

The Secularization of Adventism

PART ONE OF TWO

A friend in the Takoma Park area mailed me a book he wanted me to look at. I was reading when Linda passed by and, seeing the title, said in astonishment, “Daddy, what are you reading!”

I said, “Linda, this is a book with a title geared to an eight-year-old mind, but with a message for a thoughtful adult. It is very serious.”

She said, “What is it about?”

“About how the Seventh-day Adventist denomination has to change or it will destroy itself. Still more remarkably, it was printed by Pacific Press.”

This is a book review of George R. Knight's recent book, *The Fat Lady and the Kingdom*. If you can ignore the title, you may decide to buy the book. It should have been titled, *The Coming Self-destruction of the Adventist Church*.

The opening chapter explains the trivial title: A fat woman (a woman symbolizes a church) tries to get in the door, but cannot because she is carrying so many packages. She is determined not to lay any of them down, and she can never enter while she holds on to them.

The application is that our church has gotten so overinstitutionalized, so overmanaged, and so overfed—that it can never enter the doorway of future success unless it makes some major changes. Yet it does not want to make them.

What one finds in the book is shocking, considering that an Adventist publishing house released it. But think not that Pacific Press did it without the permission of headquarters. Back in the spring 1983, at the time of the Pacific Press crisis, we published articles to help keep it open. At that time, an official at the press told this writer that, beginning in the late 1960s, it was no longer independent. Every publication must receive General Conference approval—or else. The “or else” is a two-step program: (1) threaten to cancel its contracts to let the press print certain church periodicals and books, and (2) at the next press constituency meeting, discharge its obstinant leadership.

So, looking more closely at the coding on the copyright page, it was clear that *Fat Lady* was released in May 1995, so it could help prepare the way for Folkenberg's structural changes at the Utrecht Session. As with many books, it was released

later than planned; it should have gone out the preceding fall in order to have achieved its intended impact.

Knight happened to be fortunate that the manuscript fit so well into Folkenberg's plans—or it never would have seen ink in one of our denominational publishing houses.

For his part, I believe George Knight is sincerely trying to save the church! He has errors in his thinking, and we see them reflected in some of his assumptions and conclusions in the book, but he appears to be genuinely sincere. I appreciate that.

What Knight (a specialist in church history) did was to locate the writings of a variety of researchers (most of them non-Adventist) and report on their findings as to what makes a denomination collapse. In addition, in several chapters Knight presents brief overviews of Adventist historical development.

All of this material had previously been published or delivered as formal papers, between October 1989 and spring 1995. Putting it all together in one book makes it convenient.

In this study, we will overview his findings, and add several solutions which are more in keeping with the present crisis and Bible-Spirit of Prophecy sources. Yet, please understand, we appreciate the information he has given us in this book. You may wish to secure a copy. It is decidedly better than his new theology books, such as *The Pharisee's Guide to Perfect Holiness* and *I Used to Be Perfect*.

It is of interest that none other than Robert Folkenberg himself also published an article (*June 1989 Ministry*) dealing with the same subject (reorganizing the church in order to save it from collapse). That article sounded good: Surely, we need to cut away the bureaucracy and fat from leadership, so the church can succeed.

But then, after he took office as our world leader, Folkenberg set to work to carry out his solution (now apparent after the actions voted at Utrecht). It was to eliminate the voting power of subordinates in the divisions and General Conference—and place it in the hands of a few men (less than 15)—while all the other problems remain in place! The doctor has operated on the patient, and the patient is in worse shape than before.

THE FIVE STAGES IN THE CYCLE OF A CHURCH

David O. Moberg is a sociologist who wrote a book, entitled *The Church as a Social Institution: The Sociology of American Religion*. On pages 118-125 of that book, he detailed his “five stages in the life cycle of a church.”

Our former president, Robert Pearson, had earlier referred to those five stages, in his parting address to the 1978 Annual Council, at the time of his retirement. Although some question Elder Pearson's intentions, I believe he was a good man who earnestly tried to save us from the liberal theological takeover, which he saw looming on the horizon. We need more men like him today.

