

NAD Year-end Meeting: Pension and Salary Turmoil

W
M

1
0
0
6

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: Nomad Removed from the ABCs

PART ONE OF TWO

LETTER FROM A CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

On October 23, 2000, Jim Brauer, president of the Rocky Mountain Conference, sent a letter to “pastors and friends” of the conference. This letter, apparently not sent to many people, included these two paragraphs:

“It is imperative that we join hands in prayer this week as we approach North American year-end meetings [the annual meeting, covering several days, of North American Division officers]. Issues, regarding the retirement plan and whether all conferences will continue to support it, continue to escalate in tone and substance. Efforts to find a solution have broken down, legal implications are significant, but of most importance is [maintaining] the clear unity of the church . . .

“I do not wish to say anything specific regarding current events for fear of further causing a split. But I do want you to know the situation is very serious, even to a discussion of creating a new denomination. So please pray this week and especially next week during year-end session.”—*Jim Brauer, Rocky Mountain Conference, October 23, 2000.*

That was, indeed, a remarkable statement. What is it all about? Our readers will recall that we have written several tracts on the pension fund crisis in the North American Division (NAD). These studies include: *General Conference Retirement Fund in Trouble [WM-500]*, *Our Church Retirement Fund Crisis [WM-668-669]*, and *Changes in the Church's Pension Funds [WM-838]*.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

For decades, the leaders have followed the example of the U.S. federal government—and used part of the retirement funds for other needs. Just as Congress found it convenient to spend Social Security funds for other things, the Adventist denomination has done the same thing. In both cases, it was felt that, since the population was growing, new additions paying into the pension fund would care for those retiring.

However, in the mid-1980s, membership in the denomination did not continue as it should—and, in re-

sponse to the growing laxity in standards and adherence to the original teachings of Adventism, tithes and offerings began falling off. The placated liberals believed neither in standards nor tithing, and the conservatives were rather consistently rebuked when they pled for a return to historic principles. Both sides increasingly voted with their wallets.

The result was an increasing reduction in the number of pastors who were hired. This produced a lopsided situation in which more workers were retiring than were being added to the workforce.

The earlier “defined benefit” retirement plan, which only had a pension fund equal to three times the funding for a single year, was “frozen” as of December 21, 1999. In its place, a “defined contributions plan” was started. Under it, each employing church entity makes a smaller basic, monthly tax-deferred contribution for each eligible employee, with an additional matching amount for those employees who choose to make voluntary contributions of their own through payroll deduction. No longer does the church manage the funds; instead, the individual workers do.

But the old plan still had to be kept in place for the 14,500 workers already retired and the many more who will retire under that plan in the future. This meant that, beginning in 2000, the conferences have to make contributions for both plans.

REGIONAL CONFERENCES OBJECTED

But eight of the nine regional conferences, which have a majority of black members, did not like the new plan, because their workers would henceforth have to pay more. So, prior to the changeover date, they developed a separate plan. As part of it, they now no longer contribute their 9% of tithe to support the old plan! This means that the NAD is providing retirement payments to black workers, without being reimbursed by eight former regional conferences which employ them.

Those eight conferences maintain that, in the past, they have contributed far more to the funding of the old plan than the benefits received by retired workers in those conferences. This is partly due to the fact that

the amount of title received by those conferences is more than the number of black workers throughout the division.

Feeling that their workers were being unjustly treated, the black conferences even threatened to pull out of the pension plan entirely,—and there has actually been talk of their forming a separate organizational structure! This may not occur; for such talk was primarily intended to prompt NAD leadership into effecting radical changes in the pension program which would be more favorable to the regional conferences. Crucial to the problem is whether workers should pay an increased amount into the retirement fund. This, of course, would reduce their monthly salaries. (One other predominantly black regional conference has, so far, not joined the eight in their “pension rebellion.”)

That, in brief, is an overview of the pension problem. This is what the officers attending the fall 2000 year-end meeting were confronted with.

THE 2000 NAD YEAR-END MEETING

The North American Division executive committee’s year-end meeting convened from Sunday, October 29 through Monday, November 1.

