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## NEWS

# Beset by Critics, Adventist Official Cites 'Satanic Influence'

Beset by theological dissension and accusa-  
tions of plagiarism in the writings of found-  
er Ellen G. White, the Seventh-day Adventist  
church (SDA) has taken the offensive against  
critics and set the optimistic goal of adding  
one million members to its ranks by 1985.  
This comes despite what SDA World Presi-  
dent Neal Wilson has called "Satan's subtle  
sophistry and cunningness."

Wilson made that comment at the 1981  
Annual Council of Seventh-day Adventists,  
held in October. He had in mind the cases  
of SDA theologian Desmond Ford and former  
SDA pastor Walter Rea. The church stripped  
Ford of his ministerial credentials last year  
(CT, Oct. 10, 1980). Administrators were  
angered by his attack on the SDA doctrine of  
investigative judgment, which holds that  
Christ entered into a heavenly sanctuary in  
1844. From there, according to the doctrine,  
Christ began passing judgment on each  
professing believer.

Rea, on the other hand, alleged late last  
year that much of White's 53 books was  
taken shamelessly from non-Adventist au-  
thors of the mid-nineteenth century. Admin-  
istrators have responded that not too much  
was taken from other authors and that  
White was no less a prophet for selectively  
using outside material—just as New Testa-  
ment writers sometimes used segments  
from apocryphal literature.

These developments, president Wilson  
told the church at its conference, are ploys  
of the devil to sow seeds of discord and  
suspicion. But he happily noted that mem-  
bership is increasing in America and over-  
seas despite the problems. (Not all prob-  
lems are theological—the church is also in-  
volved in an internal audit to determine  
how much money its agencies lent a prom-  
inent member who has filed for bank-  
ruptcy.) The 3.8-million-member denom-  
ination was challenged to add one million  
members by 1985. That drive, to start in  
1982, includes the ambitious goal of attract-  
ing one thousand converts daily until the  
SDA gathers for its 1985 convention.

Other church officials at the October on-  
ference echoed Wilson's suspicion of recent  
developments. Charles Hirsch, who heads  
the SDA's educational program, stated clear-  
ly that academic freedom is not an absolute  
in the denomination. Hirsch's statement  
was relevant to the cases of Ford and Smuts  
van Rooyen, an assistant professor of reli-  
gion who was dismissed at an Adventist  
seminary last summer (CT, June 12, 1981).

Hirsch said Adventists believe academic



Neal C. Wilson

freedom must be balanced by academic re-  
sponsibility. "An Adventist teacher ac-  
knowledges his responsibility to conform to  
the church's basic beliefs as well as the aims  
for its educational program when he  
accepts employment in ... an [Adventist]  
institution."

Richard Leshner, director of the de-  
nomination's Biblical Research Depart-  
ment, addressed the issue of White's author-  
ity. He said Adventists consider the Bible  
their ultimate authority and that the Bible's  
unity makes it "its own interpreter." Still,  
Leshner said in a telephone interview, White  
holds an important place in determining  
church belief.

He said the SDA has clearly affirmed the  
Old and New Testaments as the "only un-  
erring rule of faith and practice." White is  
looked to for "comfort, guidance, instruc-  
tion and correction," but does not stand  
above the Bible. Nonetheless, Leshner ad-  
mitted "most Adventists would be more re-  
luctant to disagree with White than Presby-  
terians with Calvin or Lutherans with  
Luther." And he said it is "difficult" for an  
Adventist to say that White makes any  
errors in her interpretation of Scripture.

Only SDA officials, 300 in all, attended the  
annual conference, which is a significant  
indicator of the church's direction, and  
largely determines its future agenda. SDA  
leaders are signaling their resolve to stand  
by traditional Adventism. The denomina-  
tion has published and is heavily promoting  
*Omega*, a book seen by one nontradi-

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tionalist as "a convenient labeling and dismissal of the evangelical Adventist movement."

