

"Watchman, what of the night?"

"The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,
the hour and the end!"

Eze. 7:6 (Moffatt)

AN OPEN LETTER

TO ELDER R. S. FOLKENBERG

Editor's Note: For some months now, through the Adventist Review, and various organs of the Union Conferences, Elder R. S. Folkenberg has been writing about "independent ministries." Inasmuch as "Watchman, What of the Night?" is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, continuing publication of such a ministry, we felt it advisable to respond to what Elder Folkenberg had written. While it was in the background of our minds to make it an "open letter," we believed it best to first try and make it a personal exchange, if Elder Folkenberg was willing to do so. Since the reply to the first letter was via his assistant, and did not really address the points raised, and no reply has been forthcoming to the second letter directed to the assistant, we are now making the exchange an open report to our readers. Rather than photographically reproducing the letters, we will copy them in full within the confines of our usual layout.

The Letter to Elder Folkenberg was dated April 20, 1992. It read:

Dear Elder Folkenberg:

In the current issue of the Adventist Review (April 16, 1992), a lead article features your concern about "independent ministries." Much of what you wrote is true, and such irresponsible reporting as was illustrated by your referring to the allegation that you had visited the pope, is reprehensible, and which we as a foundation deplore. We will note this as well as other things which this "voice" has written in future issues of WVN which you receive.

However, we do take exception to what you have written under the section, "A false litmus test of orthodoxy." You wrote - and this does include some - "By proclaiming their convictions on a narrow list of topics, not accepted by the body as a whole as vital to our message, they, in effect, turn acceptance of their position on these issues into a litmus test of orthodoxy." (p. 6) Enclosed with this letter will be a document of "A Comparison of Statements of Belief" for the major statements issued from 1872 to the 1980



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Statement which we call into question.

[Note: Those not having this statement for reference may obtain a copy for \$1.50 postpaid by writing to the Foundation office - P. O. Box 69, Ozone, AR 72854]

Consider the very first statement of the 1980 Statements, and compare it with the previous three statements. In everyone of the former statements appeared the conviction that the Bible is "the **only** infallible rule of faith and practice," or "the **only** unerring rule of faith and practice." The word, "only" is removed from the 1980 Statement. A quick look at Statement #17 tells you why. Here has been inserted a position never previously held by the Church that the Writings of Ellen G. White "are a continuing and authoritative source of truth." While the Writings are a manifestation of the Gift of the Holy Spirit, never had a previous statement clothed that gift in the authority equal to the Scriptures. By so doing, they could not follow the previous statements and use the word, "only" in the statement on "The Holy Scriptures." The "why" of this change against the backdrop of the Ford challenge in 1979, and the Glacier View conclave which followed the 1980 session makes interesting contemplation.

Consider another statement - #2. "The Trinity." It reads - "There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity in three co-eternal Persons." Not until 1931 is the word, "Trinity," introduced into a Statement of Beliefs, and then not stated as written into the 1980 Statement. Nowhere do we find the word, "Trinity" in the Bible, nor in the Writings of Ellen G. White. Furthermore, the New Baltimore Catechism, No. 3, rev. ed., 1949, p. 20 reads - "By the Blessed Trinity, we mean one and the same God in three Divine Persons." Please tell me wherein the Roman Catholic position differs from the new position of Adventism as expressed in the 1980 Statement? Now let us go one step further. In the Constitution of the World Council of Churches, Article II indicates that membership in that organization must confirm the "Basis" (Article I) upon which the WCC rests. This basis requires a confession of "the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour" as they seek their "common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." (See So Much in Common, p. 40) This position credally formulated did not appear until "the council of Constantinople (381)" for at that time "the formula of one God existing in three co-equal Persons" was "formally ratified." (Early Christian Doctrines, p. 88)

Add to this fact, that in no previous Statement of Beliefs was "The Church" defined. (See #11,

1980) And when it was defined in 1980, the language was paraphrased from the Constitution of the WCC, and declared the universality of all who profess "Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour" whether according to the truth as it is in Jesus, or a theoretical dogma formulated by a Church Council. Is there no true "doctrine of Christ"? Is the confession of any "christ" false or true, the basis of the "community of believers" in "the universal church"? This has mitigated the force of Article #12 of the 1980 Statement. * Text underlined by reader.

