

The Balkanization of Adventism in North America

The Balkan Peninsula is located in southeastern Europe, and is bordered by the Black and Aegean Seas on the east, and the Adriatic Sea on the west. A range of mountains, called the Balkans, runs through most of this region, splitting it into several different small countries: the former Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, and Greece.

These small nations, lying close together, yet often unfriendly toward one another—have given rise to the word “Balkanize,” which means to break up into small, hostile political units or states.

Mainline Adventists in North America are moving into a state of partial or full Balkanization. This unfortunate condition, which has been accelerating for over a decade, is intensifying and will ultimately affect most of our people in the North American Division. In addition, because North America is the financial base for the entire world field, it will affect overseas missions as well.

This is a brief survey of this trend toward Balkanization.

THE BLACK CONFERENCES

The recommendation to organize full-fledged, separate black conferences was made at the 1944

Spring Council. Most of the eight North American Regional Conferences were organized in 1945 or 1946.

Most of us are acquainted with the fact that (with the exception of the Pacific Union and North Pacific Union) each regional conference office directs all the black churches in that union (with the exception of the Southern and Columbia Unions, each of which have two regional conferences).

In the early 1980s, leaders of the black conferences wanted to organize their own unions, but this was not approved.

As we reported earlier, beginning at the 1990 Indianapolis General Conference Session, black conference leaders held “black caucus” meetings at that city just prior to the start of the Session. This was done under strong protest by North American Division and General Conference leadership. Why the opposition? Church leadership correctly surmised that, if black leaders voted in concert on key North American Division nominations, they might represent a decisive swing vote. That is exactly what occurred. The black voting block, which resulted, became a new political power in North American Adventist politics. It influenced both the 1990 and 1995 Session votes. As reported earlier, Al McClure, president of the Southern Union, was elected NAD president because

black leaders favored him. Conference and union leaders in the Western U.S. controlled many votes and wanted one of their own placed in that office. But the black vote was the deciding factor.

As reported earlier, for several years a move has been on foot to split off regional conferences from the Pacific Union and North Pacific Union membership. If this is done, it will give the black caucus even more power at Spring and Annual Councils and quinquennial Sessions.

THE INDEPENDENT MINISTRIES

We next turn our attention to a second unfortunate split within the church: the historic Adventists. It is with special sadness that we mention this; for, at an earlier time, a majority of the denomination was historic in its standards and beliefs.

There have always been liberals and conservatives in the church, but it was not until the early 1980s that decided efforts began to be made to lessen the influence and silence the voice of historic believers in the local churches. With the exception of the smallest churches, which sometimes still have a majority of conservatives, faithful believers who have tried to teach our historic doctrines, and urge the retainment of our earlier standards, have been gradually shoved out of their offices. This has had a devastating effect on local congregations.

It has resulted in a clear fracturing of churches into liberals and conservatives. The cleavage has greatly weakened the local congregations, as it has resulted in stifling the high moral teachings of the conservatives.

It has also caused many of those conservatives to redirect their donations to other locations.

THE INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

These ongoing walling-off tactics of the liberals has been deliberately done to isolate the faithful. Modernist pastors were determined to silence or cull them out entirely. Appeals to conference offices generally accomplished nothing; the liberal pastors were generally backed, unless the complainers were wealthy.

So, from the mid-1980s onward, a growing number of faithful, Bible/Spirit of Prophecy believers left the church and formed themselves into small independent churches. The tragedy was deepening. God's plan for a united historic church preaching the Third Angel's Message of obedience to the laws of God by faith in Jesus Christ to all the world was being thwarted!

—But the liberals were saying it was no longer necessary to obey any laws of God, since we were saved at the cross! So many of the faithful departed. These separations, within the churches and out of them, continues.

THE LIBERALS

The day will come when conference, union, and General Conference leaders will discover they picked the wrong side to unite with.

The conservatives were the ones who were most faithful in giving tithes and offerings; the liberals could care less. The conservatives were the ones who believed in law and order, and working together—as long as God's Word was supreme; the liberals believed in enjoying sin for a season and following the latest fads.

This disposition on the part of

the modernists in the church, to flaunt obedience to God, is now leading them to reject the authority of the very church leaders who have done so much to advance their interests.

Women's ordination was the catalyst which started in earnest the Balkanization of the liberals.

In earlier issues of *Waymarks*, we have reported at length on progressive events in this rebellion by liberal local churches.

Here are the latest developments. They are significant:

In the spring of 1995, we predicted that, if Utrecht voted down women's ordination, the Potomac and Southeastern California Conferences would be the first to begin ordaining women. And so it happened. However, in both cases, it was liberal local churches which did it. The conference, union, and division offices chose to remain with the General Conference on the ordination issue. (Although those leaders have issued an official joint statement that they will work together toward the day when women's ordination will become a reality—all the while knowing the world field will never approve it.)

