

THE BIBLE RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

*A Pioneering Seventh-day Adventist
Organization in Retrospect*

Raymond F. Cottrell

[*Editor's note: The Bible Research Fellowship, conducted by the college Bible teachers of North America between 1943 and 1952, was the pioneer organization of the church devoted to cooperative Bible study on the research level. The author of this article, who served as secretary of the Fellowship throughout its brief lifetime, has preserved a complete file of documents and correspondence related to the Fellowship. The majority of the historical facts presented here are taken from this documentary archive. The secretary's complete personal file of all papers presented to the Fellowship is in the Heritage Room of the James White Memorial Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*]



FOR MANY YEARS, the Seventh-day Adventist college Bible teachers of North America have met following the quadrennial/quinquennial session of the General Conference, under General Conference auspices, to counsel together on matters of mutual interest and concern. The agenda has consisted of topics relating to principles, methodology,

and procedures in religious education, and to various aspects of Biblical hermeneutics, interpretation, and theology.

At the close of the 1940 Bible Teachers' Council in Takoma Park, Maryland, consideration was given to means by which the college Bible teachers could share with one another their individual endeavors to understand the Bible more perfectly, in order that all might benefit from the labors of each, and that each might benefit from the constructive criticism of all. The minutes of the 1940 Council conclude by reporting:

At the conclusion of a very wonderful convention all expressed their delight at having been present, and a fellowship was organized called the "College Bible Teachers' Fellowship." Elder Andreason was unanimously elected as the organizing secretary. An annual fee of \$2.00 for each member was agreed upon, this money to be used in providing a monthly report from the secretary, as a kind of exchange medium between

Formerly an associate editor of the REVIEW AND HERALD, Raymond Cottrell is now retired and living in California.

the Bible teachers, and it was emphasized that when any one of the group found something of particular interest that he would pass it on to the others through this Fellowship. The Seminary was asked to become the treasury for the Fellowship and inasmuch as by our vote we had pledged ourselves to stand behind the Seminary, with our prayers and our support, the Seminary thus becoming the graduate school of our colleges, it seemed the normal course for us to look to the Seminary as the center of such an organization.

The thirty-five or so Bible teachers present paid the stipulated annual dues to Milton Earl Kern, first president of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. Elder Milian L. Andreasen, a teacher at the Seminary and chairman of the Council, never implemented the planned College Bible Teachers' Fellowship, however, and Elder Kern turned over the dues intact to his successor, Denton E. Rebok, in 1943. At the 1944 Bible Teachers' Council Elder Rebok proposed returning the dues, but the teachers reaffirmed their intention with respect to the proposed Fellowship. Some suggested that the General Conference Ministerial Association be asked to operate the proposed medium of communication; others averred that such an arrangement would give it too "official" a "flavor."

At this point Dr. Leon L. Caviness, Biblical languages teacher at Pacific Union College, told of the monthly Sabbath afternoon meetings of the Bible teachers there. On the last Sabbath afternoon of March, 1943, they had met informally with a few other teachers at his invitation. The afternoon was devoted to reading and discussing a Bible research paper I had recently completed summarizing one of my personal study projects. At the close of the discussion those present agreed to meet on Sabbath afternoon each month to consider a paper to be presented by some member of the group. Over the next fifteen months others joined the study group and a few elsewhere in California became "corresponding members."



IN THE YEARS leading up to, and including World War II, international events concentrated the attention of Seventh-day Adventists on last-day prophecies, particularly the identity of the king of the north in Daniel 11 and the battle of Armageddon in Revelation 16. In the decade prior to Pearl Harbor, Adventist evangelists and publications, notably the *Signs of the Times*, were confidently identifying Armageddon as a political battle in Palestine; Japan and the other nations of the Orient as the kings of the east; and Turkey as the king of the north, a pattern of interpretation to which not a few of the Bible teachers took increasing exception. The extension of hostilities to the Pacific led some Adventist ministers—William R. French at

Pacific Union College, for example—to assure their congregations that the entry of the Sunrise Kingdom into the conflict made certain that World War II would climax in the Biblical Armageddon.

In response to these confident assertions from Adventist pulpits and in the Adventist press, and with a view to ascertaining their true import, Bible teachers gave these prophecies careful study. In this setting, the local study group at Angwin chose the name "Eschatology Society," and at its first meeting read and discussed my contextual-linguistic study on "The Kings of the East."

After listening to Dr. Caviness' account of the monthly meetings at Angwin over the preceding year and a half, the college Bible teachers asked Elder Rebok to transfer their dues from the custody of the Seminary to Dr. Caviness, requesting that they be accepted as corresponding members of his study group at Angwin. Returning home, Dr. Caviness reorganized the Eschatology Society as the Bible Research Fellowship, with the Bible teachers of the colleges in North America as members.

Over the next six years the Bible Research Fellowship grew rapidly. All but six of the sixty-six Bible teachers at the Seminary and in all Adventist English-language colleges around the world became members. Several colleges reimbursed their Bible teachers for membership dues in the Fellowship, on the basis that it was a professional organization. Most of the 190 or so Bible research papers contributed to the Fellowship during its lifetime of ten years were written by these members. A number of pastors, evangelists, editors, and administrators also requested membership and were accepted. Dues, originally \$2 per year, were later raised to \$4. Principal expenses of the Fellowship were the duplication and mailing of papers, and correspondence. Dues and other funds were deposited jointly in the names of Leon L. Caviness and Raymond F. Cottrell in the St. Helena branch of the Bank of America.

Although the Bible Research Fellowship was brought into being by the college Bible teachers of North America specifically to meet their own felt need for an organized way in which to make cooperative Bible study possible, the organization was never more than quasi-official. Initiated at one of their official quadrennial councils with the tacit blessing of the General Conference, under whose auspices these councils met, it was in the strict sense of the word always unofficial.