Consider the 1980 Statement #4. Where in this statement is the confession of all previous statements, that Jesus "took on Him the nature of the seed of Abraham for the redemption of the human race," or "He took upon Himself the nature of the human family"? Are you saying in your article that the position of the pioneers on the nature that Christ assumed in humanity is no longer a litmus test, just because it was omitted from the 1980 Statement? Is this not a departure from truth?

I could cite several more differences, but let us notice one of the more subtle insertions into the 1980 Statement not found in any previous statement. Number 23 reads in part - "In it [the heavenly sanctuary] Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross." Nowhere in all the previous statements do you find this wording. But you do find it in Questions on Doctrine, pp. 354-55, 381. There this language is declared to be an annulment of the unique teaching of Adventism of the doctrine of the final atonement. It goes so far as to declare that though Christ is in the presence of God for us, "it is not with the **hope** of obtaining something for us at that time, or at some future time. No! **He had already obtained it for us on the cross.**" (p. 381, emphasis theirs) Since your office under a previous administration confirmed to the late Walter Martin the continuing firm adherence of the Church to the book, Questions on Doctrine, and the denial of the final atonement is written into the 1980 Statement of Beliefs by borrowing the language of that book, why should not the disclosure of these things by an "independent ministry" note it as a litmus test of the doctrinal apostasy of the Church?

I have not made this letter an "Open Letter to the President of the General Conference." I want to give you time to reply before going public with an answer to your attack on "independent ministries" which included us. For over

twenty-five years we have been calling the attention of the laity of the Church to the growing apostasy in the Church, and we shall continue to do so as long as the Lord gives us the breath, and the means to do so. In all of these years, we have not solicited a single penny either via the publication of WWN, or by means of "electronic letters," but in all of these years we have lacked nothing, and have been abundantly supplied by the moving of the Spirit of truth upon sincere and concerned hearts.

Looking forward to your reply, I remain,

Respectfully yours,

(Signed)

Wm. H. Grotheer, Manager
Publication & Research

On May 21, 1992, we received the following reply from Elder B. E. Jacobs, Assistant to the President.

Dear Brother Grotheer:

Elder Folkenberg has asked me to respond to your letter dated April 20. I apologize for the delay, but I wanted to wait until I could visit with Elder Folkenberg regarding your letter.

We appreciate your sharing some of your views with Elder Folkenberg. We have shared a copy of this letter with our Biblical Research Department and they too are aware of the concerns that you have expressed. Your input is appreciated.

May the Lord continue to bless you in your witness for Him.

Sincerely,

(Signed)

B. E. Jacobs
Assistant to the President

To this response, we replied on May 28, 1992 to Elder B. E. Jacobs:

Dear Elder Jacobs:

First thank you for the acknowledgment of my letter to Elder Folkenberg dated the 20th of April. However, let us be honest, this is not an answer.

In the letter of April 20, I pointed out that Elder Folkenberg had lumped all "independent ministries" save the ASI into one category. This is not perceptive evaluation nor does it enhance his image as one who can with clear

discernment lead the Adventist Church. There are those among the "independent ministries" who swear allegiance to the hierarchy and profess great loyalty with the objective in mind of being able to use the facilities of the Church, but by their very message are saying the Church has rejected this message. There are others who cry to "high heaven" that they are being "persecuted" when their credentials and/or membership is called into question. Yet they are establishing independent churches and appointing pastors over them trained in their own institutions. Some of these same "voices" when removed from the church rolls have their membership hidden on another church list, or are invited in by profession of faith to another church. This is pure hypocrisy and deception.

