

THE JOHN CARTER STORY

From time to time we receive requests for information on the evangelist, John Carter. Here is a very brief update:

1 - CARTER COMES TO AMERICA

We first learned about Carter from faithful historic pastors in Australia. He had recently completed an evangelistic series in the new Sydney Opera House (the imposing building with the “wings” on it, alongside Sydney Harbor). Elder Neal C. Wilson wanted to bring him to the North American Division to be a major evangelist here.

We learned at that time, from faithful historic Adventist pastors over there, that Carter was solidly new theology, a very close friend of Desmond Ford, and far more brilliant and dangerous than Ford. We were told that Carter had a powerful, charismatic personality, superior to that of Ford.

So, at that time (July 1984), we published *The Carter Approach*, a two-part tract set [WM-82-83], which discussed the situation.

Enough protests were lodged at the General Conference that, when Elder Wilson asked the North American Division Committee to place a call for Carter to come to America, they turned him down. That action seems surprising today, since it would not happen now.

So arrangements were worked out to bring Carter in the backdoor.

A major evangelistic effort was held in the Caribbean; Jamaica, as I recall. We received the full-color ad sheets on it at the time. John is an expert at preparing outstanding full-color (and very expensive) circulars to advertise his campaigns.

The next step was to approach

the then president of the Texas Conference, and request that he accept John Carter in—to be the pastor of the Forth Worth, Texas, Seventh-day Adventist Church.

This was accomplished, and Carter moved to Texas. We discussed the situation in *John Carter Update* [WM—82-83], a July 1986 publication.

From Texas, John was called to the Southern California Conference as a conference evangelist.

But what happened after that? Here is the rest of the story.

Elder Dart, president of the Southern California Conference, called John Carter to pastor the Hollywood Church.

I first heard of that church in the early 1950s. It was already astoundingly liberal, and served coffee and cake between services on Sabbath morning. Situated next to the Hollywood Freeway, right at its exit, it is in a location to command the attention of hundreds of thousands of cars every day.

Arriving at the Hollywood Church, Carter decided that what was needed was an imposing building, alongside the existing church, with hanging gardens draped from the giant steps on one side. With this purpose in mind, he had a professional design an architectural view of what it would look like.

Declaring that the Hollywood Church was going to build it, he circulated copies of the two sketches of it in various churches in southern California. (See page four for a view of the sketches; they are described on the bottom of page three.)

When asked how it would be financed, he said that the middle floors of the building would be leased

out to non-Adventist businesses.

Even the name of the office building, he said would be a witness: It would be called the “*Sabbath Tower*.”

The new church was to be built on the present parking lot, with several underground levels for parking. According to the architectural sketches, there would be many floors to the building. Carter’s plan called for a radio station in one of the top floors, from which, hopefully, he could broadcast to southern California.

Although he tried to enlist the support of the local church membership, they were deeply upset about the whole project. They cared not that the bottom rotunda auditorium area would be an auditorium, and the top floors would be palatial offices of Carter and his staff. They wanted out! They did not want their church property turned into an office building, with worldlings passing through on Sabbath.

But John Carter was not a man to give up on a project, and he continued urging it, saying that the large circular auditorium and the base of the step pyramid could be used as a city-wide evangelistic center, which he could use to reach the whole city.

Within about three months, the church board of the Hollywood Church asked the conference for a replacement. So John left Hollywood.

At this juncture, Carter told the conference officers that he was ready to conduct a major campaign in Los Angeles, which would have most startling results. However, tithes and offerings in the Southern California Conference had been low, and they hesitated to go forward with a really

large campaign, such as he proposed.

He told them that, if they would let him give a series of meeting in a major rented auditorium, a rich doctor in Australia had promised to give to give him \$200,000 for advertising those meetings.

So the conference went ahead and authorized the evangelistic series—and spent the money on advertising, in good faith that it would be returned. A wide area was covered by both television and newspaper ads.