George Knight summarizes those five stages on pp. 17, 24-30 of his book. Let us consider them. Read what he says on those pages, along with what is written below:

1 - Incipient Organization.

People are dissatisfied with developments in the church, or churches, to which they belong. They want to come out of apostasy, which they fear is hurting them and their children. They are upset with hierarchical overcontrols and mismanagement. They are tired of the dead formalism, and its effect on them and their loved ones. Then a crisis, the proportion of which they can no longer tolerate, propels them to make the transition.

That which they form actually has little organization. It consists primarily of small autonomous churches.

Unfortunately, there is jostling, excitement, fakery, sensationalists, as well as truehearted pastors at work. Groups are led off by this one and that one. Gradually the number of local churches increases, but none are under any higher human authority.

Examples: The Early Christian Church, up to the time of Constantine's reign. Protestantism in Germany, from 1519 to 1530. The Advent People, from 1844 to 1855. The newly emerging Independent Adventist Ministries which are developing at the present time.

2 - Formal Organization.

The congregations get together, establish a single organization, and set up central leadership. They are moving closer to a creed. Standards are laid down, and doctrines become firm. These help identify (and separate) believers from nonbelievers.

Examples: An apostate church, Rome, stepped in at the time of Constantine and began setting up a centralized church government. The Protestant

churches from Augsburg till the end of the 15th century. The Adventist Church from 1860 to 1901.

3 - Maximum Efficiency.

At this stage, so-called “statesmen,” experts in managing committees, have taken control of the organization. There are executives, boards, committees, and policy books. Yet many are still working enthusiastically, because they continue to believe in the goals of the movement. However, in the minds of the more secular among them, self-interest is becoming of paramount concern.

By this time, there are definite church rituals, administrative procedures, and districts where each worker is to be located. There are lots of programs and campaigns. There are also historians, apologists, business professionals, and an assortment of time wasters.

That which once was the giving of a “message” is rapidly becoming a great mechanical church.

Examples: The Roman Church, after Julian the Apostate to the 7th century. The mainline Protestant Churches, after the 30 Years War till the 17th century. The Adventist Church, from 1901 to 1957.

4 - Institutional.

The organization is now sagging, and becoming top-heavy with control. It is living to itself and spiritually dying. This is the stage of formalism and institutions.

No longer is the church dedicated to spreading its message; now it is primarily concerned with feeding and protecting itself. It is selfish. It is also locked into its patterns, for committees and boards have figured out ways to become self-perpetuating. The members no longer have a voice in determining leadership or leadership decisions. It is a combination of a bureaucracy (control by committees) and a hierarchy (control by priests).

Doctrines and standards, although fixed, are now forms and becoming more widely broken. Worship services become a repetitive ritual. Fundamental beliefs are given only passing notice in church services. As Moberg describes it, the organization “has become the master of its members instead of their servants, making many demands upon them.”

Another indicator is that the church makes peace with the outside world, and attempts to bring socially “respectable” people into the ranks, regardless of their lax standards. People no longer feel part of a close-knit organization. It has become a come-and-go social club. All kinds of values and interests are to be seen. Membership feels separated from leadership, and finds it unresponsive to their needs. This renders them more passive, less interested, and

less inclined to support the organization. They are discovering they are primarily valued for their money.

Worldly interests, gatherings, and projects are abounding. A craze to ape the world is in vogue. Sermons no longer preach Christ and the primitive beliefs, but social issues and reasons why the beliefs no longer apply. Workers are primarily concerned with how they can improve their own standing, protect their jobs, move up in the ranks, and gain more coveted titles after their name.

