

# Haloviak, Berton Basil (1937–2022)

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## GILBERT M. VALENTINE

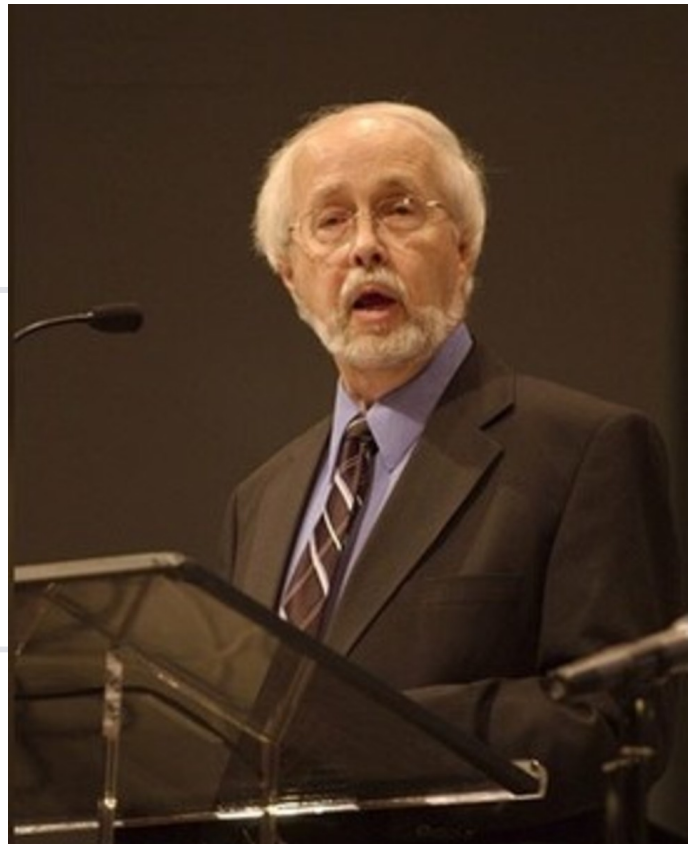
Gilbert M. Valentine, Ph.D. has served internationally in teaching and senior administrative roles in Adventist higher education in Europe, Asia, the South Pacific and North America. He has written extensively in Adventist studies and has authored several books, including biographies of *W. W. Prescott* (2005) and *J. N. Andrews* (2019). *The Prophet and the Presidents* (2011) explored the political influence of Ellen White. He has also written for the *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (2013).

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Bert B. Haloviak, notable Adventist historian, served at General Conference headquarters in the Office of Archives and Statistics (now known as the Office of Archives Statistics and Research or ASTR) for 35 years, including 12 as director. During his tenure, Haloviak pioneered the digitization of archival resources to make them more publicly accessible to researchers, authored several groundbreaking historical studies and also taught history and religion classes at Columbia Union College (now Washington Adventist University). In his various roles in the Archives, he was instrumental in helping develop the systems and processes that continue to be the foundation of the work of ASTR.<sup>1</sup>

## Early Life and Education

Born in Newburgh, New York, on December 7, 1937, Bert Haloviak was the eldest child of Basil and Estella Irene (Jennings) Haloviak and brother to three sisters, Marie, Jean and Eleanor. His grandparents on his father's side migrated to the United States at the turn of the century from eastern Slovakia, occupied at the time by Russia and now known as Western Ukraine. The family settled at first in the coal mining district of Hauto, in the Pennsylvanian Appalachians, before moving to New York. His maternal grandfather, Charles R. Jennings of Burnside, New York, became an Adventist in his youth and spent 30 years as a successful literature evangelist in New York, introducing many new members to the church in Pearl River, New York, where he served as elder for many years.<sup>2</sup> His maternal grandmother, Bertha Jennings (nee Bach) was of German ancestry.<sup>3</sup>



Bert B. Haloviak

Photo courtesy of Gilbert Valentine.

Bert attended public elementary school and then Newburgh Free Academy for his secondary education where he excelled in mathematics and music and loved playing little league baseball for local Newburgh teams. His musical gifts, his interest in sports and his wry sense of humor made him a popular though shy student. A music prodigy, he flourished under a gifted piano teacher and at the age of 13 with the encouragement of local church members, began playing for services at the local Newburgh Seventh-day Adventist church. He was soon also invited to play for services at the local Unitarian church. After reading Ellen White's *The Great Controversy* in his early teens he decided to be baptized and became an Adventist.