Tickets were required to attend all meetings, and everyone had to pass through one door, where the tickets were collected. The guards took the tickets and handed them directly to one person. That person was an attorney, with several degrees in addition to his law degree. At one time he had worked in the White House and the State Department. But later he decided to enter the ministry.

It was his task to count the tickets for conference records. But, when the attorney read, in the newspapers, that “thousands” were attending the meetings, he told Carter that the attendance figure he had given the newspapers did not agree with the number of tickets actually counted. Carter, in reply, said, “You can’t count!”

This attorney, who had completed graduate work in economics, was told he could not count! According to the ticket count, the attorney said the average attendance was about 1,200—never in the thousands. And never did 23,000 attend the meetings. The attendance at the immense Shrine Auditorium was not large, and rapidly diminished as the meetings progressed.

Publicity photos were taken and released through secular and church publications. But they were always of five to ten people sitting close together; never of the huge, nearly empty arena.

All the conference ministers were

told to attend the meetings and assist. But there were pastors who later said that Carter was extremely hard to work with, and treated them like inferiors.

When that series ended, there were almost no baptisms.

However, it was claimed that there were 10,000 ready for baptism. Later, a lesser number was cited, and then it was said that there were 600 people who were going to help him build a new church. He claimed to have the money to do this. But nothing happened.

About the time the meetings closed, Carter asked several of the ministers to accompany him to Africa for a series of meetings. They would have to pay their own way and cover all their own expenses, but Carter said he had checks for various large amounts to cover all other expenses. But no pastors would agree to go with him.

A few weeks later, John was on the rostrum of the Loma Linda University Church, where he appealed for people to go to Russia with him for a series of evangelistic meetings. Each must pay his own expenses; Carter said he had checks for \$80,000, \$70,000, etc., to cover other expenses. (He later went to Russia and held meetings.)

By this time, the Los Angeles Evangelistic Series had been finished for a number of months, and the conference treasurer decided it was time to get the money, which had been spent for campaign advertising, from Carter.

John’s reply was that it was on the way. Later, asked again, he said that the doctor had sent the money to a bank in Florida. After more time elapsed, the conference asked again, and Carter said it was “frozen” in that bank in Florida.

The attorney, mentioned earlier, was chairman of the conference committee on finances, as well as a conference pastor. He checked on the matter, and, according to his report, there never had been any such money in that Florida bank or any other. No bank in Florida had had its accounts frozen.

According to the attorney, John

Carter still owes over \$200,000 to the Southern California Conference.

Of course, in the future, the failure of the Los Angeles effort and the repayment problem would hurt his ability to get any conference to back him for evangelistic meetings.

Then Carter made contact with Three Angels Broadcasting Ministry, in southern Illinois, and began speaking on their telecasts. Rather quickly, they became firm friends, a friendship which has continued on down to the present time. Yet that is strange, in view of John’s new theology stance.

Next, Carter started his own Celebration church in Glendale, California. Called the “*Community Adventist Fellowship*,” it is held in the Community Christian Church building, on Colorado Boulevard.

This church had no connection with the Southern California Conference, and Carter told people he was on his own. But, about six months ago, he and the conference agreed to bury the hatchet. It could be a conference church, as long as two offerings were taken each church service—one for the conference (tithe and church expense) and the other for Carter’s projects.

He has 300-500 actual members. The building holds 2,000. We recently received a phone call from a couple who have been attending that church. They report the members come from area Adventist churches, drawn by the drums, music, and razzle-dazzle of Carter.

Money comes in because he goes to Russia occasionally to speak. Carter claims to have brought in 5,000 converts over there, but no one is able to verify it. Russia is a long way off. He recently went back for another eight-day trip.

Several wealthy members in his church have given him money for his Russia trips. John frequently goes back to Texas to solicit money from friends he made, while pastor of the Fort Worth Church.

In September and October, 1994, he held a three-week series at the Pasadena, California, Civic Auditorium. He announced that the meetings cost \$5,000 a night. Five hundred attended

the first weekend, but then it dwindled down to about 100 after that.