Early in the meetings, the presidents of the eight regional conferences announced the group’s intention to totally pull out of the NAD retirement program. This led to a special meeting, chaired by a General Conference NAD president (Don Schneider); during this time, everybody had a chance to air his opinions, feelings, and concerns.

Since the changeover began (January 2000), the eight regionals have withheld \$7 million from the new plan. A Lake Region officer said that, in 1999, it paid in \$900,000 while its retirees drew out less than \$300,000. In the same period, Central States said it paid in \$300,000 while its retirees drew out only \$60,000.

Actually, all conferences pay more than the actual costs to fund their own retired employees. The excess helps pay benefits for overseas and institutional employees, when they retire.

But, as already noted, the regionals also object to the new plan of having current employees help pay for their own retirement. Regional officials felt that their workers, who essentially receive the same amount of pay as the non-regional conferences and entities, could not afford to make those payments.

Ultimately, no action was voted on the retirement problem, either in that special meeting or in the main session. So the matter remains unsettled. It is still hanging, and there is the possibility that the regional conferences may yet bolt from the denomination. Although that is not likely to happen, they probably will continue with their separate retirement program.

THE SALARY PROBLEM

Many wage-related challenges confront local conferences and educational institutions in North America.

A number of our college and university faculty members are quitting in order to obtain better paying jobs elsewhere, and conferences are having a difficult time getting enough money to pay pastors’ salaries.

Some of our medical institutions, colleges and universities, Adventist Risk Management (the General Conference insurance department), and one of our publishing houses have abandoned the official church pay scales—and are now paying higher salaries.

Discussion over this ongoing problem continues, but there seems to be no solution in sight. As with the retirement fund problem, no definite decisions were made, at the 2000 year-end meeting, which would solve the salary problem. The same problems had been discussed at the previous year-end meeting, also without resolution. One of the officers attending this year’s session said to those in attendance: “The problem I see is that there seems to be no sunset on when these discussions will end . . . Is there any indication as to when the discussions will end so a decision can be made and both can move forward?”

THE IMPACT OF ALL THIS

Gradually, it seems, the denomination is falling apart. As long as we adhered to our historic standards and teachings, we were safe and united. But, since the 1950s, our denomination has encountered one problem after another.

Whether it be financial, doctrinal, standards, or whatever, the organization is gradually headed downhill. When we departed from strict obedience to our Bible-Spirit of Prophecy principles, we started to unravel.

The more we chased after Celebrationism, ecumenism, worldly standards, and the new theology, the more the Lord left us to our own ways. As it was in the days of the Judges, so it is today in our denomination. Everyone is doing what is right in his own eyes—instead of what the Lord commands in the inspired Scriptures—and we are suffering for it. As Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 28, the other nations are becoming the head and we are becoming the tail.

Regarding the retirement and salary problems, what will happen is that even fewer pastors will eventually be employed by the conferences, and each will shuttle back and forth between more churches. Ministers will spend even more time managing committee meetings instead of winning souls.

The publishing houses will charge even more for their books. This is unfortunate; for we had hoped that they would lower their prices on *Great Controversy*, etc., to match those of independent ministries.

Our academies, colleges, and universities will charge even higher rates of tuition.

Smaller amounts of money will be sent overseas for mission work, and even more will be sunk into paying local bills at home.

—vf

Nomad Removed from ABCs

The more we learn about it, the stranger the situation becomes. Here are the events as we now know them:

1983

INITIAL PUBLICATION OF THE BOOK

William L. Self, pastor of a Baptist church in Atlanta, Georgia, published a book, *Confessions of a Nomad*, which he and his wife, Carolyn, co-authored, through an Atlanta publishing house (Peachtree Publishers).

As quoted in our recent *Adventist Nomads [WM-1001]*, with the inclusion of facsimile pages from it, their book clearly teaches the importance of keeping Sunday sacred. They emphatically declared that it alone was able to prepare Christians for the other “six working days.”

1998

ADVENTIST CHURCH REPRINTS IT

1998—The General Conference Ministerial Association voted to purchase the copyright on the book, thus acquiring ownership of it so they could have one of our denominational printing houses print and distribute it to all our English-speaking ABCs throughout the world field.

