

# Friends of Sabbath convenes for second time in Australia

The writer, from Lansing, Mich., was a featured speaker at the Friends of the Sabbath conference in Australia.

By Melvin Rhodes

MELBOURNE, Australia—The second Friends of the Sabbath Australia (FOSA) conference took place over three consecutive weekends in April in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne immediately before the Days of Unleavened Bread.

About 450 people attended at various times throughout the three weekends, with some staying for every lecture in the city of their choice.

FOSA do not try to replace any church affiliation, and those present represented several Churches of God, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Chinese Sabbatharians, Messianic Jews and smaller groups.

## Unsettled state

Many of those attending had at some time been members of the Worldwide Church of God. Some had briefly been members of the Church of God International, Global Church of God, Philadelphia Church of God and United Church of God, reflecting the continuing unsettled state of people associated with the Churches of God.

Many openly admitted they were still looking for a fellowship and

remained uncommitted to any church organization.

Overseas guest speakers included Ron Dart of Tyler, Texas, formerly an evangelist with the Worldwide Church of God and the Church of God International, now an independent radio evangelist broadcasting around the world on his *Born to Win* radio program. He is the president of Christian Educational Ministries, based in Tyler.

Also present was the writer of this article, a United Church of God pas-

batarians during the recent crises.

## Guest speakers

Australian guest speakers included Dr. Bryan Ball and David Currie of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Dr. Ball presented a revealing talk and slide presentation on the history of Sabbatarianism in England and Wales after the Reformation through the English Civil War and up till the year 1800, by which time the Sabbatarian churches had mostly disappeared.

## Most speakers participated in the spirit of the Friends of the Sabbath, being willing to listen as well as speak.

tor serving Lansing and Ann Arbor, Mich.

Mr. Dart, deeply appreciated by many Sabbatharians in Australia who listen regularly to his weekly radio program, gave three talks on holy-day typology in both Brisbane and Sydney before returning to the United States.

I spoke in Sydney and Melbourne about the problems that led to the split in the WCG, comparative governmental systems within the Churches of God and lessons learned about the intolerance that has been apparent among Sab-

He included some sobering lessons on why that disappearance happened.

Mr. Currie enthusiastically showed slides of Celtic Britain and related the history of the early primitive Sabbatarian church that practiced Christianity in England during the Roman period and shortly thereafter, before subjugation by the Roman church.

Other guest speakers were Seventh-day Adventist Harold Harker, who delivered "The Sabbath and the Great Controversy"; Janet Reiger, who gave advice on helping children appreciate the Sabbath; Charles Orr, who

looked at the Sabbath from the close of the New Testament to Constantine; Messianic Jew Luana Fabry of the International Christian Embassy, who expounded "God's Appointed Times"; and Bruce Armstrong, who talked on the Sabbath and creation.

## 800,000 Sabbatharians on Taiwan

Preacher Fu An Shih of the True Jesus Church in Taiwan related the history of the Chinese Sabbatharians who began in China in 1917 and today have 800,000 members. (See related article, this page.) This encouraging presentation given through an interpreter showed how Sabbatharians can thrive in the midst of great political and economic turmoil and grow in numbers in spite of being denied access to television, radio or the printed word.

One talk in Melbourne was from 21-year-old Craig McQueen, son of United Church of God pastor Rod McQueen, who now lives in Tasmania. The younger Mr. McQueen, brought up in a Sabbath-keeping family, gave us a perspective of the transition many teens go through from seeing Sabbath observance as a necessary burden that is a part of their parents' religion, to the point that it becomes an essential part of their own lives.

One video presentation, "The

History and Experiences of the East European Sabbatharians," was pre-recorded in February by Victor Kubik, a regional pastor in the United Church of God who lives in Indianapolis, Ind.

Everybody was thankful for the great efforts organizer Craig White, member of UCG Sydney, made in bringing together the speakers for the conferences. Most speakers participated in the spirit of the Friends of the Sabbath, being willing to listen as well as speak.

A few, however, arrived only moments before their scheduled presentation was due to begin and left soon afterward.