When Joe Crews died, Carter's friends urged Amazing Facts to hire him as Joe's successor. But Amazing Facts was firm in refusing to do so.

2 - CARTER'S THEOLOGY

What are John Carter's theological positions? For ten years, we have been told by faithful, historic pastors in Australia, that Carter is solidly new theology, a close friend of Desmond Ford's, and far more charismatic than Ford. After his arrival in the United States, we had no reason to doubt that report.

New theology ministers can be far more subtle in their presentations than were the old-fashioned heretics. When Albion Ballenger spoke and wrote at the turn of the century, he never swerved from his message. Although it was error, yet he had the integrity to stand by that which he was teaching.

But, according to who is listening, new theology advocates can be quick to tailor-make their assertions. For this reason, it can be somewhat harder to draw them out.

But here is how to do it. Privately, ask them a few key questions. They will either evade the point, or give an answer somewhat like the samples

below:

Is there a sanctuary—an actual building—in heaven? Does it have two apartments? (“No.” / “I don't know what's in heaven!”)

Where did Jesus go in A.D. 31? Did He enter the first apartment and begin an antitypical daily ministry there at that time? (“He entered into the presence of God.” / “I don't know where He went.”)

What happened in 1844? Did Jesus leave the first apartment and go into the second apartment at that time? (“Nothing happened in 1844.” / “The church started in 1844.”)

If the one you are speaking with is sharp, he may say, “Jesus started a different phase of His ministry.” That is a favorite device. But he will not agree that there are two rooms in the heavenly Sanctuary, and that Jesus passed from one room to the other in 1844.

Back in the 1980s, Carter would avoid answering such questions. Recently, when asked again, he did this: Bringing his face up very close to the face of the lady who asked, he said, “What business is it of yours, what I believe?”

That answer told exactly where he stood on the question asked (about obedience to the law of God, and the Sanctuary in heaven).

Similar questions can be asked about the necessity of obedience to the

law of God.

Perhaps the most obvious question which Carter either answers incorrectly, or not at all,—is to ask him whether there is a new theology apostasy among the pastors and leaders in our church in Australia. Since he is from Australia, and solidly shares in it, he will tell you that there is no apostasy in Australia, except among some breakaway groups and renegade pastors who are no longer permitted to pastor churches there.

One couple, who has been attending Carter's church, told us last week that church members and officers have witnessed his temper outbursts on a number of occasions. When this couple have asked him about theology, he gets an angry look and turns away.

“We are not to receive the words of those who come with a message that contradicts the special points of our faith. They gather together a mass of Scripture, and pile it as proof around their asserted theories. This has been done over and over again during the past fifty years. And while the Scriptures are God's Word, and are to be respected, the application of them, if such application moves one pillar from the foundation that God has sustained these fifty years, is a great mistake.”—Counsels to Writers and Editors, 32.

The two architectural sketches on the next page were prepared at Carter's request, while pastor of the Hollywood Seventh-day Adventist Church, and then circulated widely among southern California churches.

Each of the two drawings show the Hollywood Freeway on the right, with the exit ramp leading from it at the bottom. Jutting out on the right, next to the freeway, is the existing Adventist church. To the left of it, in what is now its large parking lot, would be the hanging gardens building, rising above a domed auditorium. That circular

auditorium would have two sets of clerestory windows above it, letting in light.

The drawing on the bottom of page four shows a general sketch, but the one on the top provides additional information. It tells us this:

There would be rectangular planters along the outer edge of the building “steps,” for plants and ivy. The small circles are said to be “tree containers,” in which small trees would be planted (compare the two drawings). It is written in the sketch that there would be 100,000 square feet of commercial office space in the center section of the building. The lower central

sides of the building would have one type of glass on the outside. (You will note that this section forms “steps” on the right side of the drawing, as well as on the left). The building's upper left sides would be recessed, with of a different color of glass siding.

The low, circular building, on the lower left, would have several underground floors for parking.

The top section of the office building was to be reserved for a suite of rooms for John and his radio station.

The entire structure would have made an imposing spectacle, but at great expense.