In keeping with the request of the college Bible teachers for membership in the Pacific Union College study group, and by common consent, Dr. Caviness continued to serve as *paterfamilias* of the organization. He motivated the formation of the original nucleus around which the Eschatology Society, and later the Bible Research Fellowship, grew. His qualifications for this assignment were his

competence in Biblical languages, teaching experience, a sound concept of Biblical hermeneutics, and skill in personal relations and group dynamics. His personal interest in research-level Bible study was reflected in the considerable clerical work required in evaluating, processing, duplicating, and distributing the many papers; in extensive correspondence with individual members and the several chapters; in his faithfulness to the trust the college Bible teachers reposed in him; in his initiative in counseling with the Ministerial Association, the Ellen G. White Estate, the Theological Seminary, and other agencies of the church; and in his loyalty to the church and its leaders in everything and at all times. The church is deeply indebted to him for pioneering what proved to be a highly successful program of cooperative Biblical research and study. Throughout the lifetime of the Fellowship he continued to serve as chairman, and I served as secretary.

As time passed, additional chapters began meeting regularly on seven other campuses, and one conference president organized the pastors of his conference into a Fellowship chapter. In my official secretary's report to the college Bible teachers at the 1950 Council at Angwin, I reported a membership of 157 in the Fellowship. Of these, sixty-five were college teachers and another twenty-eight resided outside of North America. Seven (eventually seventeen) were from the General Conference, and the remaining eighty-five were conference presidents, departmental leaders, doctors, editors, pastors, and evangelists. In response to the secretary's report,

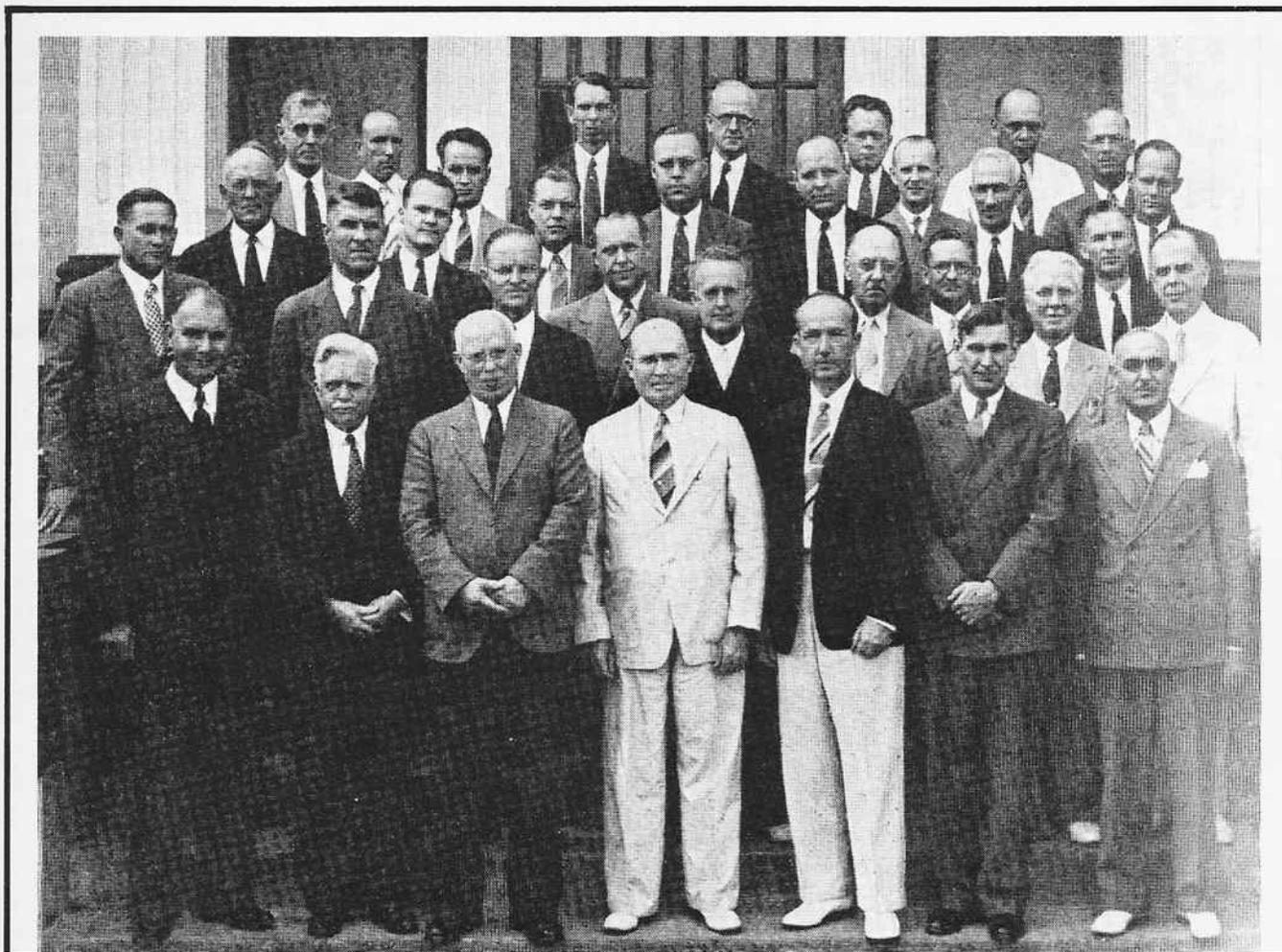
the Bible teachers in attendance at the 1950 Council:

VOTED, that we extend an expression of appreciation to the officers of the Bible Research Fellowship for the splendid work they have done in bringing into existence such a valuable organization, and for the service it offers ministers and Bible teachers in the exchange of ideas and interpretations of difficult passages of Scripture.

In 1951 membership stood at 204, and finally in 1952 at 256. Ninety-one percent of all Bible teachers in all sixteen English-language colleges around the world were members. Basically, the Bible Research Fellowship remained their organization and served the purpose for which they designed it, but persons interested in serious Bible study serving the church in many different capacities eventually made up the majority of its membership.