In 1956 Haloviak attended Atlantic Union College (AUC) on a music scholarship and majored in piano performance and history. Though he resided off campus, boarding in nearby Clinton with his Adventist grandmother, Bertha Jennings, his music interests kept him very involved in campus life. Fellow student James Londis recalls arriving on campus as a new student and, as he proceeded for the first time through the imposing entrance of the Thayer Hall Mansion men's residence, hearing the soaring music of an accomplished pianist in the ornate Walnut Room. Londis was immediately impressed by "the wiry freshman," he later recalled, because "no male my age in my scrappy neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York, could play anything but chopsticks."<sup>4</sup> The two became friends and Londis recalled of his fellow student that he "had an infectious laugh, an unflappable 'coolness' about most everything, and a razor-sharp mind and wit." As a student, Haloviak excelled in recalling the details of history. "Getting an 'A' was almost impossible even for the best of us," recalled Londis, but Haloviak "swallowed those history tests without even chewing them." While he was "smart as a whip," Londis also observed that Haloviak was "soft spoken" and "quick to chuckle and give you that special twinkle in his eye."<sup>5</sup>

Disappointed during his senior year with the way a teacher had been treated with regard to employment, Haloviak quit college, decided against a career in music and instead took an appointment in the publishing activities of the Adventist evangelistic center in Times Square, New York City. Later he worked at the *New York Times* as a linotype operator.

Through his involvement in the outreach events at the evangelistic center, Bert became acquainted with Mary Bidwell, a fifth-generation Adventist of South Lancaster, Massachusetts, who was the organist for William and Virginia Fagal's *Faith for Today* telecast. Common interests in music drew the couple together. Mary's great-great-grandparents in Johnson, Vermont, Belinda and Reuben Loveland, had been personal friends and generous supporters of Ellen and James White and had received several letters from Ellen White.<sup>6</sup>

Bert and Mary wed on June 16, 1963, while Bert was on a summer leave from service in the U.S. army. He had been drafted in September 1962 and, as a conscientious objector to combatant assignment, served in the U.S. Army Medical Corps, first in Texas and later in the Washington, D.C. area, as part of the Operation Whitecoat project.

Upon his discharge from military service in 1964, Haloviak began a decade of employment as a senior linotype operator for the *Washington Post*. Mary had secured employment as a senior administrative assistant at the

General Conference, then in Takoma Park. The couple soon became widely known around the Washington, D.C. area for their keyboard duets, Mary on the organ and Bert at the piano. Each Sabbath they played for Adventist worship services accompanying innumerable soloists and choirs. For many years Mary also played for a Lutheran church's Sunday service. Throughout their lives they were also sought after by Adventist couples desiring them to provide the music at their weddings.

Bert completed his bachelor's degree in history at Columbia Union College in 1967 and a master's degree in history from the University of Maryland in 1974. During these years of deep involvement in their local churches, first at Sligo and then at Beltsville, two children arrived to enlarge the family, a daughter, Kendra, in December 1966, and a son, Brent, in December 1969. Besides cultivating in his children a keen interest in baseball, a pastime he inherited from his father, Haloviak also encouraged a family interest in the treasured stamp collection that he started in his teen years.

## Church Archivist

In 1975 Haloviak was called to the Department of Archives and Statistics of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists where he initially took on the role of research assistant under archivist F. Donald Yost. As well as helping organize the archival materials, his role required him to undertake research projects for church officials and various church agencies leading to his authorship of more than 30 substantial studies or commissioned reports. He would eventually serve at the Adventist world headquarters for 35 years, becoming Director of Archives and Statistics in 1998 following the leadership of William Cash. As director, Haloviak was responsible for managing the rapidly growing collection of archival materials as well as overseeing the publication of the annual *Seventh-day Adventist Church Yearbook* (1,100 pages in 1998), and the annual statistical reports for the church. A large part of Haloviak's archival work also involved helping a growing number of scholars from the church's expanding graduate studies programs access the collection for their research. He assisted many doctoral students researching for their dissertations as well as other researchers utilizing the archives for their individual projects. His familiarity with denominational documentary sources made him an invaluable resource and guide for Adventist historians.