In a class I took at the Seminary in the 1950s, one of the pastors made a comment: "It used to be that the brethren would say, 'How can I help you?'; now they say, 'This is what you can do to help me.' "

Examples: The Roman Church, from the 7th century onward. The mainline Protestant churches, from the 17th century onward. The Adventist Church from 1957 (when *Questions on Doctrine* was published, and we began our first overtures to the NCC and WCC).

5 - Disintegration.

The confusion, uncertainty, indifferentism, obsolescence, absolutism, red tape, patronage, nepotism, and corruption deepens. The organization has become a machine which is breaking down. Some church leaders run about worrying what to do, while many others could care less, as long as the structure lasts till they reach the age of retirement. Members are dropping off rapidly and entering offshoots, other denominations, or just drifting out into the world. A majority is quite worldly by this time. The church is going to pieces; yet it continues on, a burned-out hulk, for quite some time. Consider how long Rome has survived!

Example: The mainline churches in the Western world.

For stage one (incipient organization), Knight places our denomination between 1844 and 1863. He sees stage two (formal organization) as occurring between 1863 (when the church officially organized) and 1900. He sets stage three (maximum efficiency) between 1901 (when we reorganized) and 1956, when we began receiving the "right hand of fellowship" from Martin, Barnhouse, and a number of other Protestant denominations.

Intriguingly enough, Knight tells us that Moberg himself pointed to our denomination as an example of passage into stage 3—as having occurred at that time and for that reason:

"As an illustration Moberg goes out of his way in the first edition of his book (1962) to point out 'the gradual acceptance of Seventh-day Adventists into fundamentalist circles [through the aid of Walter

Martin and Donald Grey Barnhouse in the late 1950s].' "—*Fat Lady*, p. 27 [brackets his].

"If a specific date can be given for Adventism's arrival at 'adulthood,' it may best be seen as 1956, when the denomination had the 'right hand of fellowship' extended to it by Donald Grey Barnhouse, editor of *Eternity* and a highly influential fundamentalist leader. The acceptance of that fellowship unfortunately (but predictably) split the Adventist ranks between those who viewed it as a step forward and those who saw it as a 'sell-out' to the enemy."—*Op. cit.*, p. 27.

An important question is where are we now? Since it is not a nice thing for an Andrews University teacher to say that the church is in an advanced state of self-destruction, Knight assures the reader that our denomination has only arrived at stage 3. Yet the descriptive data would indicate that we are passing from stage 4 to stage 5—at this very time!

Knight wavers at times in his assessment:

"Adventism . . . teeters between stages 3 and 4 . . . but to drift into stage 4 means eventual disaster."—*Fat Lady*, p. 29.

"The better part of wisdom is renewal and reformation at the borders of stages 3 and 4 before further degeneration takes place."—*Op. cit.*, p. 30.

But, earlier, this sentence slipped in:

"It is Moberg's stage 4 that much of Adventism has definitely entered."—*Op. cit.*, p. 17.

THE O'DEA RESEARCH

Knight then turns his attention to research by another sociologist, Thomas F. O'Dea. In his 1970 book, *Sociology and the Study of Religion: Theory, Research, Interpretation* (and in a second book, *Sociology of Religion*, coauthored with Janet O'Dea Aviad and published in 1983), O'Dea discussed two dilemmas which tend to cause the downfall of religious organizations.

The first is "**mixed motivation,**" and is described in this way: **Whereas the pioneers of the organization were zealous for the original goals and the propagation of its message, many later leaders and members have other objectives.**

"A professional clergy arises that gives stability to the movement, but with stability come many 'perks': security, prestige, respectability, power, influence . . . Moreover, keeping these rewards coming tends to become a part of the motivation of the group."—*Fat Lady*, pp. 30-31.

O'Dea believes the mixed motivation problem leads to—

"the secularization of the movement as it experiences institutionalism: (1) the emergence of a careerism that is only formally concerned with the movement's goals; (2) bureaucratic growth that may be more concerned with maintaining and protecting vested interests than with accomplishing the

original goals; and (3) official timidity and lethargy in the face of problems and challenges, rather than a vital and progressive spirit that is willing to risk all for the accomplishment of the mission.”—*Fat Lady*, 31.