As an unofficial organization, the Bible Research Fellowship functioned with a minimum of organizational structure. It had no elected officers. Dr. Caviness continued to lead in its activities, having been asked to do so by the college Bible teachers of North America, who appreciated his approach to Bible research, the principles on which he succeeded in getting thinking men of diverse minds to cooperate on sensitive matters, and the demon-

Participants in the 1940 Bible Teachers Council in Takoma Park, Maryland, voted to organize the College Bible Teachers Fellowship.



credit: Review and Herald Publishing Association



At the 1944 Bible Conference, the teachers present reaffirmed their interest in a Bible teachers fellowship. Elder Denton E. Rebok, second president of the Theological Seminary from 1943 to 1951, transferred dues from the Eschatology Society to Dr. Leon L. Caviness for the proposed Bible Research Fellowship.

credit: Review and Herald Publishing Association

strated success of the Fellowship's predecessor, the Eschatology Society of Angwin.

IN ALL OF THE Fellowship deliberations and exchanges of opinions over its ten years of life, mutual respect prevailed for the sometimes diverse views of its members. No vote was ever taken for or against any particular point of view, or on any paper presented for consideration. It never adopted or advocated any particular interpretation of Scripture. It made no attempt to decide between alternative views. It never expressed an opinion on any subject, nor did it attempt to disseminate the findings of any of its members. Papers were never supposed to be given, loaned, or sold to non-members by anyone other than the author. The sole purpose of the Fellowship was to provide a means of communication and interaction among its members in their individual research, for their own edification, in order that all might benefit from the labors of each and that each might benefit from the comments and constructive criticism of his peers.

Research papers considered by the Fellowship were sometimes requested, but usually were submitted voluntarily by members as reports of their personal study projects. Of approximately 190 papers evaluated during its lifetime, about 120 were accepted for formal consideration. At first the chairman and the secretary evaluated papers submitted. Later, two other resident members of the Angwin

chapter participated in the evaluation process, and eventually a panel of six non-resident members was set up to assist in the evaluation and to give counsel when requested. These non-resident members were appointed by Dr. Caviness from a list prepared at his request by the General Conference Ministerial Association. This panel included an evangelist, a pastor, two administrators, and two Bible teachers. From time to time lists of papers awaiting evaluation were sent to the nine organized chapters for an opinion as to which should be accepted for consideration, and the priority to be assigned various papers.

As might be expected, manuscripts varied in quality. They were judged on the basis of their intrinsic quality as research papers and their potential value for study, irrespective of their point of view. As a rule, research-type papers only were accepted. Occasionally several papers dealing with the same topic, and perhaps expressing diverse points of view, were grouped together for consideration at the same meeting.

Once a paper was accepted, preliminary suggestions to strengthen the author's presentation—which he was free to accept or reject—were often forwarded to him prior to duplication. The duplicated paper was then sent out to all members and a date was set for reading and discussing it. Later, papers accepted for consideration were duplicated in their original form and sent out to all chapters. Suggestions from the chapters were collated and sent to each author, who might choose to revise his paper before it was duplicated in final form and sent to all members.

At the Angwin chapter meetings the author, if present, would read the paper and members would ask questions and make comments. If the author were not present, one of the resident members was appointed in advance to read it for him, to represent his point of view as accurately as possible, and to answer questions for him as best he could. The reading was followed by general discussion of the subject. The secretary recorded, collated, and summarized the comments for the record and for passing on to the author to use as he saw fit.

Each Fellowship paper bore this notation immediately below the title:

Presented to the Bible Research Fellowship
Though presented to the Bible Research
Fellowship, like all other papers it
represents no pronouncement of the
Fellowship.

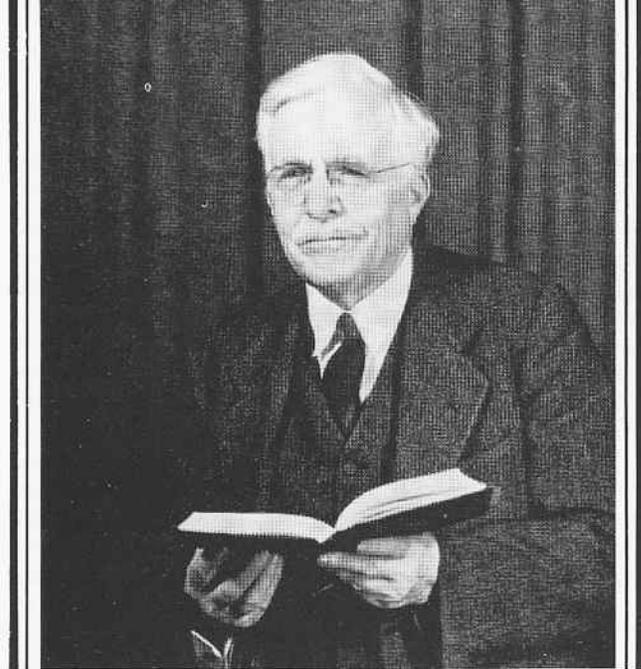
Members were requested to hold Fellowship papers in confidence. They were considered the personal property of their respective authors, who retained full control of them. An author might secure additional copies of his paper for personal use, with the above notation and mention of the Fellowship deleted, and was free to use them as he deemed appropriate.