“Copyright © 1998 Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.”—*Copyright page*.

For two reasons, it cannot be said that the acquisition and publishing of this book was done ignorantly:

1 - Our denomination would not purchase a book authored by a Baptist minister without first carefully examining its contents.

2 - According to the copyright page, the book was carefully read again and proofed at Pacific Press.

“Originally published by Peachtree Publishers, Atlanta, Georgia, in 1983. All copy has been reset and repaginated. Several short portions have been edited to conserve space.”—*Copyright page*.

It appears that the only omitted portions were probably portions of the authors’ description of a trip to the Middle East. It is truly astonishing that several pages of strong praise for Sunday sacred-

ness would be retained while other things of minor consequence were omitted “to conserve space.”

THE CRESS DOCUMENT

In response to complaints from faithful Adventists who had purchased the book, the Ministerial Association refused for two years to consider withdrawing the book. James A. Cress has been in charge of the General Conference Ministerial Department since at least 1995. On December 28, 2000, he sent a four-page document by e-mail to several inquirers. One of them sent us a complete copy. While consisting primarily of a defense of their continued publication of the book, he inadvertently provides a number of remarkable facts.

This *Cress Document*, which we have reprinted in its entirety later in this tract set, is arranged in a somewhat confusing format: (1) There is a “Response #1,” dated August 30, 2000, in which he defended the Ministerial Association’s publication of the book and announced that, in spite of the many complaints received, the book would continue to be sold to Adventists and Protestants. (2) In his “Response #2,” dated September 18, he announced the book had finally been withdrawn from the ABCs (although we will learn that the actual withdrawal did not occur till mid-December, when it happened extremely fast). (3) The two “responses” are prefaced by a brief cover letter, dated December 28, 2000. In order to simplify your reading of our comments on the “responses,” we have numbered the paragraphs.

AUGUST 30, 2000

MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION REFUSES TO STOP PRINTING AND SELLING IT

This is what you will find in the August 30 statement:

• *Para. 1-3:* This begins an extended excuse for the section in the book about Sunday sacredness. Cress says that, if the reader had read the portions about a trip to the Near East, he would have not thought so badly about the book. But details of a sightseeing trip to parts of Egyptian territory cannot exonerate passages which strongly de-

fend Sunday sacredness and urge its acceptance by everyone.

• *Para. 4:* “The Ministerial Association did not edit this book in any way.” No excuse can be pleaded for leaving the Sunday exaltation in the book! If the Ministerial Association went to the expense of purchasing a full copyright to the book, they could easily omit the Sunday sacredness pages.

“The cover of the book makes it clear that this is a Baptist pastor writing from a Baptist perspective.” Why are we publishing such a book as that? Who authorized the Ministerial Association to do this? Between 1998 and the present time, why did not someone in authority in the General Conference tell them to stop selling it?

Cress would doubtless argue that the book described a visit to Mount Sinai. But, ever since the mid-1950s, many Adventists have visited Holy Land sites, and a number have written books about their travels. In my library, I have a privately published book by Leona Running. It is fascinating, but the church never published it. Another small book by William A. Fagel, head of Faith for Today, about his trip to Mount Sinai was also very interesting. Both books have been out print for decades. Why were they not reprinted instead of a Sundaykeeping Baptist’s book? Our people do not need books written “from a Baptist perspective”!

• *Para. 5:* Cress actually states that the General Conference Ministerial Association intentionally—deliberately—searches for non-Adventist books to publish for our ministers, which will educate them in non-Adventist thinking! This is incredible.

“We carry a number of books by authors from various denominations as part of our resources.” Amazing. Later, in para. 12, he mentions that you can obtain a complete listing, with prices, of all those non-Adventist books from

ministerialassociation.com.

This afternoon a search was made for those other Protestant books on that website; although 65 books are listed, they are careful to avoid stating whether or not the author is an Adventist! So the reader purchases ignorantly, thinking he may be purchasing Adventist books when he may be buying books authored by Catholics, Pentecostals, or whatever. Yet, several times in his “responses,” Cress emphasizes that the purchaser can always know in advance when the book is not written by an Adventist.