The major women's ordinations occurred at the Sligo and La Sierra University Churches. It is known that several other local churches have also been considering it. But many wondered why the Loma Linda University Church had held back.

The reason for the delay lies in a crucial report being prepared at this time by a specially appointed LLUC committee.

The man in charge of that ordination committee is William Loveless, LLU senior pastor and foremost moderator of the "meditation" retreats, which (as we reported earlier) are teaching our pastors how to use entry-level hypnotism to gain greater control over their congregations. (See our *Hypnotism Tractbook* for more on this and related

subjects.)

Not to be outdone by Sligo and La Sierra, Loma Linda is hard at work developing a comprehensive policy statement,—one which any church in Adventism can use to enter the rebellion against Utrecht and the General Conference!

This new "ministerial education and ordination policy" may include Loveless's meditation training, but it definitely will include women's ordination protocol.

It is known that a number of other large liberal Adventist congregations are waiting for this paper to be published, so they can recommend enactment of them by their local boards!

The new policy will have three special features: it will be *gender inclusive* (no difference in any respect between men and women in the ministry), have *uniform standards* (which churches everywhere can adopt), and be *congregation-based* (be founded in rebellion against conference and higher level authority).

It is well-known that Loveless is a prime mover in the formulation of this document, therefore since it is said to include both "ministerial education" as well as "ministerial ordination," it may well include a procedure for setting up meditation sessions as part of the educational training.

The completed policy will be much more comprehensive than merely women's ordination. As such, it will be a partial replacement for the *Church Manual*. Those using it, will be churches in rebellion against conference authority.

Can you see where the denomination in North America is headed?

A growing consensus of pastors are voicing the opinion that ministerial ordination should be decided at the local church level. But, of course, they will not stop there. If they succeed in rebelling on one point, they will broaden it to others.

We are all acquainted with how birth control and abortion became the issues crystalizing rebellion within the Roman Catholic Church. It appears that women's ordination will lead the rebel banner in our own.

There is clearly a trend in North American Adventism, that liberal congregations are moving toward complete separation from the Division and General Conference! How many of them will take conference offices with them cannot be known at this time.

THE COLLEGES

Our North American colleges and universities are also moving toward Balkanization. Gradually, a number of them are becoming independent units, doing whatever they wish.

One area this reveals itself is the growing rebellion against church regulations governing intercollegiate sports.

By definition, this means competitive sports in which one college plays against another. It is also called "intervarsity sports" or just "varsity sports."

In the 1940s and 1950s, on-campus sports were approved in our schools; but intercollegiate sports never had been. In the late fall of 1989, both the Annual Council and North American Division Year-end Meetings voted down varsity sports. But that same NAD meeting did approve "friendship games" between two Adventist schools. (Since sporting events are a type of war games, how can they be called "friendly?")

Since 1989, a growing number of Adventist colleges and academies have rebelled against that ruling. At the present time, these include Atlantic Union College, Columbia Union College, Southwestern Adventist College, Union College, and Walla Walla College. It also includes an increasing number of academies.

Andrews University and Oak-

wood College play an annual "friendship game," so they consider themselves as following the rules laid down by the NAD.

As noted by us in several earlier reports, during the school year these Adventist intervarsity institutions regularly send players hundreds of miles away to play athletics of competing schools. The highest excitement prevails.

Consider, for example, the Portland Adventist Academy Cougars. On Saturday night, March 9, 1996, this basketball team fought and defeated the Roman Catholic Regis High School team—and won the state 2A OSAA championship. Over a thousand Adventists watched the exciting game, and Oregon Conference President Alf Birch, was among those present to cheer their team on to victory.

Yet all this was done in defiance of a church ruling against intervarsity competitive sports.

Neither Coach Norm Ballou nor principal Michael Connor say they have heard any complaint from church members. The problem is that, as the apostasy in the church intensifies, the opposition is numbed into silence. The degree of backsliding seems overwhelming. Part of the silence arises from the fact that many of the faithful are leaving.

Gradually, the Balkanization of our colleges into competing institutions, not accountable to church policy, widens. A very knowledgeable person told us recently that our colleges are receiving as much as 50 percent of their funds in government grants and loans. This is an additional reason to ignore church leadership: Much of their money now comes from outside the church. In addition, while a growing number of the faithful refuse to send their sons and daughters to these worldly institutions, the colleges are turning to advertising for non-Adventist and overseas students to attend.

On a different level, another instance of this growing isolation of our educational institutions from church recommendations is to be found in the latest meetings at Atlantic Union College. We recently reported on the March 10, 1996, meeting, when it was disclosed that AUC's yearly operating loss (which was \$390,000 for the 1990-1991 school year) had risen to \$1.9 million, as of March 10, 1996—and that it would total \$3.2 million by the opening (opening) of the 1996-1997 school year—less than half a year later!