The Adventist Laymen's Foundation makes no apology for the fact that we are not a part of the regular church organization, and we state clearly our reasons. In the previous letter, we set forth those reasons, and to this point Folkenberg did not reply. Merely sharing with the BRI a copy of my letter is not an answer. If they are aware of these facts, why have they not addressed them? The fact is that the BRI in a position paper - "An Appeal for Church Unity" - actually sets aside the position of our pioneers on one of the points set forth in the April 20th letter as nonessential, and went even further and falsified the data connected therewith which I submitted with the letter of the 20th.

Now let us be honest with one another. Elder Folkenberg has a right to write what he wishes but let it be accurate and show a clear grasp of the situation. Then let us not shunt aside documented evidence. If you have an answer, then give it. If not, be honest enough to say the Church has erred and departed from the faith of our fathers. I shall await a bit longer before going to press with this exchange.

Sincerely yours for truth, unadulterated. (TM, p. 65)

(Signed)

Wm. H. Grotheer

THE ORDINATION

"On June 13, 1992, John Wesley Osborne, Jr, Robert Joseph Trefz and Michael John Thompson were ordained to the gospel ministry at the Steps to Life Campmeeting near Wichita, Kansas" so stated the opening sentence in a letter dated June 17, 1992 from Dr. John J. Grosboll, Director of Steps to Life Ministries. In a cover letter for documents pertaining to the ordination, Trefz called it a "new era" and the "dawning" of the "long awaited revival of primitive godliness." He indicated that in presenting the ordination sermon, Dr. Ralph Larson "drew powerful, unanswerable truths from Scripture and history" to justify the ordination. (Letter dated June 18, 1992) These we shall examine.

Dr. Larson read as his opening text - Acts 13:1-4. Then he stated - "This is an interesting situation which is worthy of study and reflection." Indeed it is, and more so, since it has been made the basis for justifying the ordination which took place on June 17. Larson indicated in his sermon that these men were being ordained because of the call of three churches - "the Rolling Hills Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Steps to Life Seventh-day Adventist Church and a home church in South Dakota.." Larson bestowed upon these churches the authority to issue such a call. He declared - "From New Testament times until now, true Biblical ordination has always been a response to the call of God's people." Whatever other precedent may be cited, the text in Acts 13:1-4 does not so teach. Let us consider this experience carefully.

In the first Christian Church at Antioch, there were men possessed of specific gifts of the Spirit - prophets and teachers. They are named - Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen and Saul. As these men "ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit [not the church] said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." (Acts 13:2) These men obeyed not a mandate from a church, but a directive by the Holy Spirit. No big fanfare is recorded, and no videos were offered for sale displaying the service! Neither did a panel discussion as to what constituted the church precede the carrying out of the directive. The Scripture simply reads - "So they [Barnabas and Saul] being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, departed" on their mission. (verse 4) Larson has

misused and distorted the Word of God.

The justification of this ordination recalls to mind an experience from the history of ancient Israel. King Saul had been directed of Samuel to destroy utterly all of the Amalekites, and their possessions. He set forth on his mission. On his return he was met by Samuel, whom he greeted with the words, "Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord." (I Sam. 15:13) Samuel asked him what meaneth "this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" To this Saul replied, "They have.." Protesting further that he had obeyed "the voice of the Lord," he declared, "But the people took of the spoil." Yes, the "people" made him do it. Just so now, "the voice of the people" forced Larson and Grosboll to perform this ordination. It was not "the voice of the Lord," because the Lord does not work this way. He has no part in the distortion of His word, nor does He recognize man's attempt to sanctify inflated human ego. The question of Samuel to Saul is very apropos - "When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel?" (I Sam. 15:17)