Ford considers himself an evangelical Adventist, as does dismissed professor van Rooyen, who has contributed to *Evangelica*. That magazine is published by Adventists who seek more freedom to disagree with White and want to reaffirm such Reformation doctrines as salvation by faith alone. It used strong words on *Omega*, saying the book breathed a "spirit of religious McCarthyism" and "marks traditional Adventism's rejection of the Christ proclaimed in the apostolic gospel and a retreat to the cult mentality which Adventism could have outgrown."

*Evangelica's* reviewer considers the book a feeble attempt to convince faithful Adventists they should not be "concerned with the overwhelming biblical evidence against the 1844 theology [including the investigative judgment] and the alarming discovery that the visionary was a plagiarist."

Dissenters like van Rooyen claim most SDA scholars agree that the investigative judgment is doubtful and are skeptical of other pronouncements by White, but do not speak openly because administrators hold the traditional SDA views. The administrators say their view is that of most within the denomination and is biblically sound. The struggle within Adventism continues. □

### Did Adventists Discriminate?

Theological dissent and charges of plagiarism are not the only problems faced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA). Now a graduate of its top school, Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, has filed a discrimination suit against the church.

The graduate is a woman, Carole Rayburn. She holds three degrees, including a doctorate from Catholic University, and a master's degree from Andrews. A clinical psychologist, Rayburn says she applied for positions at two Maryland churches and was turned down. She believes she was turned down because she is a woman.

Denominational spokesmen say Rayburn has a weak case and that sexism is not involved. The suit, filed in federal court in Baltimore, will probably be heard in December.

The SDA church does not ordain women, but Rayburn was not trying to be ordained. She applied for positions as an associate pastor and an intern in pastoral care. A number of women hold such positions in the denomination. But Rayburn said she was denied employment and that a denominational official blocked her way. □

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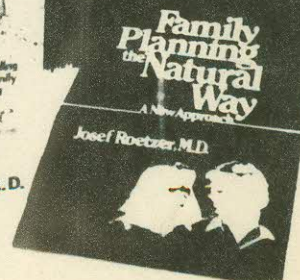
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# AMERICA'S Spiritual, Sometimes Satanic, Smorgasbord

JAMES BJORNSTAD

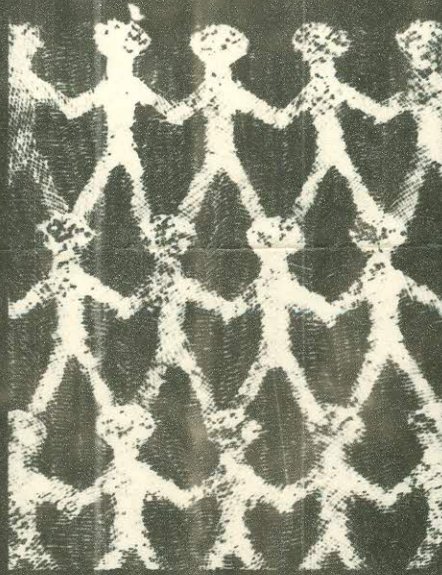
**"NOT ANOTHER ONE!"** That seems to be the frustrating response of religious researchers as they discover new manifestations of religion among groups that are continually emerging today. America has become a smorgasbord of incredible diversity. Only 25 years ago a count of 500 religious groups might have been considered high. Today, a total of 5,000 might be conservative. Some of these are very small, with as few as a dozen members; some are very large, having followings of several million.

Why is there such a proliferation of religious expressions? In the early 1950s, America seemingly was beginning to realize the effects of a revolution in the way it viewed the world. Naturalism, as the dominant paradigm for perceiving and explaining reality, had been eroding for several decades. While going a long way towards meeting man's needs in a variety of areas, it had done so on a purely material, technological level. Once these goals were attained, man, who was dissatisfied with materialistic lifestyles and the answers of an optimistic humanism, was left with an uncertainty as to the deeper meaning of life. According to Theodore Roszak, the religious counterrevolution took place among young people disgusted by the failure of scientific technology (*The Making of a Counter-Culture*, Doubleday, 1969).

Naturalism, with its accompanying doctrine of rationalism, was structurally incapable of providing all man sought for and needed. Though naturalism continues to be a major paradigm, new world views have been sought to allow for different and greater explanations of reality.