This lack of sincerity in maintaining and carrying out the original goals—results in an ever-increasing secularization of the church.

“For many, church membership may mean comfortable social relationships rather than a radical religious experience.”—*Ibid.*

O’Dea’s second dilemma, noted in Knight’s book, is **“administrative order.” Initially, the organizational structure aided the mission of the church; but later, departments and structures proliferate. It is something like an add-on house. So much has been tacked on, that, walking through the house, one can hardly tell where he is. Eventually, all he is looking for is the exit sign.**

“One of the most serious of those consequences is that structures that are erected to respond to a particular set of problems or opportunities are not dismantled when the reason for their creation passes. As these structures multiply, the movement’s complexity increases. While originally the structures solved real problems, their continued maintenance may greatly hinder the solving of later problems.”—*Fat Lady*, pp. 31-32.

The present writer recalls, when he was in the ministry, a fellow pastor told him this: “When I was carrying on evangelistic work up north, I was visiting homes of the interests; and, as I worked, I stopped one afternoon at the conference office. It was snowing lightly. There sat the departmental men, and I said to them, ‘Keeping warm, gentlemen?’ They should have been sent out to pastor churches or hold evangelistic meetings, but there they sat. Nothing to do.”

OUR 150th BIRTHDAY HAS PASSED

Is this trend inevitable, and what are the solutions—if any? They should not be difficult to find. Faith and obedience to the Word of God is the key.

Several times in the book, Knight alludes to the fact that **our denomination is 150 years old, and most denominations began to seriously decay at that age. He says there have never been any exceptions to the rule.**

“Adventism at 150 seems to be moving in lockstep with other religious movements from the early church to the Reformation to Wesleyanism. Each went through a secularizing process that put it off its missiological course by its 150th birthday. It is of crucial importance to realize that *not one major religious revival in the history of Christianity has successfully escaped that process.*”—*Fat Lady*, p. 41 [italics his].

Knight says each church enters the process lead-

ing to corruption (loses the “missiological course” p. 45) at age 150. **As a result of his own historical studies, the present writer gauged in the 1960s that no denomination (including the Old and New Testament churches) has lasted more than 200 years without having become solidly grounded in corrupt practices and control—with one definite exception!** There was an exception; it was the Waldenses.

If you study their history, you will find that every 50 to 80 years (averaging 70 years), heavy persecution came to the Waldenses. The armies of Rome would march in and try to destroy them. Then, in the mercies of God, the Italian wolves would be called off for a time.

Throughout those many centuries, the Waldenses adhered to their faith and trained their children to love and give their lives for it.

But in the mid-19th century, everything changed. The persecution permanently stopped. The Waldenses today are in liberal apostasy. (Some of our readers will have written for a recent tractpack, which included pages from one of their newsletters demonstrating this.)

So we see that apostasy does not have to be the certain outcome. But normal, undisturbed, unchallenged living tends to lead directly into it. It is only by resolutely meeting obstacles to their faith that the people of God can resist the corrosive effects of growth, prosperity, and denominational job security!

In the time of the Waldenses, it was repeated attacks on their lives. In our time, it is an attack on our beliefs and standards. This is revitalizing the faithful in the church. Unfortunately, the present crisis in standards and beliefs is not revitalizing the organization itself.

But we can be thankful that there are those today who are not succumbing, as are many others in the denomination, to the apostasy. Read again the last paragraph in *Great Controversy*, page 48.

Preach the message, and you will not want for enemies! In the enabling strength of Christ, sharing the Advent Message with others will keep you purified in it!

Derek Tidball, another non-Adventist sociologist researcher (whose 1984 book, *Social Context of the New Testament: A Sociological Analysis*, Knight has studied), said the solution was to be found in Paul’s counsels to Timothy (1 Timothy 1:18-19; 4:14, 16; 6:12, 20; 2 Timothy 1:6-7, 14; 2:4): Guard the

Continued on the next tract

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PART TWO OF TWO

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

original objectives, protect the interests of the flock, always remain vigilant, do not be sidetracked by side issues, and keep close to Christ (the source of strength).