Larson in his ordination address asserted - "We are most emphatically not starting a new organization. We are not starting a separate church." Did Jesus not start a separate Church when He ordained the Twelve? At the very base of every new church and ecclesiastical organization is the establishment of its religious leadership. This is done by ordination. When men are ordained to the ministry apart from the approval of the established church, they are in that very act putting a new church organization into operation, call it what you will. Thus beyond the distortion of the Scripture incident in Acts 13, is the distortion of basic truth, a failure to recognize what is the Church. Even though Trefz declares Grosboll to be "the foremost authority in Biblical Adventism on the nature of the church," his ecclesiology at this point is heretical. In this false premise, Larson joined Grosboll. Jesus Christ warned - "Take heed that ye be not deceived." (Luke 21:8)

The issue involved here is very simple. Is the Church in apostasy, or is there only apostasy in the Church? This question was projected when the Tithing problem was brought out into the open. Both the regular Church through the release of the tithing insert by Dr. Roger Coon in the Adventist Review (Nov. 7, 1991), and an article

by Dr. Ralph Larson in OFF (Sept., 1991) addressed the issue. Dr. Coon went to the heart of the matter. If a church is in apostasy, you do not pay tithes to that church, but if not, and there is only apostasy in the church, you continue to support that church with your tithes and offerings.

Resulting from Larson's article in OFF, Dr. Douglas Devnich, president of the Canadian Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, accurately zeroed in on Larson's distortion of the Writings to support his contention. Seeking to justify himself, Larson has now presented his position in a 39 page booklet published by Steps to Life - The Tithe Problem. In the heart of this booklet, one finds the basic premise for not only the tithe problem but also for the ordination question. Here the heresy of the ecclesiology of both Larson and Grosboll - for they are working close together - surfaces. Larson writes:

The Review tract writer suggests that there is a significant difference between saying there is apostasy in a church and saying a church, speaking of the entire body of believers, is in apostasy. This point is well taken. I know of only one independent ministry leader who has a conviction that the church is in apostasy. The rest would say, like the Review tract writer, that there is apostasy in the church, although they would not minimize it as he does. (p. 18; emphasis his)

If one considers the Church to be merely a loose confederation of individuals, and not a corporate body of believers, then apostasy would be determined by a head count. But the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a corporate body and so recognized as such in the Writings, as well as in organizational structure. It is this corporate Church that must face the judgment of the sanctuary. In 1903, Ellen White plainly wrote:

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)

No amount of verbalizing can erase the fact that here is corporate language. The Church as a corporate body is to be weighed in the balances of the sanctuary. The basis upon which the judgment will be rendered is given - the sacred trust of truth. Then only one question remains

to be answered. Has the Church as a corporate body betrayed that trust? If she has, then the Church is in apostasy. If the issue is only the life-style of the Church - the conduct of its services, the programming of its ministry, the defining of the personality of its members, and the core of truth remains unchanged, then there is only apostasy in the Church. Working under this kind of a premise, and such a premise lies at the foundation of the Grosboll-Larson ecclesiology, there is no justification for the ordination service conducted, or the suggestion that tithes should be diverted from the regular Church channels. Instead they should be every Sabbath in some recognized regular church working to correct what they believe to be apostasy in the life-style of the Church. But they are not doing so. Grosboll is organizing a network of independent churches setting up pastors over them. Now he and Larson have ordained men, not at the moving of the Holy Spirit, but on demand of "the people" to satisfy the human ego of at least two of those ordained.

There is only one conclusion that can be drawn, a new organization has been formed, a new order of clergy ordained. Sadly many will continue to be deceived by this venture. If the Word of God is distorted to justify what has been done, as Larson did in his ordination sermon, the Spirit of God will not bless such a work, for He is the Spirit of truth. Trefz in his cover letter telling of the ground plans laid for the ordination at the Prophecy Countdown campmeeting called that meeting "a revival of primitive godliness" which "began a thrilling new era in Seventh-day Adventism." (Letter dated June 18, 1992) What needs to be kept in mind is the fact that before the genuine revival comes the false. A genuine revival does not make provision for the exaltation of self, and the massaging of the human ego.

