

Report of Discussions with Desmond Ford and Associates

IN late July, 1982, W. R. Lesh, J. R. Spangler, and W. D. Eva met with Dr and Mrs Desmond Ford at the request of Pastor Neal C. Wilson. The meeting took place in the Takoma Park area and was in response to a serious suggestion passed on to the General Conference that there be a study of some aspects of the church's doctrines with Dr Ford and his associates to see whether there could be healing and reconciliation with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After about twelve hours of study and discussion, Pastors Lesh, Spangler, and Eva reported to Pastor Wilson and the General Conference officers that it might prove profitable to have a series of studies with Dr Ford and his associates covering certain basic positions and fundamental beliefs of the church.

On August 17 the General Conference officers carefully considered the report, but arrived at no firm consensus, since they felt it wise to allow time for reflection. The following week, after further earnest consideration, the officers reached the decision to enter into further study with Dr Ford and his associates provided the latter would, during the time the studies are in progress, agree to abide by the conditions suggested in the report.

These conditions are that (1) Dr Ford and his associates preach within the sphere of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and as Seventh-day Adventist ministers, (2) they present no public or private criticism of church administration, (3) they keep a low profile in the Australasian Division, (4) they seek earnestly to heal divisions in the church and to be seen as doing so.

The General Conference officers decided that if any individual or the entire group would agree to these conditions, the proposed studies would proceed. The officers also voiced the expectation that the basic relationship between the church and Dr Ford and his associates would be clarified.

Further contacts were made with Dr Ford and his associates, and on November 1 a plan was proposed in Pastor Wilson's office. It states that discussions will take place under the conditions approved by the General Conference officers in August and as already stated in this article. The topics to be studied will concern doctrinal issues and will be decided in advance between the General Conference group of the study committee and Dr Ford and his associates. It will be the plan to seek to arrive at conclusions at each meeting in regard to the topics discussed. During the period of the studies every endeavour will be made to maintain such relationships as will foster understanding within the study group itself and that, in any and

all contacts beyond the group will contribute to the unity of the church. In a letter of November 18 Dr Ford and his associates expressed their agreement with this proposal.

The basic group from the General Conference consists of W. D. Eva (chairman), G. F. Hasel, W. G. Johnsson, W. R. Lesh, J. R. Spangler. Dr Ford's group will be comprised of himself, Calvin Edwards, Noel Mason, and Smuts van Rooyen.

As specific items are dealt with, the membership of the committee may be enlarged by the addition of selected persons with appropriate skills and expertise. Accordingly

Neils Erik Andreasen and Enoch Oliveira will also attend the first meeting to share their counsel with the group and take part in the discussions.

The first meeting is scheduled for January 14 to 17, 1983, and will take place in the San Francisco area. The general topic will be "What Are the Methods and Principles of Biblical Interpretation, Especially as They Relate to Prophecy?" Four specific areas will be covered: "The Nature of Old Testament Prophecy," "How Do We Arrive at Christian Doctrine?" "The Role of Scholarship in Arriving at Doctrine," and "The Significance and Importance of Study and Understanding of Eschatological Truth." It is intended that these studies will prepare the way for more specific ones.

As we share this information with the membership of the church, we covet your intercessory prayers. Pray that truth may stand out in clarity; intercede also that the unity our Saviour so earnestly prayed for may be preserved and strengthened.

—W. D. Eva,

Adventist Review, January 13.

Statement on Ford Group

ON JANUARY 14 to 17 representatives appointed by the General Conference met in the San Francisco area with Desmond Ford and his associates. The general topic of discussion was "What Are the Methods and Principles of Biblical Interpretation, Especially as They Relate to Prophecy?" (For background to the meeting, see the accompanying report from the *Adventist Review* for January 13.)

Although a cordial spirit prevailed, the meeting underscored significant differences of understanding between the two groups. The principal areas of disagreement were: The interpretation of Old Testament prophecy, particularly the Book of Daniel, the relation between the Old and the New Testaments, and the nature of eschatology. The General Conference representatives were unanimous in their opinion that the discussions had clearly revealed that the members of Good News Unlimited reject the historical positions as well as official teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in these areas.

The General Conference officers at a meeting on January 25 received a report from those appointed by the General Conference. In view of the basic nature of the differences and the failure of the San Francisco meeting to bring about even a partial reconciliation of understanding, the General Conference officers agreed to terminate further doctrinal discussions with Dr Ford and his associates, since such would probably prove to be unproductive.*

The Australasian Division executive committee on February 1, 1983, following consideration of this information, voted with regret to annul Dr Desmond Ford's ordination and advise the church where he holds membership of this action.

*This statement (up to asterisk) appeared as well in the *Adventist Review* for February 17. A preliminary statement, giving a background to the meeting, appeared in the *Adventist Review* for January 13, and is reproduced in conjunction with the above statement for the information of our RECORD readers. Editor.