“Tidball concludes by asserting that to succeed the church needs ‘to be alert constantly to the peril of mixed motives, the threat of unwieldy bureaucracy, the lessening of standards and the fossilization of principles.’”—*Fat Lady*, pp. 34-35.

But, unfortunately, the above-stated solutions work best for individual believers. Organizations and leaders tend to be above such humbling activities. While the faithful plead with God for help and earnestly work for the lost (and, throughout the world field, there are many faithful ones doing just that), the structure itself keeps heading downward.

SETTING A DENOMINATION ASIDE

Oddly enough, Knight’s next chapter (Chapter 3) consists of a comparison between Adventism and Marxism. **His point is that all organizations, both secular and religious, ultimately degenerate because those in authority are determined to take care of themselves and their own interests. They finally destroy its reason for existence, and corrupt or drive out the members needed to maintain the structure.**

Knight then introduces the point that God can take away the calling from one organization and finish the work Himself, or give it to another! (pp. 42-44)

“In another passage she [Ellen White] suggests that the great crisis could steal upon Seventh-day Adventists as a thief [3 SM 414], and in yet another place she claims that if a church is not faithful to God it can be bypassed in His work, ‘whatever’ its ‘position’ [UL, 131; italics his]. She also drew a lesson from history: ‘Because,’ we read of the ancient Jews, ‘they failed of fulfilling God’s purpose, the children of Israel were set aside, and God’s call was extended to other peoples. If these too prove unfaithful, will they not in like manner be rejected?’ [COL 304; cf. 303].”—*Fat Lady*, 44.

As if this were not enough, Knight continues on:

“From the perspective of Ellen White, God did not grant the Adventist Church any immunities.

“ ‘In the balances of the sanctuary the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to be weighed. She will be

judged by the privileges and advantages that she has had. If her spiritual experience does not correspond to the advantages that Christ, at infinite cost, has bestowed on her, if the blessings conferred have not qualified her to do the work entrusted to her, on her will be pronounced the sentence, ‘Found wanting.’ By the light bestowed, the opportunities given, will she be judged’ [8T 247].

“Again, in the midst of the Minneapolis crisis Ellen White deplored the fact that Seventh-day Adventists had been acting like other churches. She went on to say that ‘we hoped that there would not be the necessity for another coming out’ [1888 Materials, 1:356-357]. Thus Ellen White at the very least hinted at the possibility of Adventist failure. Finally in 1883 she wrote that ‘it should be remembered that the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional.’ [1 SM, 67].”—*Fat Lady*, p. 44.

Knight tries to explain to the people that God may intervene—and end history in a manner different than the church members or leaders are expecting, if they do not fulfill the “faith conditions” (p. 45:4).

Knight may not realize that the future has already been outlined for us by our kind Father. (See our *End-Time Series*, Book 18, with the most complete collection of classified Spirit of Prophecy statements available on coming events.)

That oft-quoted statement: “The church will appear as about to fall, but will not fall,” appears in several books. But in only one place is it quoted in its context. This passage is referring to the National Sunday Law crisis. The church will appear about to be destroyed at that time,—but the faithful ones will stand true, and go through to the end. This is discussed more fully in *The Shaking and Sifting* (Book 4 in the *End-Time Series*).

OUT OF CONTROL

In Chapter 4, Knight says **an organization finally reaches a point where there are too many institutions and they are not accomplishing their purpose. Yet they remain under the direction of an entrenched management—over which the members have no control.**

“There is too much talent allotted to greasing the wheels and watching the baggage. In fact, there are too many wheels and too much baggage.”—*Fat Lady*, p. 52.