Others, including the Philadelphia Church of God, headquartered in Oklahoma, furnished a display, although their members did not attend.

All present appreciated the depth and variety of the presentations given and commented on how much we can learn from each other, thereby avoiding mistakes others have made and sometimes reinventing the wheel.

The conferences were spiritually edifying and profitable for those involved and for those listening.

All Sabbatharians, of whatever church affiliation, should attend at least one Friends of the Sabbath seminar. These weekend-long sessions broaden the mind and uplift the spirit as well as build bridges among people

# Sabbatarians from all over get together down under

The writer is director of the Friends of the Sabbath in Australia.

By Craig White

MELBOURNE, Australia—Over a considerable period, I have been in touch with various branches of the Church of God. At no time did this ever undermine my faith or impact upon the doctrines or truths I had been taught from the church I was associated with.

We should be aware of Christ's example: He associated with Pharisees and Sadducees and was an

turn gave birth to over 126 groups!

The Sabbatarian groups today are like a tree with many branches. Some, sadly, grow old and die, falling off from the Sabbatarian tree. Some flower and are beautiful to behold; others are withering; some are flourishing; many others are struggling to stay alive; and some have been poisoned and have become rather carnal.

In a letter dated Sept. 26 the Polish Sabbatharians indicate support for a Sabbatarian conference and reveal some of the hardships caused by the church of Rome. Let us all pray for our

them have been keeping the Sabbath and all the holy days in homes. More and more of them are coming to an understanding of these vital truths and are edging away from former error.

Are we witnessing the birth of another Sabbatarian group? That remains to be seen. But in the meantime we should introduce them to the broader Sabbatarian community and keep in touch with them.

## Historical information

Vital information with associated overheads and slides was presented by Dr. Bryan Ball, president of the South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventists, and David Currie, president of the Trans-Australian Union of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Dr. Ball's presentation centered on his scholarly work *The Seventh-Day Men: Sabbatarians and Sabbatarianism in England and Wales, 1600-1800*. It is available from Oxford University Press (hardback, ISBN: 0-

Although some Ukrainian Sabbatharians may have long roots back to the 14th century, as related above, the majority appear to have begun because of a revelation to observe the Sabbath in 1946. A similar account may be found with the Chinese Sabbatharians. But before we discuss the modern-day Chinese Sabbatharians, let us take a brief trip back in time.

Evidence for the existence of Sabbatharians in China may be found in Benjamin Wilkinson's acclaimed work *Truth Triumphant*, first published in 1944 (available from Richard Nickels' Giving & Sharing, 3316 Alberta Dr., Gillette, Wyo. 82718).

Another work that discusses the Chinese Sabbatharians of the 19th century is *Facts of Faith by Christian Edwardson* (1943). The writer devotes a chapter to these Christians.

Dr. Herman L. Hoeh wrote an article on the Chinese Sabbatharians titled

address in Melbourne, I wrote to it. After a while a response was received via the church's secretary in Sydney, Esther Wee.

In my reply to her I sent her a copy of Dr. Hoeh's article on the Chinese Sabbatharians who arose last century, but no reply was received.

So it was a pleasant surprise to receive a telephone call from one of the group's officials in Melbourne, Walter Vu, who rang me a couple of months before the 1997 conference series. I immediately put him in touch with Leon Lyell, the Friends of the Sabbath organizer in Melbourne, and the Chinese were invited to attend the conferences.

The 20-minute message by Miss Wee in Sydney was clear and fascinating: She concentrated on the history of her group and why it observes the Sabbath. But she told me privately that no linkage to the Chinese Sabbatharians of the 19th century is known.

However, since there may be a link of some Seventh-day Adventists to this group, and since the tiny remnants of the Chinese Sabbatharians, if any, may have found their way into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, perhaps a continuous chain is possible. Perhaps we shall not know in this life. Whatever the case, more Sabbatharians reside on earth than we think.

Other speakers in Sydney were Brad Burman of the Messianic Jewish Alliance, Ron Dart of Christian Educational Ministries, Colleen Buxton of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and Melvin Rhodes of the United Church of God, whose report elsewhere on this page provides additional information about the conferences down under.