## God as Ultimate Reality

One new world view, which replaced the matter of naturalism with God as the ultimate substance, not only radically altered the perception of the world, it also estab-



lished a monistic world view necessary for the beliefs and practices of the Far East. Since world views are merely paradigms for understanding reality, no geographical transplanting was needed: one did not have to move to India to perceive reality differently. One could adopt that world view here, though frequently in a tainted, Westernized form. In fact, one did not have to go to Nepal to train at the feet of a guru in a Himalayan cave—the gurus were soon coming here.

Prior to the 1950s, spiritual leaders from the Far East such as Swami Vivekananda, Jiddu Krishnamurti, and Paramahansa Yogananda had visited America. Their lectures were appealing to intellectuals interested in their philosophy (see Harvey Cox's *Turning East*, Simon and Schuster, 1977). Several groups were founded, including the Vedanta Society and the Self-Realization Fellowship.

But in the 1950s, people from all walks of life found the antirationalism, the lack of technology, the uncomplicated lifestyle, and the different religious experience of the Far East extremely attractive. They wanted to hear, explore, and experience what the East had to offer. When Huston Smith began to teach classes on Far Eastern religions at the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a large number of eager students attended. Other gurus and swamis such as Yogi Gupta, Vishnu Devananda, and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi came to America to establish themselves and spread their message. They paved the way for the proliferation of Oriental gurus. Their teachings and practices of the 1960s are still with us today.

## Occultism and Consciousness Alteration

A second new world view posited, in general, a divine force or consciousness permeating the physical universe in its totality. Emphasizing the inherent power and different states of consciousness not only altered the perception of the world but also established a world view necessary for the experiences of sorcery, spiritualism, extrasensory activities, and consciousness alteration, whether by drugs or other means. In this paradigm one did not have to visit some primitive village in a remote part of the world and sit at the feet of a shaman to discover the hidden dynamics of the universe, encounter spirit beings, or participate in altered states of consciousness. One could adopt that world view and experience those realities here.

Occult groups were active in America prior to the 1950s. One occultist has stated, "Occultism may be defined as the use of hidden powers in man to discover the hidden life in the world" (Mark Albrecht, "Occult Philosophy and Mystical Experience" in *International Review of Missions*, October 1978). In addition to spiritualism, one could discover esoteric doctrines and practices in such religions as Theosophy, the Rosicrucians, the Church of the New Jerusalem, the I AM movement, and the Association for Research and Enlightenment. But interest increased greatly in the 1950s as people sought to discover new dimensions of reality beyond naturalism. New groups such as the Astarte Foundation, Scientology, the Holy Order of Mages, and the Church Universal and Triumphant (formerly Sunmit Lighthouse) began to develop. Some of

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these were the result of contact with "ascended masters," "higher beings," or some other "angel of light." These paved the way for the proliferation of occult devices, techniques, and rituals, as well as for the great diversity in occult activity seen in the 1960s. By the end of that decade, occultism (things done in secret) was public. Churches of Satan and Schools of Wicca, which have operated clandestinely for centuries, now occupied buildings openly in various communities, advertising their beliefs and practices.

### God as Creator

A third new world view generally posited God as the creator of the heavens and the earth. Adding a transcendent and immanent creator God not only altered the perception of the world from that of naturalism, it also established a general world view that allowed for both Christian and pseudo-Christian beliefs and practices. It was only natural for traditional Christian words and doctrinal concepts to be used in this paradigm, although frequently with different meanings. For example, Victor Paul Wierwille, founder and authoritative leader of The Way International, uses biblical words in a Unitarian rather than a theistic framework. He writes, "Many people may be misled, because while using the same language or words, we don't mean the same thing" (*Jesus Christ Is Not God*, American Christian Press, 1975). While giving the appearance of being Christian, The Way is nothing more than a heretical adaptation or distortion of historic Christianity.

Christian churches and groups were active in America prior to the 1950s along with such pseudo-Christian religions as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Christadelphians, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Baha'i, and the Worldwide Church of God. (Though Mormons [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints] posit a God "with whom we have to do" who "created" the heavens and the earth, the basic paradigm of Mormonism is that naturalism—matter, not God—is eternal.) The faith accepted by both kinds of groups tended toward the rationalistic, and the lifestyle, materialistic.