Church leader Reinder Bruinsma, for example, who undertook doctoral research on Adventist relationships with Roman Catholics while serving as secretary of the Trans-European Division, recalled that Haloviak's "phenomenal knowledge of the church's past" enabled him to readily access materials, some not yet catalogued, that facilitated his research.<sup>7</sup> Bruinsma recalled Haloviak handing to him a large box he called "my 666 box" with the assurance that "there's bound to be something of your liking."<sup>8</sup> Bruinsma found that indeed, the files contained much that was helpful. Norwegian Terje Johannessen, pursuing research on the fifth person to serve as General Conference president, Ole Olsen, recalls Haloviak handing him three large boxes in which he found letters written in the Norwegian language that were of large historical significance and immensely helpful to his

project. The discovery led to involuntary loud whoops of joy. Haloviak spent the next three hours discussing with Johannessen the joy and the importance of his discovery.<sup>9</sup> Ever curious, Haloviak genuinely enjoyed and shared in the enthusiasm of his visiting researchers delighting in the discovery of new materials, new insights, and new perspectives. Researchers found his enthusiastic engagement with their projects to be thoroughly contagious. Historian Michael Campbell remembers interacting with Haloviak at the beginning of Campbell's scholarly career. "He guided me through the research process, helping me to locate historical documents and whetting my appetite for research—he even suggested writing an article, one of my first." Infused with Haloviak's passion for Adventist history and enthused by his skill in "historical sleuthing" Campbell observed, "I will always be profoundly grateful for his influence in my life that encouraged me to pursue a vocation of preserving and promoting our Adventist past."<sup>10</sup>

Much of Haloviak's work during his early years in the church's archives focused on appropriately organizing the archival materials. Beyond this, he provided a distinguished contribution to the church by pioneering the development of internet access to the church's archival sources, making 1.5 million digitized pages available online. To achieve this, he created four websites for accessing the content: [adventistarchives.org](http://adventistarchives.org), [adventistyearbook.org](http://adventistyearbook.org), [adventistdirectory.org](http://adventistdirectory.org) and [adventiststatistics.org](http://adventiststatistics.org). This was "no easy feat," observed David Trim, who succeeded Haloviak as ASTR director in 2010, for it "required patience, perseverance, and dedication." Haloviak's adoption of optical character recognition technology, noted Trim, enabled researchers to search church records by keyword for the first time, providing "an immense boon" to Adventist scholarship.<sup>11</sup>

## Historian

As a widely respected Adventist historian, Haloviak also served as an adjunct professor at Columbia Union College regularly teaching classes in Adventist history and on the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation which involved the historicist approach to interpretation. Students appreciated his spirituality and humor in the classroom. A deeper understanding of righteousness by faith during the late 1970s proved transformative for Haloviak's theological perspective significantly shaping his life and work thereafter. He became known for his advocacy of "the gospel."

Haloviak authored numerous important public contributions to the field of Adventist studies. His groundbreaking analysis of the 1919 Bible Conference, for example, was the first scholarly study of the recently re-discovered transcripts of the conference. It has been widely cited.<sup>12</sup> In 1980 he undertook an authoritative scholarly analysis of the writings of A. F. Ballenger for the Glacier View Sanctuary Review Conference that took place in Colorado in August of that year.<sup>13</sup> In the late 1980s, in connection with the centennial of the historic 1888 Minneapolis Conference, Haloviak wrote extensively on the theological and contextual issues surrounding the watershed event.<sup>14</sup> He believed that his most significant documentary discovery was a set of previously unknown, fully transcribed camp meeting sermons by Alonzo T. Jones on the subject of Righteousness by Faith

published in a Kansas newspaper, *The Topeka Daily Capital*, May 2-27, 1889. He saw that the discovery provided important new insights into the soteriological debates generated at the controversial 1888 conference.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Haloviak was among the first to realize the major significance of the Christian Connection movement for Seventh-day Adventist history and the first to explore the implications of this important aspect of the nineteenth century context in which the church originated.<sup>16</sup> He also wrote a number of frequently cited studies on the church's organizational development. After researching the involvement of women as licensed ministers in early Adventism, Haloviak became a passionate supporter of a wider role for women in Adventist ministry and wrote extensively on the topic and on the tangled history of women's ordination.<sup>17</sup> His report on the influence of United States taxation policy on Adventist theology and practice regarding the ordination of women had a significant impact.<sup>18</sup>

## Final Years

In 2011, following his retirement, Haloviak and his wife moved to Riverside, California, to live near their children and grandchildren. They became involved in the Azure Hills Seventh-day Adventist Church, with Bert leading out in a Wednesday morning Bible study and Mary providing musical accompaniment for the song service. In 2015 Bert was awarded the Charles Weniger Award for Excellence in recognition of his contribution to the work of the church and his studies in Adventist History.

Haloviak lived with rheumatoid arthritis since his 60s and in his later years was diagnosed with a severe lung disease that increasingly restricted his movement. Still, he found joy in local church Bible study groups and various research projects, in classical music concerts, in his stamp collection and in the activities of his family. He died in Riverside, California, on October 18, 2022. The funeral service was conducted at Azure Hills church and he was interred in the Montecito Cemetery, Colton, California.

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