“In many places we have more pastoral talent in the bureaucracy than we have in the frontline. And it must be remembered, once you get above the local conference level, it is largely the bureaucrats who continue, quinquennium after quinquennium, to vote the bureaucrats in.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 51.

Knight is here referring to the General Conference Sessions which convene once every five years. What he may not have known was that the forthcoming Session at Utrecht would eliminate a great number of the votes carried out at future Sessions. Henceforth a large number of the officers will be appointed by the General Conference and division presidents! (See our several studies on The Utrecht Session, published in July and August 1995).

Knight also mentions that there is a need to stop encouraging pastors and other lower-level workers to believe it is their work in life to keep moving up the ladder. Sound advice.

“We need to destroy the mentality that treats a move from the pastorate to administration as a ‘promotion.’”—*Op. cit.*, p. 51.

“Too many pastors have their eye on hierarchical advancement, rather than . . . developing into first-rate biblical preachers who feed an ever-growing flock.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 52.

He also warns that, if changes in the structure and function of the denomination are not made, the results will be unsavory:

“We could see the gradual strangulation of the church in the industrialized world. As frustration with the bureaucracy increases, dissident groups will drain away more and more tithe. Among those who maintain their loyalty, the more intelligent will be more and more troubled over supporting a system that is not functioning . . . efficiently.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 51.

By the “Western world,” Knight is referring to North America, Europe, and Australia/New Zealand, where tithe is, in relation to wages, dropping off, and membership is at a near standstill (p. 50).

CHURCH STANDARDS

The next several chapters deal with a historical review of Adventist development, in missionary work (Chapter 5); organizational structure [publishing, medical, educational, and conference] (Chapter 6); and educational and mission vitality (Chapter 7).

Then comes Chapter 8 on church standards. Although this is also a historical review, it is more controversial, for it contains errors which require comment.

Knight begins by noting the contrast between the Amish and the Methodists. The Amish dwell in the past, treasure earlier standards—and because they refuse to change them, cannot reach contemporary society. In contrast, the Methodists have so united with the world that they have become faceless and

useless.

Knight maintains that the balance is to adapt the standards to the times in which we live.

But this is a false analogy. We are acquainted with Amish practices. Their peculiar standards generally have no relevance to Scripture. One of their groups (the Schwartzentruber group of Old Order Amish) forbids the growing of flowers around their homes! All sorts of peculiar practices have developed, which have no basis in God’s Word. It is just handed-down tradition from long-dead elders.

The fact is that standards given in the Bible and/or Spirit of Prophecy are timeless! They never go out of date! Abortion, immorality, immodest clothing, needless adornment,—will always be “in style,” as far as the world is concerned. We can forsake God, but He will not forsake His Written Word—and that is where His standards are to be found.

“They [Adventists] . . . need to learn from the Amish conundrum that standards do change with time and place.”—*Fat Lady*, p. 108.

Which of our standards need changing? health standards? clothing standards? educational standards? worship standards? None of them. We have been bequeathed a precious heritage of principles. Yet there are those among us who want to new-model the church, so it will be more acceptable to the worldlings around us.

Knight tells us that part of the organizational problem is the need to revise our standards to meet people in our time:

“Adventism is at present in the midst of a critical juncture in its development. The church has yet to face successfully two facts: (1) modernity and (2) that Adventism has acquired a century and a half of traditions that may or may not be helpful in preparing people to live as Christians in the twenty-first century. One party in Adventism would pull it toward the Amish solution, while another group would allow the church to drift toward uncritical assimilation of culture.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 108.

What need have we to change our God-given standards, just because we are about to “enter a new century”? Why should the number of a century matter more important than the morals of our people?

Knight then proceeds to explain how various points were adopted by the denomination over the years, such as facial hair, etc. It is noted that some changes occurred through *Review* articles, others through position papers.

Eventually Knight comes to that source of standards we are waiting for him to discuss: *In some instances, he says we obtained a standard from the Spirit of Prophecy.* His subhead for this section

is “Grab a Quote”—and that is the theme: One person grabs and twists one quote and another does it to another one. The inference is that we should be very careful about using the Spirit of Prophecy as a norm for standards.