• *Para. 6:* The admission is made that “Dr. Self” has provided our ministers with training seminars “on a number of occasions,” and *Nomads* is only one of five of his books the Ministerial Association has reprinted and is currently selling! Cress is adamant that he is not going to remove any of those five books from the ABCs. Our ecumenical connections with Protestant and Catholic churches and pastors are gradually wrapping us deeply in the folds of the enemy. For some reason, we seem to owe the other denominations a debt that we must repay by repeated concessions.

• *Para. 6-7:* Once again, the statement is made that “in no way” has the Ministerial Association “edited the books for either content or writing style,” but only corrected a few typographical errors. Yet, according to the copyright page of *Nomad* (quoted earlier), Pacific Press was quite free to eliminate some material in order to fit the space.

• *Para. 8:* “We do not purport that this reprint is an Adventist-endorsed theological position.” But they do not deny it either. According to this argument, it is all right for the General Conference to print and sell a book advocating any kind of error,—as long as a General Conference endorsement of that error is not printed on the back cover! Astounding. Let Adventist readers beware what they buy in Adventist bookstores. If the church does not intend to protect its people from error, they had better just read their Bibles and Spirit of Prophecy books.

Another remarkable admission: Cress says that neither the General Conference, Pacific Press, nor our ABCs make any profit on this book. All the profit goes to Dr. Self and the expense of his seminars to Adventist and non-Adventist pastors! What is this infatuation that we have for Dr. Self, that we cannot even permit Pacific Press nor our ABCs any margin of profit on his books?

• *Para. 9:* We are told that, by August 2000, Cress had already received many complaints about this book, some of them from ABC managers about its emphasis on Sunday sacredness. But Cress says his response was to assure them not to worry themselves about the matter,—since they were already selling many other books by non-Adventist preachers! In other words, He is as much as saying, “You are already selling a lot of other bad books, so another one won’t hurt.” Cress is here revealing a publishing policy: Sell most anything in our ABCs, and the “readers” are expected “to glean good things

Nomad Removed from ABCs

W
M
1
0
7

EARLIER IN THIS ISSUE: NAD Year-End Meeting

PART TWO OF TWO

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

and discard those which are unacceptable. We would expect the same from any reader of this book.”

• *Para. 10:* “Of course, we are not promoting Sunday in any manner.” Is that a truthful statement? “The ABCs, who sell books by various authors, are not promoting their theological positions.” A fabulous statement. Again, we say, let the buyer beware. The consensus apparently is, “Hand them anything to read that they are willing to buy. It’s not our fault they take the books home. Whatever effect those books may have on their families, we care not. *For we are not responsible for anything we sell them!*”

But, we inquire, why are our leaders doing this? Are we trying to indoctrinate our people into the beliefs of our ecumenical brethren? Do we consider the sale of more books by our ABCs to be worth the price in lost souls?

• *Para. 11:* Once again Cress returns to the fact that our denomination is now printing books for Protestant ministers. Cress should tell our ABCs to place this sign over those books: “Written by non-Adventist preachers, containing the erroneous teachings of non-Adventist preachers, and proudly printed by authorization of the General Conference for sale to our people.”

James Cress continues: “You should know that Adventist denominational funds did not pay for these books to be developed/published. The costs were born primarily through Dr. Self’s own heavy utilization of these books in his seminars, for which we provided a service by reprinting books that he no longer was able to obtain.”

There are three points in the above quoted paragraph which mutually falsify one another.

The first sentence says that we did not pay to print Self’s books. The first part of the second sentence says that Self paid for them because they are having a very brisk sale at his Protestant seminars. The last part says we had to come to the aid of poor Dr. Self and reprint his book,—because he could no longer do it (either he could not afford to

or non-Adventist publishing houses refused to print it; what other reasons could there be?). But the first and second sentences say that his money, not ours, paid for the book!

If a person has the money to print a book, it is easy to find a printer. If the book has been selling well, he has the money. It is not necessary for Pacific Press to print it, because it is not true that it cannot be printed anywhere else.