But in the 1950s, young people were particularly dissatisfied with their lives, and desired something more than mere knowledge about God and life. They wanted to experience God and explore alternative lifestyles. The Way International thus emerged with an emphasis on the "abundant life" and experience of speaking in tongues. Street preachers appeared who proclaimed the gospel to those in the counterculture movement, who in turn paved the way for the Jesus Movement and a host of new groups

in the 1960s, both Christian and pseudo-Christian. These included the "local church," The Bible Speaks, Family of Love (formerly the Children of God), the Alamo Christian Foundation, and the Process Church of the Final Judgment.

While the world views described are general and provide only a smattering of the various manifestations of each, they do indicate that the world view revolution has produced a religious smorgasbord of delectable tidbits from all over the world for hungry Americans. Since master chef Satan has been busy preparing and promoting most of these delicacies, he is delighted that so many are choosing his rather than God's.

### The Future of New World Views

The world view revolution has not ended. Many of the desires that led to new religious expressions in the 1950s and 1960s are still present today—for instance, a desire not merely to know about ultimate reality, but to experience it. When the compounding effects of the breakdown of societal structures (for example, the family) and the instability of our age are added, it is easy to see why so many continue to seek nourishment from this smorgasbord.

The question arises whether these religious manifestations are merely a "passing fad," for contemporary observation and history do reveal that some groups dissipate. But some, however, entrench in society and become "institutionalized." The Mormons were rejected by society at one time, and even driven out of towns, but today they are an accepted, respectable religion in America. And the Unification Church now is seeking inclusion in the National Council of Churches and approval from various religious leaders and organizations. This group has been in continual ecumenical dialogue in an attempt to become "legitimate" and accepted. Adherents swept streets in one town and performed other civic tasks in hopes of being accepted by the townspeople. Even some groups that have emerged from and been critical of recognized Christian churches are seeking to become a "legitimate" part of the Christian society and gain acceptance. If such trends toward institutionalization by Christian, pseudo-Christian, and non-Christian groups continue, a broad religious pluralism is guaranteed for the future.

New religious manifestations will continue both to emerge and be imported in the next few years as the world view revolution continues. The spreading, militant evangelism of Islam from the Near East, which has already converted large segments of the world, will pose a serious challenge to Christianity as well as to religion in general in America. But because of the great resurgent interest in sorcery and power, the "spe-

cial feature" of this smorgasbord will probably be in the area of the occult. This can be seen in the inclusion of those elements in television programming (note the cartoons children watch, the current focus of such programs as "Fantasy Island," and so on), the interest in such games as Dungeons and Dragons, as well as announcements of forthcoming movies that are based on sorcery. Variations of this "special feature" may come from the Far East since Eastern monism is compatible with the occult world view in such spheres as power and consciousness alteration.

### What Can the Church Do?

Since the current world view revolution grew out of the inadequacy of naturalism and dissatisfaction with it, the root of the problem for the Christian church is its paradoxical affinity with this paradigm. Operating on naturalistic and rationalistic principles within the theistic world view, Christians are functioning daily according to their own desires as though this is God's will—rationalizing away sin as though the situation or "what everyone else does" is God's standard, and seeking material goods as though they are eternal possessions. This has affected the church's witness as well as its life. When people in their religious search look to the Christian church today, many see only the naturalism and rationalism they originally rejected. So they look elsewhere for spiritual reality.

In the first century, the Christian church stood apart from the Roman culture, proclaiming a unique message of salvation in the midst of the religions of that day. The difference was easily noticed by those dissatisfied with their lives, seeking spiritual reality. But in the twentieth century, the Christian church has become part of the American culture, accommodating itself to a materialistic milieu while still proclaiming a unique message. The result is that Christianity is no longer distinct. The new religions now stand apart from the system being rejected, and attract people.

What Christianity needs today is a return to a pure biblical theism. It needs to reevaluate itself in terms of its affinity with naturalism, seeking to rediscover the unique Christian life, which complements its unique message of redemption. Once it does, Christianity will be the solid feature of the smorgasbord.

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