Such facts render the situation financially dangerous. The Atlantic Union has the lowest per-capita income of any union on the continent, and responsible leadership in the North American Division has urged the AUC constituency to either close the school or merge it with Andrews University.

But, in spite of this, the AUC constituency voted on March 31 to keep the school open, and the officers of the Atlantic Union voted to hand over \$3 million to the college and cover the \$8 million it already owed! It was also voted that the union constituency would hand over an additional \$1 million each year for the next five years.

These agreements were made, while knowing that only 31 percent of the students attending Adventist colleges, who live in Atlantic Union territory, attend AUC (28 percent go to Oakwood, 22 percent to Andrews, 13 percent to Southern, and 6 percent to Columbia Union).

Some believe that the entire Atlantic Union may financially collapse! Time will tell.

The situation is becoming wildly incoherent, with each entity doing what is right in its own eyes.

NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

As you may know, the North American Division was always closely affiliated with the General Conference. In fact, it was little more than a set of subsidiary offices

in the General Conference building! One of the General Conference officers was given the title "Vice president for North America."

But in recent years the NAD has separated from the General Conference, and last fall agreed to sign a statement issued by the union presidents declaring that ways would be found to circumvent the Utrecht decision not to ordain women.

Balkanization continues. It appears that the North American Division leadership anticipates joining the women's ordination rebellion.

THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

In an Internet posting, released December 16, 1995, Robert Folkenberg declared the women's ordination celebrations to be "just like Korah, Dathan and Abiram." This adds fuel to the Balkanization fire, and brings it all the more into the open.

At the same time, the General Conference is building strong fortifications around itself, and tightening every rein of control it can lay its hands on.

Last summer we reported at length on the various measures which Folkenberg pushed through at the Utrecht Session, granting the General Conference much greater authority and control over its own subsidiaries, while gaining still more.

One of these is the *Adventist Review*. Ellen White told the leaders that the publishing houses were not to be placed under centralized authority and that all three publishing houses were to remain in operation.

In the late 1970s, Southern Publishing in Nashville was closed, and in the mid-1980s, during the Pacific Press crisis, this writer was told the General Conference already controlled their publications. When asked how this was done, he was told that if the press did not comply, rights to print certain popular books and journals would be can-

celed. A similar arrangement had been worked out with the Review and Herald Publishing Association.

But the magazine, *Adventist Review*, continued to remain separate from General Conference control.

Until 1983, that is. Until that year, *Adventist Review* was owned and operated by R&H—but that year the Spring Council voted that the editorial offices of the *Review* would be located in or near the General Conference building, and that, henceforth, the General Conference would both cover its editorial office expenses, and would set up a publishing review board over the editing office.

Then, in the January 1996 monthly edition of *Adventist Review*, William Johnsson, its editor-in-chief, disclosed that the General Conference now totally owns and controls, what used to be, our general church paper.

Henceforth, *Adventist Review* will be the promotional arm of the General Conference, in its ongoing efforts to defuse the splintering and gain more authority to itself.

Until the retirement of Kenneth Wood from its editorship about 1981, the staff of *Adventist Review* could think for themselves. The situation worsened when Johnsson took over. Then its gradual subduction began. (Subduction occurs when something slides under something else.)

But now the transfer of control is complete. Henceforth *Adventist Review* will be the public relations arm of the General Conference.

The world church no longer has a church organ, for *Adventist Review* has become a player piano.

CONCLUSION

In describing these growing trends, we could have titled it *The Fracturing of Adventism in North America*. But *Balkanization* is a more exacting term.

To fracture is to split into pieces. But, when the pieces oppose one another, it is Balkanization. To a

great extent, this is occurring today. Indeed, it is because of resistance and conflict that these splinterings within Adventism are occurring. Some entities want more power, others want more freedom to do as they please, while still others are demanding a return to our historic beliefs.

The entire situation is regrettable, yet keep in mind that Ellen White called for decentralization. It is intriguing that, at a time when a small clique in the General Conference is trying to draw all lines of control into its own hands,—a growing number of groups within Adventism are refusing to acknowledge its authority.

Perhaps there is a providence in this. Yet it still seems to be a perverse one.

Think not that you have seen the end of this trend. It appears to be only beginning, and will probably continue to deepen.

In addition, there is every reason to believe that it may gradually spread to the entire world field.

It is true that there are advantages in decentralization,—but it should be ever based on friendly cooperation and unity in obedience to the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy.

Yet what we are finding here is a splitting apart caused by differences. In this present study, we have observed that, while part of it is caused by a concern to avoid domination and over-control, many of these fractures are caused by a desire to escape from Bible/Spirit of Prophecy principles.

As if to make matters worse, we recently reported on plans to close those smaller churches which do not appear to be complying with higher level directives. It is time to pray. Surely, we must be nearing the end.

—Vance Ferrell