And then Cress makes this statement, two years after the book was initially printed by Pacific Press and complaints kept rolling in: “We will NOT be withdrawing the book as some have requested” (emphasis ours). Well, that is clear enough. As of August 2000, our Ministerial Association refuses to remove a book, strongly advocating Sunday sacredness, from the presses at Pacific Press and the shelves of our ABCs.

• *Para. 12:* Cress has the effrontery that it is all right for us to sell Sunday sacredness books, because Ellen White recommended that our people read similar books!

Cress again states that our Ministerial Association has printed five of Self’s books. He surely is not ashamed of the fact. Anyone, he adds, can obtain a list of all the non-Adventist books they print from the website: ministerialassociation.com.

**SEPTEMBER 18, 2000
MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION
WITHDRAWS BOOK**

Now we turn our attention to “Response #2” on the Cress Document (reprinted later in this tract).

• *Para. 2:* So many complaints continued to pour in to our ABCs and the General Conference Ministerial Association that, on September 18, James Cress announced that the book had been withdrawn “from distribution.”

**FIRST OF DECEMBER
BOOK STILL BEING SOLD IN ABCs**

But the September withdrawal announcement was only made to about 15 people (*para. 1*), and the book continued to be sold in a number of our ABCs. It was available at the Oregon ABC by the

first of December, and others told us that it was obtainable elsewhere by that date.

**DECEMBER 10, 2000
PILGRIMS REST MAILING**

For some reason we are not clear about, our people kept sending in their complaints to our ABCs and the General Conference Ministerial Association, year after year, without conclusive success. Finally, James Cress said that the Ministerial Association “withdrew” the book in mid-September, but the ABCs were permitted to continue selling their stock.

But when Pilgrims Rest printed thousands of tracts and mailed them out, exposing what had been taking place, within a remarkably short time the head of the Ministerial Association ordered the ABCs not only to sell no more,—but to ship back their current stock so it could all be destroyed.

Our tract was mailed out about December 10, and reached most of the East Coast by December 20. Shortly after that, the book could not be obtained anywhere in America.

By mid-December:

- Several friends told us how they phoned ABCs all over the country, trying to locate a copy, but without success.

- The Oregon ABC told a friend that it had been ordered to mail all its copies back to the publishing house. It had earlier said it would mail him a copy from off the shelf.

- Another ABC told a different friend that the book was no longer in their book list.

- The Potomac ABC told yet another friend that, in the words of the manager, the books had been sent back “so they could be shredded.”

- Another friend told us that, when he phoned an ABC and asked to order it, he was told the book had only been printed “for the Baptists.”

- Another friend contacted the General Conference Ministerial Association and was sent the e-mail with the two “responses,” which we are reprinting in this tract.

It would be interesting to phone a Baptist bookstore and see if they are still carrying copies of this Pacific Press book! Although the Adventists may not want to read about Sunday sacredness, the Baptists probably will be delighted to keep buying books, printed by the Adventists, which exalt this “child of the papacy” (*Great Controversy*, 54).

It is of interest that, upon receiving our tract, another friend phoned and told us that, in the summer of 2000 at Toronto, many expressed anger about that book. Yet, incredibly, Cress refused to withdraw it until later in the year.

DECEMBER 28, 2000

CRESS RELEASES TWO EARLIER LETTERS

So many complaints had come in by this date, that Cress sent out a third memo which included both of his earlier “responses.” This was done in the hope that, by reprinting the excuses in his August 30 letter, people would understand why it was considered all right to keep selling the book—even after church members pled that its sale be terminated.

CONCLUSION

What are we to make of all this? One friend commented that this was either part of a plot to infiltrate Sundaykeeping into the minds of our pastors and church members or a mammoth example of incompetence on the part of several of our highest denominational offices: in the General Conference Ministerial Association and the editorial offices of Pacific Press.

But two other factors should also be kept in mind: (1) Our ever-increasing ecumenical entanglements which require that we please “our Protestant and Catholic brethren.” (2) An opportunity to print and sell more books to Adventists.