But that viewpoint is incorrect. **The Spirit of Prophecy is always instructive, correct, and accurate. Those Heaven-sent quotations line up like telephone poles, pointing the wayfarer in one direction, and one direction only. You will be guided if you submit to God’s Word, and search it for personal standards.**

Knight’s primary vindication for his viewpoint in this “grab a quote” section, is the illustration of a physician who disliked “gold wedding bands,” but who drove a “gold-colored Cadillac.” Therefore, according to Knight, we should not place much confidence in Spirit of Prophecy quotations.

“The plain fact is that he had a quotation from Ellen White on gold wedding bands, but had undoubtedly searched her writings in vain for any condemnation of gold Cadillacs.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 117.

That is the excuse given for throwing out the Spirit of Prophecy! Knight suggests that many of our problems regarding standards have arisen from using the Spirit of Prophecy as a source for standards to live by:

“The use and misuse of Ellen White’s writings typically stand at the center of Adventist approaches to the formulation of standards.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 118.

Ironically, later in the book, Knight decries the inevitable result of casting aside the Spirit of Prophecy—without having recognized that that is the problem!

“The denomination has no systematic means for either reviewing past standards or developing standards that face the issues of modern culture . . .

“One result is that the denomination too often is fighting a rearguard action against the erosion of its standards.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 122.

It is deeply unfortunate that the man who has the audacity to tell the denomination that it is going to pieces—cannot recognize the single, most crucial, factor causing that destruction!

Our denomination is collapsing because it refuses to trust and obey the Word of God! Having cast aside the books containing the standards, the standards are also being thrown down.

OUR PROPHETIC BELIEFS

In Chapter 9, Knight examines our “prophetic roots” in Daniel and Revelation and, without naming them, decides they are worthwhile. That is a refreshing response in one of our denominational publications. **Then he inquires what might be the cause of the success of Adventism.**

The opinions of three non-Adventist historians is reviewed. They say our denomination grew because the 19th century was a good time for revivalism, millennialism. Natural disasters (including changing weather patterns) and similar trivia helped out (pp. 133-134).

But then Knight suggests several internal factors within our church which were significant—and worth our attention (pp. 134-140):

(1) We had a basic cohesive cluster of beliefs which made sense. (2) We had special truths which were distinctive and attracted new members. (3) Because these truths were opposed, it drew the members more solidly together against the world. (4) We, alone among the Millerite groups which followed 1844, had authority above the congregational level. (5) A sense of urgency driving us to proclaim our message, because we were a people predicted in Bible prophecy for this time in history.

“The fourth, and by far the most important, factor in the rapid spread of Millerism was its sense of prophetic mission and the sense of urgency generated by that prophetic understanding . . . Millerism was a mission-driven movement.”—Fat Lady, p. 137 [italics his].

Then Knight quotes a statement made by Joshua V. Himes (who was second only to Miller in that movement) in the first issue of his weekly newspaper:

“Our Work is one of unutterable magnitude. It is a mission and an enterprise, unlike in some respects, anything that has ever awakened the energies of men . . . It is an alarm, and a cry, uttered by those who, from among all Protestant sects, as Watchmen standing upon the walls of the moral world, believe the WORLD’S CRISIS IS COME—and who, under the influence of this faith, are united in proclaiming to the world, ‘Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him!’”—*J.V. Himes, Midnight Cry, November 17, 1842.*

Knight says that a driving sense of mission came from the truths they had found in Daniel and Revelation. The Adventist Church inherited those beliefs and that sense of urgency.

Knight then explains that, in contrast, the other Millerite descendant denominations dried up—because they later rejected and forsook those beliefs. Some literally denied them, while others spiritualized them away.