The broad scope of Fellowship research is evident from this sampling of titles:

- "The Soul-Winning Motive"
- "The Two Covenants"
- "The Shut Door"
- "The King of the Lombards"
- "Har-Mageddon"
- "The Jubilee Calendar"
- "Before the Veil"
- "Melchisedec"
- "This Generation"
- "The Divorce Question"
- "The Deity of Christ"
- "The Sealing of the Saints"
- "The Three Angels' Messages"
- "Development of the Mystery of Iniquity"
- "The Place of Christ in Spiritualism"
- "Spiritual Significance of the Sanctuary"
- "The Four Divisions of Alexander's Empire"
- "The Eternal Priesthood of Christ"
- "The Chronology of the Hebrew Monarchies"
- "How Long Shall Be the Vision?"
- "The Prohibition of Unclean Meats"
- "The Glory That Lightens the Earth"
- "Pioneer Views on Daniel and Armageddon"
- "The Privileges and Conditions of Stewardship"
- "Historical Setting and Background of the Term 'Daily'"
- "Meteoric Showers Seen as Heralds of the Advent"

Among the authors were:

- Wilfred J. Airey
- Albert W. Anderson
- Henry F. Brown
- Leon L. Caviness
- Raymond F. Cottrell
- LeRoy E. Froom
- Edward Heppenstall
- R. E. Hoen
- George D. Keough
- Stewart Kime
- A. F. J. Kranz
- Herbert C. Lacey
- Roland E. Loasby
- Charles S. Longacre
- Meade MacGuire
- Andrew Nelson
- Walter A. Nelson
- Albert V. Olson
- H. O. Olson
- George McCready Price
- Paul E. Quimby
- William A. Spicer
- Edwin R. Thiele
- Jean Vuilleumier
- Guy F. Wolfkill
- Alonzo J. Wearner
- C. L. Woods

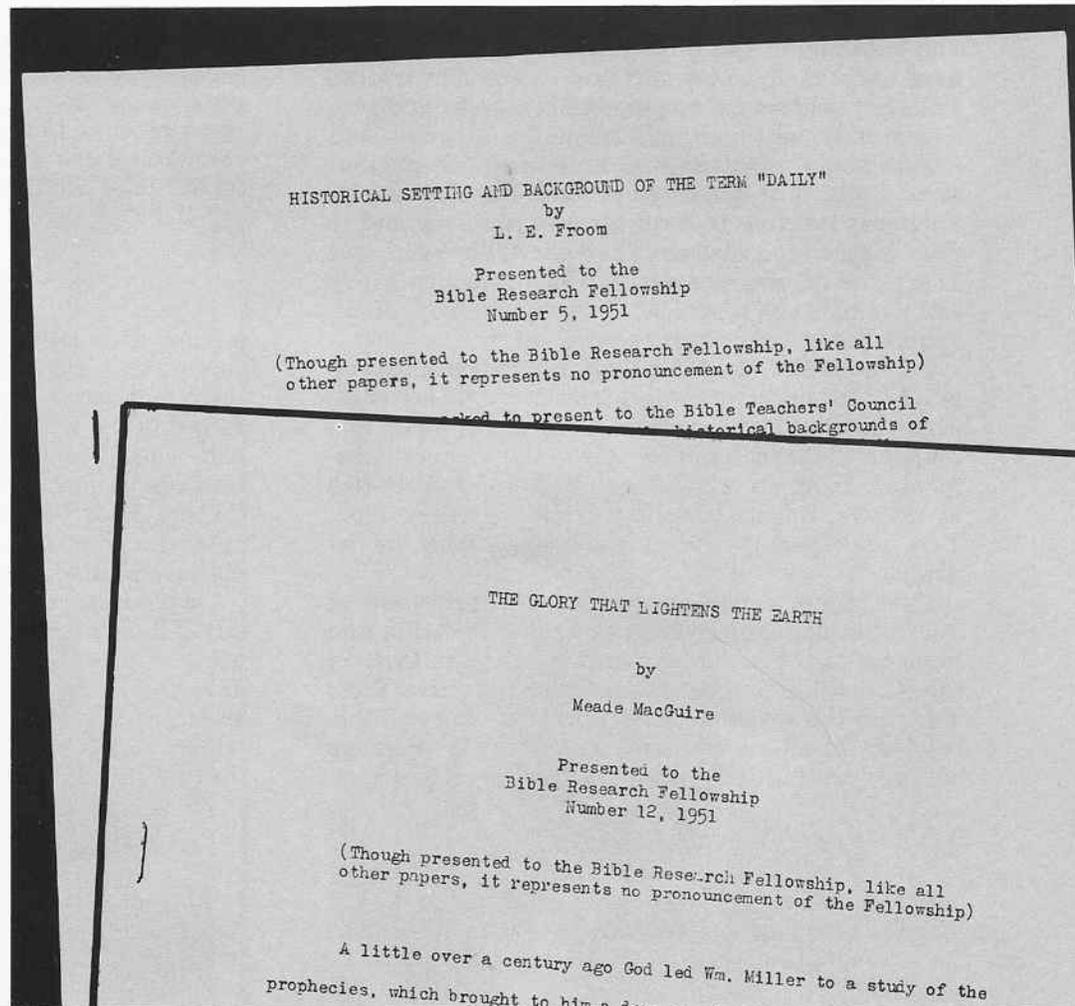


credit: Pacific Union College

Dr. Leon L. Caviness, a Bible languages teacher at Pacific Union College, was chairman of the Bible Research Fellowship during the entire ten years of its existence.

During the period of its existence, approximately 140 papers were evaluated by the Bible Research Fellowship and about 120 were accepted for formal consideration. The Fellowship never adopted or advocated any particular interpretation of Scripture; its sole purpose was to provide a means of communication and interaction among its members in their individual research.

courtesy: Loma Linda University Heritage Room





THE BIBLE Research Fellowship subscribed to the great fundamentals of the Christian faith on which there is general agreement among Seventh-day Adventists. Its primary attention was devoted to aspects of these fundamentals and to passages of Scripture with respect to which there was not yet substantial consensus, with a view to clearer understanding of Scripture at these points. Such matters obviously required the attention of those in the church who, by training and experience, were best qualified to investigate them on the basis of sound principles of exegesis, in an environment conducive to such study. The Bible Research Fellowship was the corporate response of the college Bible teachers of the church to the emphatic counsel of Ellen White:

There are mines of truth yet to be discovered by the earnest seeker.