Regarding the reason why Pacific Press was willing to print a Sundaykeeping book, I should mention this:

It is true that several key leaders at Pacific Press are very liberal. But it is also true that Pacific Press must print whatever the General Conference tells it to print. In 1983, we were reporting extensively on the efforts of the General Conference to reduce Pacific Press to nothing more than an editorial office. All the equipment was to be sold off. Our tracts, exposing what was planned, were sent out by the thousands by Pacific Press workers that spring. General Conference officials were so embarrassed that they did not close down our West Coast publishing house after all.

While that controversy was raging, one high-placed worker at the Press told me that they had to print whatever the General Conference sent them or their contract to print the Sabbath School materials, certain journals, and the Spirit of Prophecy books would be cancelled.

As you may know, Ellen White made strong statements that each of our publishing houses was to remain independent of General Conference control (*Confederation and Consolidation [RS-17-19]*). But the situation has changed since she wrote those words. She clearly recognized the danger of centralized control over our institutions. (We know what happened when our hospitals came under centralized control.)

—vf

I now have a copy of this book that the Ministerial Association has pulled from the ABCs. The front cover shows the title above reddish-brown pebbles.

On the back cover, we are told this:

“When Carolyn and Bill Self toured the Sinai, they saw far more than the beauty and desolation of the desert. They saw their journey across Sinai as a metaphor for modern life . . . *Confessions of a Nomad* is a guide for modern Christians crossing the desert of life. It follows Moses’ journey across the Sinai through Scripture. Each passage ends with a prayer. ‘Are you in bondage? Are you a slave? Many of us live as did those enslaved Hebrews,’ write the Selfs . . .

“Bill Self has earned a national reputation as a gifted preacher, pastor, author, lecturer, and innovator in church growth. He and Carolyn led the Wieuca Road Baptist Church in Atlanta to a place of prominence in Georgia and the nation. More recently they have brought the Johns Creek Baptist Church in Alpharetta, Georgia, into the vanguard of fast-growing churches.”

This 5¼ x 8-inch softcover has 84 short chapters in 174 pages. Yes, each chapter does end with a written prayer. Apparently, our Ministerial Association wants Baptists telling Adventists how to pray!

Someone might say that our General Conference leaders had no way of knowing that the Selfs strongly urged their readers to keep Sunday holy. But no excuse can be offered, for 19 of the 84 chapters (chapters 51-69) deal with the Ten Commandments. That is about one-fourth of the book! And, in the table of contents, each of the commandment chapters is clearly listed by name.

The book contains, not one, but two chapters dealing with the Fourth Commandment. In our earlier tract (*Adventist Nomads [WM-1001]*), we reprinted chapter 59 (“*Remember the Sabbath; Commandment IV*”), pp. 117-119. But chapter 60 also talks about the importance of keeping Sunday holy! (“*Holy Day or Holiday; Commandment IV*,” pp. 120-122). On the lower left of p. 1 of that tract, we quoted three paragraphs from that second chapter.

Here are additional quotations from this second chapter:

“If we abuse Sunday, we’re going to destroy something beautiful that God has given . . . So what do you do with the day? Do you sit around and read the Bible all day? That might not be a bad idea for some of us . . . Don’t ever negate public worship . . . God is here [in church on Sunday]; God’s presence is among us . . . Be aware of your witness: What about your neighbor? Can he set his clock by the fact that your car pulls out of the driveway at a certain time on Sunday morning, and you’re on your way to worship God? . . . Do you pray for the pastor, your teacher, and the choir before you go to church? . . . This is the day of rejoicing. Take this day as a gift from God and use it . . . It’s God’s answer to the mental health struggles of our day. This is God’s great gift for us. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. *Prayer:* Dear Father, could it be that my depression and fatigue is my body demanding a Sabbath? My days are filled with stress, and I’m anxious about so many things. This week I will stop and catch up with myself. Even You, O God, rested after working six days. Why do I think I can defy Your plan for me? Quiet my soul as I prepare for the Sabbath—a holy day. Amen.”—*Confessions of a Nomad*, pp. 120-122.