## 'The celebrants of the Sabbath in Ukraine have documents from the 14th century from missionaries from Armenia and Russia.'

example and a light to them. How much more should we associate with other branches of the Sabbatarian community without compromising our beliefs? Hence the Friends of the Sabbath conference series.

## East European Sabbatharians

My relationships with these various groups has grown over the years, and over the past few years many tremendous new contacts have been made. For instance, the Churches of God in Poland and Czechoslovakia have been tremendous new contacts and have provided some fascinating information.

Bujok Pavel in a letter sent to me in November wrote that:

"I am sending a brochure of [the] religious belief that is the same for all the churches that observe or celebrate the Sabbath: Poland, Czech Republic, Germany, Ukraine, Moldavia and all of Russia. The celebrants of the Sabbath in the Ukraine have written documents from the 14th century, from the missionaries that came from Armenia and Russia."

Correspondence with the Polish Sabbatharians confirms that the Sabbath Day Christian Church was formed in the early 1930s from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These and other valuable data are found in their booklet *The Sabbath Day Christian Church*. Their doctrinal statements reveal basic beliefs similar to the Church of God (Seventh Day), the parent church that gave birth to the Worldwide Church of God, which in

brethren in other groups and show love and concern for them. They are members of the Body of Christ, and we should show them due Christian love.

## Protestants switch to the Sabbath

Shortly after the Friends of the Sabbath conference last year, I began to hear of a group in the Australian state of Queensland that had switched from Sunday to Sabbath. It took a long time until I was able to track them down.

While at the Feast I was hoping to visit members of the group but did not receive their telephone number until after the Feast. Although a little disappointed that I was not able to meet them, I did find out that one of their speakers would be visiting Canberra.

Although I was not able to attend the meetings, a nonaligned Sabbatarian who lives in Canberra and who issues various newsletters, Dale Heslin, attended the meetings. His report was that the presentations were "spot on" in regard to the holy days.

On further investigation and with discussions with various of their people and leaders, I found that the group is associated with an annual pilgrimage of Protestants to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and to show solidarity with the Jews. They are known as the International Christian Embassy.

From further study and thanks to public statements made in support of the Sabbath at a recent Feast, many of

## 'Their basic beliefs are similar to the Church of God (Seventh Day), the parent church of the Worldwide Church of God, which gave birth to over 126 groups!'

19-826752-5; illustrations, maps). No researcher of Sabbatarian history should be without this work.

David Currie's exciting presentations concentrated on the Sabbatharians in southeastern Europe and the ancient Celtic church. (See Dr. Currie's article on page 13 of *THE JOURNAL*.) The slides made the presentations come alive. The comments afterwards were all positive, with many delegates saying they wish they could hear more of the subject matter.

## Chinese Sabbatharians

The Seventh-day Adventist Church today numbers nine million, and the various branches of the Church of God may add up to 500,000! But another great Sabbatarian church with at least two million members in mainland China and tens of thousands elsewhere may be found today. It is the True Jesus Church.

How did it originate? Why do its members observe the Sabbath and not Sunday?

"The Dramatic Story of Chinese Sabbathkeepers," published by the Worldwide Church of God in *The Good News*, December 1955. An updated version appeared in the same magazine November-December 1990.

My understanding is that Dr. Philip Arnold, founder and director of the Religion-Crisis Task Force and the

## More Sabbatharians reside on earth than we think.

Reunion Institute of Houston, Texas (and a 1969 graduate of Ambassador College), has undertaken some extensive study into the 19th-century Chinese Sabbatharians.

## First heard of Chinese church

The True Jesus Church was founded in 1917. The first I heard of this group was about January 1996 when Dale Heslin of Canberra informed me. After he was able to find the church's

Please note that I do not necessarily agree with the positions of the various groups which attended the conferences. I regard the conferences as an educational series with interesting information. Nor do I know all of the doctrinal beliefs of these groups. What I am trying to do is to ascertain the extent of Sabbatarianism in Australia and learn more about these groups and to build bridges where necessary.