[We should enter into] a diligent study of the Scriptures and a most critical examination of the positions which we hold. God would have all the bearings and positions of truth thoroughly and perseveringly searched, with prayer and fasting. Believers are not to rest in suppositions and ill-defined ideas of what constitutes truth.

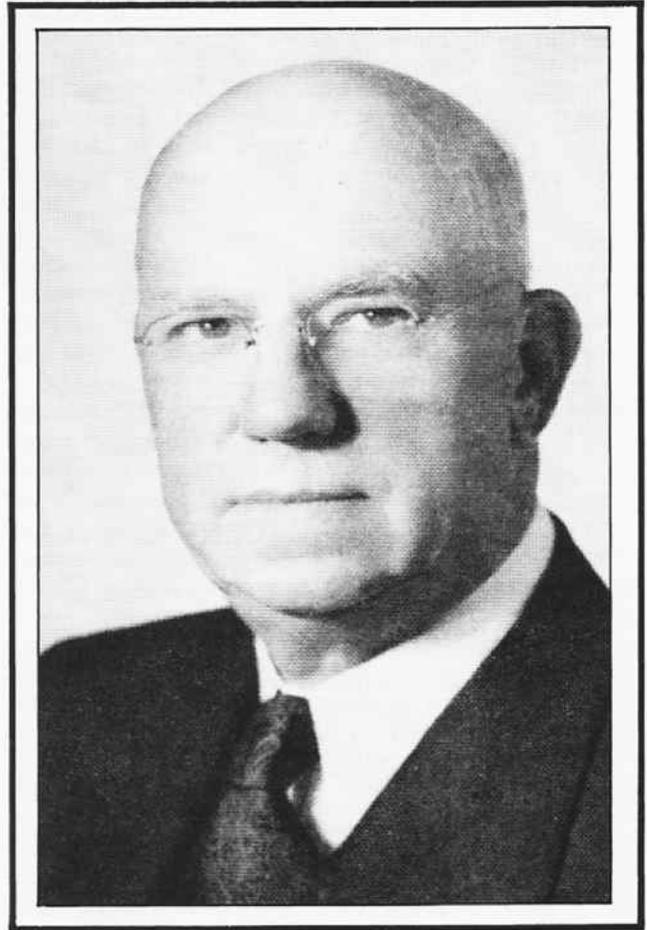
When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves, to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient time, who hold to tradition, and worship they know not what.

The initiators of the Bible Research Fellowship believed that a full and fair investigation of all the evidence is essential to genuine research, and promotes unity.

Fellowship members respected each other's personal integrity as dedicated Seventh-day Adventists. Each was left free to form his own opinions and to draw his own conclusions. The Fellowship's role was to provide an environment in which effective group study could take place. As Proverbs states, "In an abundance of counselors there is safety."

Paradoxically, the Bible Research Fellowship, voluntarily but under pressure, terminated its activities at the height of its success, in December, 1952, and initiated the transfer of its role to the General Conference. From an original membership of thirty-five in 1940-44, it had grown to more than 250 by 1952. Two fundamental reasons were responsible for its demise.

First, there existed a deep-seated difference of opinion in the church with respect to the value and importance of research-type Bible study. In favor of the Fellowship and its approach to collective Bible study on the research level were the college Bible teachers in all sixteen Adventist English-language colleges around the world, other college teachers,



Elder William H. Branson, President of the General Conference from 1950 to 1954, misunderstood the purpose of the Bible Research Fellowship and recommended that it be disbanded. In its place was established the Committee for Biblical Study and Research of the General Conference.

editors, and many pastors and administrators in local conferences and in the General Conference. Many of their individual expressions of appreciation are on record in the Bible Research Fellowship correspondence file. The collective expression of the Bible teachers is on record in the minutes of the 1950 College Bible Teachers' Council. To my knowledge, no member of the Fellowship ever questioned its objectives, its spirit, or its *modus operandi*.

On the other hand, some non-members who knew little, if anything, about the Fellowship or about research-level Bible study objected to its existence. They found its detailed analysis of Bible passages and the investigation of alternative possible interpretations of these passages—with a view to providing the church with a firmer Scripture basis for the proc-

William H. Branson, president of the General Conference, are also a matter of record.

Secondly, for an unofficial organization such as the Fellowship to function across administrative and institutional lines, throughout North America and around the world, without administrative supervision and control of the General Conference, was considered by some administrators—including the president of the General Conference—to be in violation of generally accepted denominational protocol. Several individuals held this position irrespective of the fact that the Fellowship was in every respect completely loyal to the church, to its leaders, and to its fundamental teachings. To my knowledge, no member had ever criticized or questioned church leadership at any level. It never occurred to us to do so; our quest and concern was for truth of value to the church.

Neither of these two factors seems to have been sufficient in and of itself, however, to compromise the viability of the Fellowship. But a situation that developed in Australia brought these two elements together in a lethal combination that precipitated action on the part of Elder Branson. The catena of events deserves narration at some length as a case study of the problems serious Biblical research and study continues to encounter.

Dr. Vernon Hendershot, president of the Theological Seminary from 1951-1952, chaired the 1950 Bible Teachers' Council held at Pacific Union College.

courtesy: Andrews University Heritage Room



LOUIS F. WERE of Australia attended the 1950 General Conference Session in San Francisco (July 10 to 19) at his own expense and spent several days at Angwin following the session. The 1950 General Conference-sponsored Bible Teachers' Council met on the campus of Pacific Union College from July 23 to 30, and on his own initiative Brother Were attended a number of the Council meetings along with a few other interested teachers. Formerly an Adventist minister, he had left the ministry as a result of indiscretion on his part. An ardent Bible student, he had published a number of books and pamphlets on various subjects in which he set forth at considerable length the results of his Bible study. A subject on which Were wrote at some length was the king of the north and Armageddon, a live topic for discussion in the years leading up to and during World War II. His views on Daniel 11 and Armageddon were similar to those of James White and other pioneer Adventist Bible students but differed from those of Uriah Smith, which church leaders in Australia favored at the time. Despite their emphatic disapproval, Were persisted in presenting and publishing his views.

