloyd (president of the Sydney Adventist Forum, who moderated the November 23, 1996, Forum) asked a question, which received several interesting responses:

“*Dr. Lloyd*: Is there general agreement that the Glacier View meetings brought a maturing in SDA doctrine?”

“*Pastor [Gordon] Lee*: I came into the scene as the results of Glacier View were being reported back to the conferences. I studied the material very closely. I wouldn’t say it brought in any new principles to our fundamentals. Rather it broadened them, it has given us a better understanding of our

doctrines, and it has placed many doctrines on a more stable foundation.

“Pastor [Robert] Parr: I think we should never forget our debt to Dr. Ford for telling us what righteousness by faith was really about.

“Pastor [Clem] Christian: I would support that too. I have to say that my understanding of righteousness by faith has been enhanced from my understanding of what Dr. Ford taught. There are other areas where I had to disagree.”—page 15.

Read *The Parr Letters [WM-27]*, now in our *New Theology Tractbook*, which reprinted Parr’s secret letters to W. Duncan Eva in the General Conference. Both men worked hard to keep Ford in the ministry and in our schools. Reading our early papers, you will learn that Eva sought earnestly to get N.C. Wilson to simply have Ford transferred to our British college instead of firing him.

“Righteousness by faith” is a code word among Australasian liberals for “salvation without obedience to the law of God.”

That 1996 Adventist Forum meeting, in which seven presidents took part, was in great measure due to a research study by Harry Ballis, published in 1995. Repeatedly, the seven presidents declared that few ministers had left the Adventist ministry during the 1980s. But Ballis’ research had arrived at a far different conclusion.

On page 19, we arrive at the key document in this issue of *Adventist Professional*. Entitled *Adventist X-Files: “The Truth is Out There,”* it is written by Harry Ballis.

For 15 years, Ballis was a pastor in both New Zealand and Australia. Leaving the ministry, he obtained advanced training and is currently “Lecturer and Head of the Sociology Section at the Gippsland Campus of Monash University.”

For his doctoral degree (entitled *Leaving the Adventist Ministry: A Study of the Social Process of Exit*), he carefully researched the number of Seventh-day Adventist pastors who quit or were fired during the 1980s.

Ballis discovered that far more ministers quit or were fired than leadership would admit. Here are the best excerpts from this article:

“I had great difficulty getting data to construct an accurate picture of the extent of fallout from the Adventist ministry in this [South Pacific] division. Early estimates of the number of ministers who exited were conservative. For example, Pastor Jorgensen dismissed as ‘hogwash’ reports in Melbourne’s *Sun-Herald* (8 February 1981) of schism in the Adventist community by asking, ‘But what are three among hundreds?’

“Likewise, in his study of Ellen White, Robert Wolfgramm noted that 14 ministers had been dismissed from the Adventist ministry between 1980 and 1982. Wolfgramm did not focus on the host of ministers who resigned.”

[Ballis’ footnote: “R. Wolfgramm, *Charismatic Delegation [sic.] in a Sect: Ellen White and Her Critics*, 1983). I do not differentiate between ex-pastors who were ‘dismissed’ from others who ‘resigned’ as representing different categories of leaving. The overwhelming majority of ex-pastors who resigned did so either because they were coerced into resigning or because of a mistaken belief that resignation would be looked upon more kindly by administrators and thus attract better settlement.”]

“*Limboline*, a monthly newsletter [now defunct] published by a group of former Adventists in California, named 100 Adventist pastors who left, although only 20 of these ex-pastors had served in either Australia or New Zealand.”

[Ballis’ footnote: “*Limboline*, 10 August 1985, 11(16): page 3. This list was a reprint of a report that was published in another similar publication (*Evangelica*) [now defunct] in February 1982.”]

“A more accurate estimate is provided by Eric Winter from his 1983 survey of pastors in Australia and New Zealand.”

[Ballis’ footnote: “Eric Winter, *Ministers in Conflict: A Study of Role Conflicts Experienced by the Pastoral Leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Avondale College, Cooranbong, NSW, 1983*, Unpublished M.A. Research Paper.”]

“Winter reported that 66 ministers had already left the Adventist ministry and that 27.2 percent of pastors he surveyed had seriously considered leaving. When his number of respondents in the ‘maybe’ category is added to the number who definitely contemplated exit, the percentage of discontented pastors in this division rises to an astonishing 43.1 percent. Winter was alarmed by this finding in which he saw a forewarning of an impending crisis.

“On three separate occasions, I communicated with officials in the division requesting assistance with numbers of pastors who left. While the church leaders expressed interest in the project and looked favourably on the study, my requests for assistance were not met.

“In frustration, I tried to survey individual conferences and wrote to Conference secretaries. This too produced disappointing results.