We appreciate these comments by George Knight. **Unfortunately, he never gave the other powerful fact which held the Advent Movement together and gave it power, understanding, and divine guidance to a pre-eminent degree: the Spirit of Prophecy.**

ARE WE DYING?

Changing to a more somber note, Knights wonders whether our organization will now die—as the other Millerite descendant groups are dying.

He cites as one problem that fact Jesus has not returned, in spite of the fact that 150 years has passed. Frankly, I do not think that complaint is valid. Jesus said in Revelation 22 that He was going to return quickly. Faith in that fact has kept countless millions in the faith through the centuries. That truth has saved their souls. Nowhere are we told, in the Bible or Spirit of Prophecy, that He will not return soon. So He will. The truth is that, in view of eternity, a wait of 2,000 years before He returns is but the blink of an eye.

The Christian who goes through to the end, will be the one who talks courage and is full of it. He is not one who goes around mourning, doubting, and tempting his fellow believers to doubt that the coming of Christ is not near!

Genuine Christians have no question whether Christ is coming soon. And they do not love Him the less because He does not come immediately.

I choose to be among that number who trust Him no matter how soon He returns. Will you join me?

Then Knight goes on to mention other problems which are causing the denomination to sink downward (pp. 142-144):

(1) The wealth and affluence of the members in the Western world. (2) An overextended, poorly functioning organization.

“Decades of expansion and change have created a bureaucracy that is extremely expensive to maintain and appears to be becoming progressively dysfunctional in fostering the mission of the church in the most efficient manner.”—*Fat Lady*, p. 142.

(3) Members who are leaving and forming separate congregational churches [the independent ministries].

(4) Overinstitutionalism.

“There is a tendency for its extensive educational, publishing, conference, and medical institutions to become ends in themselves rather than means for the end of taking the denomination’s peculiar message ‘to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.’ Thus there is the danger of the denomination gaining its self-image from its institutions rather than from its stated mission.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 143.

(5) The danger of forgetting our prophetic heritage.

CONCLUDING PROBLEMS

In Chapter 10, Knight mentions the apparent conflict between the ideas of “occupy till I come” and “I come quickly.” **Some want to get a high seat in the work and enjoy the good life. Others want to get the work done and go home. This contrast**

produces a mutual conflict.

Then there is the oddity that “success is failure.” The more successful our church is, Knight says, the more reason it sees to sit back and enjoy its prosperity.

Frankly, if our people worked in humility of heart, pleading with God for souls, and giving Him all the glory, success would be no problem. Victories won would drive us to our knees in praise to Him and pleading for more victories. We would be doing the right things in the right way, and have the right kind of success.

Knight also notes the tendency for many of our people to disregard their past. In doing this, he says, they unconsciously lose their identity.

Well said. Our church members, in hankering after the world, are being absorbed into it. **But there is more to the problem than remembering our past; we must also adhere to the beliefs and standards given us of God in our past!**

“Either God had led them or they had been deluded. Relating to their past history had become an important aspect of their identity . . . A church that has lost its past jeopardizes its future and risks existing in a muddled present in terms of its cosmic mission.”—*Ibid.*

Nicely said. But then he spoils it in the next paragraph:

“One [way to deal with changing times] is to live in the past as if the past can somehow be preserved intact in perpetuity as a golden age. Such an approach disregards the reality of change.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 158.

Historic believers are not living in the past! They are living today, dealing with today’s problems. But they use the Inspired Word of God to deal with it. And that Word comes from “the past.”

There are no living prophets today. If we needed them, we would have them. But we do not need them. We have thousands of pages of valuable counsels—given by full inspiration of God—which we hardly look at. If we will not read and obey that which we already have, we would not accept what God sent, even through one raised from the dead.

Knight concludes with the numbers game: Everyone counts numbers: how much we have and how much we have done—and calls that success. This is how organizations prove that they are doing well.

For a lengthy list of areas which need to be changed in order to turn the church around, see the chapter by that name at the end of my book, *Collosion Course*.

—Vance Ferrell