One of the assigned papers at the 1950 Bible Teachers' Council dealt with the presentation of controversial subjects in the classroom. The morning this paper was to be read, I suggested to Dr. Vernon

At the 1952 Bible Conference, Walter E. Read was asked to direct the newly-established Office of Bible Research at the General Conference and to set up a permanent committee for Biblical study and research.



courtesy: Nigel G. Barham

Hendershot, president of the Theological Seminary and chairman of the Council, that it might be interesting to poll the teachers present on their views with respect to a number of subjects that had occasioned controversy over the past half century. He concurred, and I prepared a form on which each of the Bible teachers could indicate his own understanding with respect to the various points of controversy. This was done immediately following the reading of the paper on controversial views. Among the items listed in the poll were various interpretations that had been given the king of the north and Armageddon.

The poll revealed general unanimity on all of the formerly controverted points, and complete agreement with respect to the king of the north and Armageddon. A chorus of fervent "amens" greeted my announcement of the results, and someone proposed that we sing the Doxology—which we did. The Bible teachers voted that the poll results be included in the official minutes of the Council.

The Bible teachers' agreement on the identity of the king of the north and the nature of the battle of Armageddon coincided with that for which Louis Were had been severely criticized in Australia. He returned to Australia, wrote K. J. Reynolds of the General Conference Department of Education, with the "report that the best theological brains among the Adventists in America were giving full support to the things he had been teaching for years in Australia against the opposition of the leading brethren. So you see, he has stirred up quite a tempest." As a result Neal C. Wilson, Sr., president of the Division, appealed to Elder Branson of the General Conference to deal appropriately with the situation. Elder Branson responded by issuing a letter warning church administrators against the Bible Research Fellowship, setting up an *ad hoc* committee to study the king of the north and Armageddon, and scheduling a large ecumenical Bible Conference for September, 1952, that would lay down the official line on these and other subjects.



CONFUSING THE 1950 quadrennial council of the college Bible teachers at Angwin with the Angwin-based Bible Research Fellowship, Elder Branson's presidential letter, issued to church administrators around the world, warned them against the Bible Research Fellowship—which was in no way involved with the situation in Australia that precipitated his correspondence.

In this letter, dated October 7, 1951 (immediately preceding the Fall Council), Elder Branson acknowledged that he had "received very little of the material being sent out by the Fellowship, so [I] actually know little about its activities except as I receive repercussions from the field [Australia]." Some of these, he wrote, "give to those of us here at head-

quarters some cause for concern." The Fellowship had become "a major denominational problem," he continued, because of its "chapters or branches in the various Divisions," and "the General Conference Officers, who recently gave considerable study to reactions from the field, expressed considerable concern over the situation that is developing." He lamented that:

A very wrong impression is being given to the world field as to the loyalty of many of the Fellowship members to the old fundamentals of the Advent message [Uriah Smith's view of the king of the north and Armageddon], and that scores of our workers and college students are becoming confused as to many points of denominational faith and teaching.

He specifically objected to inclusion of the poll on controversial subjects in the official report of the 1950 College Bible Teachers' Council, and identified the unanimity of the Bible teachers with respect to Armageddon and the kings of the east (counter to Uriah Smith's view) as the theological crux of his objection.

Curiously, Elder Branson addressed this four-page letter to "L.L. Caviness, Ph.D.," and "Prof. Raymond F. Cottrell" but sent it to administrators around the world and *not to either of us*. Puzzled inquiries from Fellowship members around the world a few weeks later provided our first intimation of such a letter. Our first copy came from a personal friend of Dr. Caviness, a Bible teacher at Helderberg College in South Africa, who was a member of the Fellowship. As Elder Branson stated frankly in his letter, he himself knew little about the Fellowship and what little he did know had come to him in the form of "repercussions from the field"—from people who evidently did not know much more about it than he did. Neither he nor they had sought first-hand information about it from any of the Bible teachers or from the officers of the Fellowship before taking action.

As chairman and secretary of the Fellowship, Dr. Caviness and I both wrote Elder Branson requesting information about the letter and an explanation of his reason for sending it out. It was clear to us that he and his informers were unwitting victims of misinformation which none had made an attempt to verify. Two months later Roger Altman, administrative secretary to Elder Branson, sent each of us a copy of the letter with an apology for the omission of our names from the list of recipients. For some months Dr. Caviness and I sought unsuccessfully to clarify matters with Elder Branson, explaining the role of the Fellowship as a study group initiated by the college Bible teachers and assuring him of our individual and collective, complete and undivided loyalty to the church and its leaders. But he had evidently decided that the Fellowship posed a grave threat to the church, and that settled the matter. All

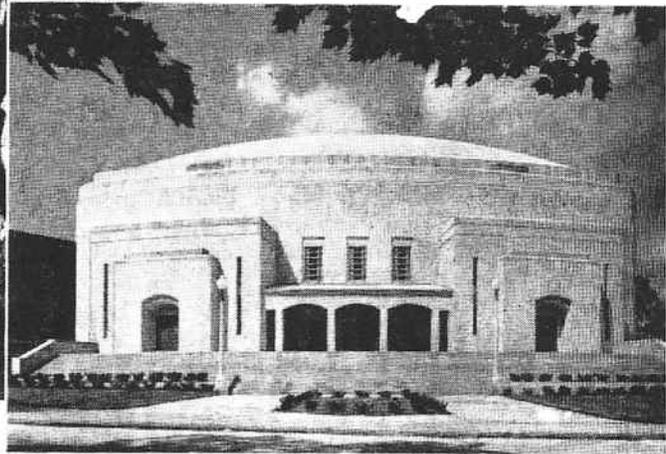
PROGRAM

Seventh-day Adventist
BIBLE CONFERENCE



The Belden House in Which First 1848 Bible Conference Was Held at Rocky Hill, Connecticut

The Spacious Sligo Church in Which the 1952 Bible Conference Is Being Held in Takoma Park



SEPTEMBER 1-13, 1952



HELD IN THE

Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church

FLOWER AND CARROLL AVENUES
TAKOMA PARK, WASHINGTON, D.C.

efforts to clarify the situation proved futile.