The Fallout

On June 3, 1992, Dr. John J. Grosboll, in a 24 page letter with 3 additional pages added as a postscript on June 4, wrote to Ron Spear defending the pending ordination service and a justification for including John Osborne in that rite. This letter was resultant following "telephone conversations" which had taken place with Spear, "members of his staff, Colin Standish and a number of other individuals." Hope International and Hartland Institute refused to go along with the ordination plans. Spear responded in a document - "The Final Appeal to the Steps to Life Board" - dated June 12. In this 3 page appeal, he wrote:

John [Grosboll] you believe that I would have agreed to the ordination of Bob Trefz, but that I have taken this stand, because of my "bias" on John Osborne. This is entirely untrue. I told you on the phone I had no problem with Bob personally, but we do have a problem with John. Our file backs up our reasons for this and we are as conscientious on this as you are on your stand to be John's protector. Hope International is not comfortable ordaining anybody to the ministry. (p. 2)

The telephone conversations must have become rather heated. Grosboll in his letter indicating that Spear had threatened "to go public," suggested that "it is appropriate for a person who has threatened to publicly oppose a ministry to not be the board chairman of that ministry." (p. 23) Spear in his document replied that "if this ordination is carried out, you will be forced to accept this document as my resignation from the board." (p. 2)

One cannot adequately grasp the internecine warfare taking place between various independent ministries over this "ordination" unless he can read carefully the emotionally charged letter which Grosboll wrote to Spear. It was evident throughout that Grosboll was thinking with his emotions rather than with his head. We shall seek to give some brief but incomplete evaluations of this letter as it has impressed us after reading it as objectively as it is possible for us to do, knowing the two leading characters through experiences with them, that is Spear and Osborne. We have never met Grosboll, and have had no direct personal dealings with him.

Grosboll in his letter charged Spear with having utilized his position as chairman of the board of Steps to Life to depart from the "agenda" and bring charges against Osborne, charges which he claims could not be substantiated. (p. 16) This is very understandable when one has experienced Spear's smear techniques. I can cite evidence of such personal attacks, so libelous and slanderous that he canceled a speaking appointment in the State of Arkansas for fear that I would have him arrested and placed in jail. I know that when I did confront him at the 1985 General Conference session in New Orleans, he lied without batting an eye, and has since violated his word to me. He just cannot be trusted. But this is not saying that this clears Osborne, because he, too, can lie and falsify a situation for monetary ends. The problem is that two individuals having the same habit problems have crossed each other, and neither can trust the other, even if they agreed to "bury the hatchet."

While the letter is intended to be a defense both of Osborne, and the ordination, an illustration used by Grosboll from his past experience in the ministry with either a "parabolic" meaning, or "double application" would negate the objective. Dr. Grosboll tells of a young man whom he calls, "Pastor John, in Florida." He describes him as having "a very volatile temperament" with an uncontrollable temper. (pp. 2-3) He became acquainted with "Pastor John" when he first went to North Dakota. "Pastor John" wanted to be a preacher in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He was made "the singing evangelist for the evangelistic team of the North Dakota conference." Then Grosboll continues - "Now as is the case with some other individuals in this world, Pastor John was not really a manager of money. That was not his talent. In fact, he had a problem of getting into debt, and not being able to pay his debts. He was a man of world vision, and of large plans. He was a visionary, but he needed the help of his wife (who was a very talented person) to make his visions come to pass. Both of them were excellent musicians."

Due to monetary problems in the conference, the evangelistic team was dissolved, and "Pastor John" was left without resources. Bad relationships developed between Pastor John and the Conference leadership. Grosboll tells of "a most heated" telephone exchange between "Pastor John" and the Conference President [Trout], at least on "Pastor John's" part. (p. 4) Finally, "the time came when secretly, without telling anybody, he left town... He just packed up his family and quickly left town. He not only left town, he not only wasn't an Adventist minister, he was so discouraged he wasn't even an Adventist at all. He went back to Florida."