“According to the figures provided by the secretaries, 17 pastors left [the] ministry from their conferences between 1980 and 1985. By this time, I came to know that 28 ex-pastors left [the] ministry from these same Conferences during those years. In the end, it was by a process of deduction and individual ‘head-counting’ that I arrived at my calculations.

“The extent of the problems in the Adventist ministry are hinted at in the Division’s *Statistical Report* published annually in *The [Australasian Union] Record*. The *Statistical Report* does not identify the actual number of ministers who leave each year, however, movement in ministerial numbers can be calculated by comparing the number of ministers for each year . . .

“A more accurate indicator of the crisis in the Adventist ministry in this division is provided by the annual number of Avondale College graduates who trained for, entered [the] ministry, and subsequently left . . . At 1990, approximately 44 percent of graduates who enter [the] ministry do not continue in it. . .

“It took approximately four decades for the 1950s ministers (40) to exit, three decades for the 1960s ministers (46) to do the same. Moreover, in two decades more than half (53 percent) of graduates from the 1970s who commenced [the] ministry had left. The number exiting [the] ministry increased with each decade and now more ministers leave over a shorter period of time . . .

“The implication of these trends did not escape notice of one Avondale College educator who kept detailed records of persons who left [the] ministry and classified them according to the year they graduated from the college training program.

“It is not my intention in this article to address the issue of whether and to what extent the training program contributed to the exits, suffice to say that, contrary to claims in popular Adventist discourse, my research highlights styles of management rather than ministerial training as the critical factor.”

Ballis faults the leaders for ejecting pastors; whereas the fundamental doctrinal issues and the liberalism taught at Avondale would also be very significant factors.

“While leavers remain invisible to the church system, ex-pastors know of other ex-pastors and by means of this snowball technique I was able to establish a register of leavers.”

The following paragraph is key to his entire report:

“In the course of the research for my doctoral dissertation on Adventist ex-pastors, I compiled a list of *180 ministers who left the Adventist work in Australia and New Zealand during the 1980s* [italics his]. The figure is equivalent to approximately 40 percent of the total ministerial workforce in Australia and New Zealand. This statistic is without precedent in the Adventist church at any other time in its history or in any other place.

“The extent of the fallout from the Adventist ministry suggests that the phenomenon of pastor loss is less ‘a persistent low-grade infection’ and more like ‘a runaway epidemic.’

“The exodus from the Adventist ministry, I sug-

gest, is even more alarming when coupled with declining numbers training for [the] ministry, an increase in the number of ministers reaching retirement age, and as Winter’s survey shows, the significant number of pastors who are trapped in [the] ministry but who prefer exit.”

[Ballis’ footnote: “*John Seidler, ‘Priest Resignation, Relocations and Passivity’, National Catholic Reporter, 10 May 1974, Vol. 10, pp. 7, 14.* Seidler is of the view that for a realistic appraisal of labour turnover in churches should include priest/clergy relocation and passivity as well as resignations.”]

“If a characteristic feature of mainline denominations is minister loss, then one could argue with confidence that the Seventh-day Adventist Church in this division came of age during the 1980s.”

Here is another very important paragraph!

“As well, my analysis of membership trends in the two Australian Unions [Australia and New Zealand] shows a dramatic increase in the number of persons listed under *‘Apostasies and Missing Members’* in the annual *Statistical Report*. The figures indicate that about 8,000 members left the church during the 1980s, although realistically, I believe that figure is probably more like 12,000.”

[Ballis’ footnote: “On the issue of accuracy of denominational membership records, see *L.F. Jackson, ‘Seventh-day Adventists in New Zealand: Towards a Demographic History,’* in *P.H. Ballis (ed), In and Out of the World: Seventh-day Adventists in New Zealand, 1985, pp. 135-138.*”]

“The 1980s was a dark episode in Adventist history, and the actions of those in positions of leadership in this division should be evaluated and judged in the light of this evidence. These outcomes—the unprecedented exits—did not just fall out of the sky . . .

“My research brought me into contact with a number of ‘X-Files’ which verify ex-pastors’ claims that some church authorities in key positions of leadership encouraged and actually solicited undercover monitoring of Adventist ministers. Elders, other pastors, and conference employees informed those at union and division levels concerning the activities of local pastors with letters, transcripts and tape recordings.

“These ‘X-Files’ may be removed from the public domain and erased from the consciousness of some former administrators, but ‘The Truth is Still Out There.’”—*Harry Ballis, ‘Adventist X-Files: The Truth is Out There,’* in *Adventist Professional, Autumn 1997, pp. 19-23.*

That ends Ballis’ article. The concluding articles in this issue of *Adventist Professional* deal with the need for a renewal of public evangelism. That is needed, since the local churches are emptying out!