The immediate effect of his letter was to create an even greater interest in the Fellowship than had existed before. Twice as many membership applications were received during the year after his letter as during any comparable period prior to it.

After some months of correspondence with Elder Branson, I reluctantly concluded that further attempts to clarify matters would be futile and that more harm would result from defending the Fellowship than from discontinuing it in deference to the well-being of the church as a whole. The key factor in my decision was reluctant acceptance of his opinion that denominational protocol precluded its existence. The Fellowship was serving the Bible teachers of all sixteen Adventist English-language colleges around the world and had members in every world division of the General Conference except one, and in every union conference except one.

Accordingly, upon three occasions during the winter of 1951-52 I proposed to Dr. Caviness that we return the Fellowship to the college Bible teachers at the proposed 1952 Bible Conference in Takoma Park, Maryland, with the recommendation that it be disbanded. I also proposed that we request the General Conference to make provision for Bible research within the framework of the General Conference. He reluctantly agreed that that would be the best course of action under the circumstances.

But it was nevertheless, a deep disappointment to all of the Bible teachers, to be so misunderstood and misrepresented around the world—for what was intended to be sincere and dedicated service to the church—and to see the effective ministry of the Fellowship brought to a close. The impasse to which we had come was a modern version, in a religious setting, of the age-long difficulty town and gown have always experienced in trying to understand and cooperate with each other. However, attempts to resolve this particular difference of opinion—between the college Bible teachers and the General Conference administration—were marked on both sides, from beginning to end, by goodwill and mutual respect; relations never deteriorated to the personality level.

Simultaneously with my proposal that the Fellowship be disbanded, I drew up a formal recommendation that the General Conference establish an office of Bible research and appoint a Bible research committee. I sent copies of this recommendation to several persons at the General Conference and to other persons of influence in church affairs with whom I was personally acquainted. I then arranged with Clifford L. Bauer, president of the Pacific Union Conference, for Dr. Caviness to attend the Bible Conference as a delegate of the Pacific Union, specifically that he might work out, with the Bible teachers and the General Conference, the transfer of Fellowship activities to the General Conference. A

few days later, Elder Branson personally invited him to attend the Autumn Council and to participate in arrangements for establishing the office of Bible research and the new Bible Research Committee.

Walter E. Read of the General Conference secretariat was appointed chairman of the *ad hoc* committee set up to make an in-depth study of the king of the north and Armageddon, and to present this subject at the 1952 Bible Conference. On behalf of the committee and in preparation for the conference, he corresponded with me at length over a period of several months. Among other things, he requested copies of a number of papers I had written on various aspects of the subject for the Fellowship. The *ad hoc* committee was eventually merged into the Bible Research Committee, which presented a formal report in the March, 1954 *Ministry*. This report listed several of these papers, among others, accepted their conclusions, and gave the papers appropriate credit. The report consisted essentially of a resume of my paper, "Pioneer Views on Daniel 11 and Armageddon."



IN ORDER TO counteract what he felt to be the objectionable influence of the Bible Research Fellowship (all of the Bible teachers of the church, collectively), Elder Branson, as previously noted, decided to convene a large ecumenical Bible Conference to reaffirm the historic position of the church on important points of Biblical interpretation as he understood them. That conference met in the Sligo Church in Takoma Park from September 1 to 13, 1952, a few days before the 1952 Autumn Council. Most of the delegates to this conference were from North America, but many from overseas came early to attend both gatherings. Major attention was given to certain points of interpretation listed in the questionnaire at the Bible Teachers' Council two years before, to which Elder Branson had taken particular exception, and especially to the king of the north, the battle of Armageddon, and related events. The Bible Conference was so structured that only what might be called the "official position" was to be mentioned publicly, and no provision was made for discussion on the floor—though there was considerable "locker room" discussion. To this end all papers were carefully screened in advance, as were written questions from the floor. In his lengthy, two-part presentation of Armageddon and related subjects, Elder Read took the same position as that reflected by the college Bible teachers in the 1950 poll.

Bible teachers attending the 1952 Bible Conference agreed to disband the Fellowship, and the Autumn Council a few days later (September 17 to 27) appointed Walter E. Read to direct the office of Bible research and set up a permanent "Committee for Biblical Study and Research." Dr. Caviness



R. A. Anderson



W. R. Beach



W. H. Branson



T. G. Bunch



L. K. Dickson



M. K. Eckenroth



W. L. Emmerson



R. R. Figuhr



T. R. Flaiz



L. E. Froom



E. Heppenstall



S. H. Horn

Speakers at the
BIBLE CONFERENCE

The speakers here shown were those who presented the various subjects at the conference. In addition to these were the Sabbath speakers and the leaders of the devotional services, whose pictures are shown elsewhere.



T. H. Jemison



A. S. Maxwell



J. W. McFarland



W. G. C. Murdoch



F. D. Nichol



A. V. Olson



W. E. Read



D. E. Rebok



H. L. Rudy



W. Schubert



John C. Trever



F. H. Yost



The 1952 Bible Conference met in the Sligo Church September 1 to 13. Bible teachers attending that conference agreed to disband the Bible Research Fellowship because the General Conference was establishing its own permanent office of Bible Research.
courtesy: Review and Herald Publishing Association

thereupon laid plans to disband the Fellowship as of December, 1952, when membership dues already received would expire. In November the new committee met for the first time under the chairmanship of Elder Read. The guidelines drawn for it by the General Conference officers specified the objectives and procedures pioneered by the Bible Research Fellowship. With the approval of their authors, some thirty research papers awaiting consideration by the Fellowship were turned over to the new committee, and Dr. Caviness wrote to the nine local chapters inviting them to deal directly with Elder Read and the new committee. Through the columns of *The Ministry* an announcement was made of the new committee and an invitation issued for research papers to be contributed. There was thus direct continuity between the Bible Research Fellowship and the new Committee for Biblical Study and Research.