Why is Grosboll telling this experience? He writes - "I have thought a lot about Pastor John over the years. And I have thought exceedingly a lot about him over the last few days... And the thing that keeps coming back to my mind - Oh, I know, he had lots of faults. He didn't pay his bills. He didn't manage his money. He made lots of mistakes. But I have always wondered, 'Is it partly my fault? Is it partly my fault because I didn't put my reputation, my job, and my career on the line to try to save him?'" It is obvious that in Grosboll's mind he sees a comparison between two "Pastor Johns." Now Larson and Grosboll have placed their hands in ordination upon the second "Pastor John," even though sensing this parabolic comparison. What an accounting they will have to render before the bar of God for such a lack of judgment

based on retrospective emotional evaluation. The instability of the characters of all involved in this ordination should cause some serious thinking on the part of concerned Adventists. The relationship of the first "Pastor John" with the North Dakota Conference has marked the relationship of the second "Pastor John" with the Florida Conference. Reports appearing in Osborne's publication told of meetings with the leadership which he claimed was marked by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Then when the conference crossed his path, they were instruments of the devil.

A report received in this office from the one supplying the documents, upon which this article is based, told of Osborne's volatile reaction to one suggesting that the ordination be delayed. It was checked and verified as accurate. Yet the ordination was carried out for two reasons - the demand of the "people" and judgment based on emotion.

‡

LET'S TALK IT OVER

Thinking with one's emotions instead of with one's head leads to some inconsistent positions. Grosboll in his letter indicated that if Spear was going to "publicly oppose" the Steps to Life ministry, he should resign from the Board - in other words, get out. But Grosboll seems not to believe that if he "goes public" in opposing the Church, and exposing it, he should "get out." No he wants to operate as a Seventh-day Adventist Church, train ministers for various independent churches he is establishing in different places, and have the right to ordain on the demand of the "people," men who have not yet demonstrated their call to the ministry. Should he not follow the same counsel he gave Spear?

This same emotional approach to the "ordination" of questionable candidates has blinded the eyes of both Larson and Grosboll to the fact that in this act they have established a "new" organization. The three churches named as requesting the ordination of their pastors are now a new and different organization from the Church headquartered in Silver Spring. It will be interesting to see what working arrangement these churches will form with each other. Will they become a conference? It is not beyond the ego of Osborne to envision a General Conference with himself as president!

The real problem returns to the very issue raised by Dr. Roger Coon in his Tithe tract - "There is a fine line - but a significant distinction - between 'a church in apostasy' and the 'apostasy in the church.'" (p. 3) Now if we are going to deal only with church life-style - mode of worship, NLP training for the ministry, and the classification of the laity's temperaments, etc., then we can say that there is "apostasy in the church." In such a case, there is no justification for the existence of Osborne's Rolling Hills congregation, nor for Grosboll's Steps to Life Church near Wichita, Kansas, nor for Trefz' home church in South Dakota. They should each Sabbath be in some regular Seventh-day Adventist Church seeking to correct in a Christian way what they perceive to be apostasy and supporting that church with their tithes and offerings.

However, if the core of beliefs has been changed and what the Church once stood for doctrinally altered, then the Church is in apostasy. This calls for a whole new approach. The once fundamental and orthodox Church has structured a "new" organization, and we cannot enter into a "new" organization and be true to the counsel which has been given us. (SM, bk. II, p. 390)

The "blind spot" in the ecclesiology of both Grosboll and Spear is the failure to recognize corporate accountability, and individual responsibility, and to differentiate between the two. This we shall address in another issue of WWN.

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For Bible information, conversation and/or discussion call 1-800-4 LAYMEN. If you would like a free copy of this issue call this number also.

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