The Bible Research Fellowship thus terminated nearly ten years of pioneering ministry to the church, during which time the Angwin chapter met regularly one Sabbath afternoon each month. It was my

privilege to attend every meeting of the Fellowship from 1943 to 1952, and every meeting of the new Bible Research Committee from 1952 to 1975.



HE INFLUENCE OF the Bible Research Fellowship did not cease with formal termination of its activities. In ten short years it made an impact on the denomination that has vitally affected church life and work. There were both immediate, tangible results, and less tangible but equally important long-range results. The principal tangible results consisted of:

1. A permanent General Conference office of Bible research, established in 1952, the year of transition.
2. A permanent General Conference Committee for Biblical Study and Research, also established in 1952.
3. The ecumenical Bible Conference of 1952, in Takoma Park.
4. The principles of interpretation built into the *SDA Bible Commentary*, 1952 to 1957. Practically all of the writers and the two editors of the *Commentary* were Bible teachers and members of the Bible Research Fellowship at the time they accepted their assignments. The *Commentary* reflects the spirit, the hermeneutical principles, and the interpretation of Scripture encouraged by the Fellowship, and is a living monument to it. These hermeneutical principles are also set forth at some length in my chapter



on principles of Bible interpretation in the book *Problems in Bible Translation*; in my article on "The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy" in Volume 4 of the *Commentary*; and in numerous unpublished papers on the subject.

Less tangible results of the Fellowship include:

5. A demonstration of effective group dynamics in cooperative Bible study on the research level for the first time in the history of the church. It brought the college Bible teachers of the church—with their concern for such study—together in a permanent, cooperative working relationship in which mutual respect and confidence, complete freedom of expression and investigation, and a spirit of dedication and loyalty to the church prevailed.

6. A demonstration of the atmosphere necessary for creative, cooperative research-level Bible study. This atmosphere is composed of willingness to recognize the Holy Spirit as the author, guardian, and arbiter of truth, and to follow wherever the Spirit leads; willingness to deal objectively and fairly with all of the available evidence; and willingness to listen attentively and with an open mind to the other person's perspective of the truth, in the realization that he may have a more accurate understanding of some facets of it than I do, and with sincere respect for his perception of truth and confidence in his personal integrity, dedication, and loyalty to the church. Such an atmosphere is vital to a successful corporate quest for truth.

7. Its provision of a place to which the Bible

scholars of the church could take reports of their individual study for evaluation and constructive criticism by their peers; that is, persons competent to evaluate research-level study projects. Ellen White counseled those who, in their study of the Bible, find what they take to be a clearer understanding of truth, to submit their findings to persons of experience—obviously persons with more experience than their own:

. . . the only safety for any of us is in receiving no new doctrine, no new interpretation of the Scriptures, without first submitting it to brethren of experience. Lay it before them in a humble, teachable spirit, with earnest prayer; and if they see no light in it, yield to their judgment; for "in the multitude of counselors there is safety."

But to whom can those with the best training and highest degree of competence in Biblical studies go for such counsel? Obviously, only to their peers; that is, persons with comparable training and experience in Biblical studies. The Bible Research Fellowship provided a forum in which the results of Bible study on the research level could be evaluated by a panel of other competent Bible scholars, in an atmosphere of mutual respect and confidence.

8. A demonstration that freedom to investigate the Bible objectively, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with an open mind and in mutual confidence, is a far more effective catalyst for unifying competent, responsible, thinking persons than regimentation of thought. The Fellowship was unofficial in its

organization and operation, and therefore had no need to take a position or make a pronouncement. It never did so. Its purpose was simply to help its members in their individual quests for truth. Inasmuch as the Fellowship eventually included virtually all the college Bible teachers of the church, through them it made a major contribution to our collective perception of truth. In this unofficial atmosphere the investigation of alternative possible interpretations and points of view could proceed in a relaxed, secure atmosphere of mutual respect and confidence, without fear of being misunderstood, or of recrimination or reprisal. The responsible scholarly exchange and examination of alternative interpretations and points of view in such an atmosphere seem essential to any genuine quest for truth.

9. A demonstration that cooperation with others in the quest for truth is a highly desirable safeguard against weak spots in one's own reasoning process, and that the experience of working with others in the quest binds hearts and minds together in a richer understanding of God's word. I feel that one of the most valuable byproducts of the Bible Research Fellowship was the spirit of unity and fellowship it provided for its members in their collective quest for truth.

10. Its powerful incentive to diligent, thorough, persevering Bible study on the research level, with a view to ascertaining as accurate and complete an understanding of the import of Scriptures as possible. It brought individual endeavor to understand the Bible into sharp focus. The experience of critically evaluating many scores of papers, analyzing an

Elder R. F. Cottrell was secretary of the Bible Research Fellowship during the entire period of its existence. Besides writing some of the papers discussed by the Fellowship, he attended every one of its meetings from 1943 to 1952 as well as every meeting of the later Bible Research Committee from 1952 to 1975.

courtesy: Pacific Union College



author's presuppositions, his hermeneutic, his reasoning process, and the validity of his conclusions in terms of the evidence he presented was also of inestimable value.

The church is deeply indebted to the Bible Research Fellowship and to the dedication and vision of its founder and leading spirit, Dr. Leon L. Caviness. The church might well be served today by a revival of the objectives, the incentives, the principles, the atmosphere, the procedures, and the spirit of fellowship in the quest for truth it provided those who participated in it.

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