

Contemporary Context
of the Adventist Mission

Job Description
of the GC President

Changes to the Statement
of 28 Fundamental Beliefs

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Adventist *Today*



San Antonio

2015 GENERAL
CONFERENCE
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ISSUE

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What Will Happen at General Conference?

By Monte Sahlin

Many have said that the 2015 session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists may be a historic occasion. In preparation, we have pulled together articles providing history, context, background on the major agenda items, relevant Bible study, and counsel from the writings of Ellen G. White. We have tried to provide a convenient, readable, and objective package of information to prepare you for what will happen in San Antonio, Texas.

Our international group of writers includes a number of retired denominational leaders and well-known scholars. There may be greater gifts of wisdom and knowledge represented here than in any issue of this journal published over the past quarter of a century. Donors gave *Adventist Today* the extra funds necessary to make this a double issue, with twice as many pages as usual, to make room for all of the important information they have provided. We are also sharing a copy of this magazine with all of the General Conference (GC) Session delegates.

The editors of this magazine, along with millions of other Adventists, have been praying for God's will to be done in this important meeting. We hope that as you read the information in this issue, you will reflect carefully and pray for wisdom in the decisions you will be asked to make—whether you are a delegate or a denominational employee or a member in the pews—during or in the aftermath of this GC Session.

The Adventist movement had less than a million people when I was born in 1948. Today there are probably 30 million when you include children too young to be baptized, non-members who attend church and take Bible studies, and former members who have dropped out but still believe in the central doctrines of the Adventist faith. Along with growth in numbers, there has come much more complex

diversity. The context within which the mission of Christ is pursued has also changed. The core of the Adventist faith is the same, but the reality of Adventist life today is different. With progress comes the unanticipated, both good and bad.

The item on the GC Session agenda that has generated the most discussion in advance is the question about how ordination is to be handled relative to women employed by the denomination as Seventh-day Adventist ministers. The General Conference Executive Committee referred the question to the delegates at the GC Session without a recommendation for or against. Now, six of the most respected retired leaders of the denomination have come forward with their view on the question. (See the box on this page.)

Adventist Today will work to keep you up-to-date as news happens. Our sole mission is to provide an independent, professional journalism service for Adventists around the world. We answer only to our readers. During the GC Session, wherever you are in the world, you can get immediate developments via Twitter through @AdventistToday on your Smartphone, tablet, computer, or other mobile device. At key times we will transmit developments literally every few minutes.

Why do these Adventist elders recommend a "Yes" vote at the GC Session?

Elder Jan Paulsen, retired GC president

Elder Angel Rodriguez, retired director of the Biblical Research Institute

Elder Charles Bradford, retired North American Division president

Elder William G. Johnsson, retired *Adventist Review* editor

Elder Alejandro Bullón, retired evangelist and ministerial secretary

Elder Calvin B. Rock, retired GC vice president

Read a brief statement from each of these men and others at this website: www.adventistelders.com

This special GC Session double issue has twice as many pages as usual, to make room for all of the important information it contains.

THE BEAUTIFUL IMPORTANCE OF PLURALISM

By Smuts Van Rooyen

NOT TOO LONG AGO, MY CONFERENCE PRESIDENT PUT THIS challenge to me as we were discussing church politics in the office parking lot: “Show me what pluralism looks like. I don’t know what it really is, nor how it is supposed to work in an Adventist context. Do you?”

Fair enough. He was not hostile, just dubious. He caught me off guard, which is not necessarily a bad thing. If I’d had all of my wits about me, I would have said: “Pluralism looks like a rainbow; it has diversity, a unified structure, and is full of promise.” Nice sound bite, don’t you think? But it was not a quick-comeback day for me, so I mustered nothing of real value. To my credit, I knew what I should have said by the next week, or thereabouts.

After some research (albeit limited), I have become more ready to address the topic and have gained a deeper appreciation for the contrary brother and sister who just do not see things my way. I am guided in my thinking by The Pluralism Project at Harvard University and, not surprisingly, by the apostle Paul.

We start with Harvard expert Diana L. Eck,¹ who launches many discussions on the subject by distinguishing diversity from pluralism. At first that seems to be a distinction without difference, but it is not so. She argues that while diversity is a given, pluralism is an achievement. Pluralism is the outcome of an energetic engagement with diversity so as to decrease the tensions created by naked diversity. In other words, pluralism is diversity that has been baptized, dunked under, and transformed into something new.

Eck then proceeds to define what pluralism is not: namely, it is not mere tolerance. Putting up with others is not the same as understanding them. Mere tolerance does nothing to remove our ignorance of each other. Pluralism, however, seeks understanding across lines of difference. We cannot leave the stereotypes, half-truths, personal projections, biases, and labels firmly in place, pat ourselves on the back, feel sanctimoniously tolerant, and call it pluralism. Understanding, not forbearance, is the key in pluralism. To achieve pluralism, we must make an effort to go up the scale from tolerance to understanding to acceptance and maybe even to affirmation. We work with the assumption that getting into another’s mind is a good thing.

Third, pluralism—and this is important—is not relativism, but rather an encounter of commitments. It does not require anyone to give up an identity. I do not have to give up my identity in order to accept yours. No, full identity meets full identity. Parties hold on to their differences but in a new relation to each other.

I react to this crucial insight with the following observation from my own experience. My father-in-law was a conservative, you-don’t-know-when-your-name-comes-up-in-the-Judgment

Adventist. He lived as if his probation could close at any second. In my limited view, he had no security or joy of salvation whatsoever. He, on the other hand, suspected that I was not ready for Jesus to come since I did not follow health reform as closely as he did. (I confess to not being underweight.) But whenever we closed the Sabbath at his home, he prayed with such sincerity and earnestness that I consistently was moved to my core and was convinced that God was his friend. Clearly Pappaw, as we called him, understood Jesus in his own way, not in my way. When we got up from our knees, I felt that our hearts had met without either of us having changed our commitments. But we now held our commitments in relation to each other. It's hard to explain this dynamic, but I saw him as more than his theology and he saw me as more than my weakness.

Finally, says Eck, pluralism is based on dialogue, which is both listening and speaking. The idea is that all entities have something not only to teach, but also to learn from each other. In such give and take, we come to see where we differ but also, perhaps more importantly, where we agree. Ongoing dialogue, consistent and robust, is called for. Crisis dialogue, white-knuckled with tension in emergency sessions, simply will not do. Although helpful, such encounters often contain the whiff of fear and pushing panic buttons rather than the fragrance of fresh interaction and new understanding. Ongoing conversation is a must. Paul urges us to pray without ceasing. I think he'd forgive me for reframing his sentiment to read, "Dialogue without ceasing."

Why bother to work at pluralism? At first blush it might seem that the motivation for transforming diversity into pluralism is simply to be freed from the discomfort of ongoing pain ("Let me kick off these wretched shoes pinching my tired feet!") or the liberal urge to be inclusive and relevant. Such motivation is, in my view, far too trivial to produce genuine pluralism. No, here we speak of a motivation that reaches upward to honor the magnificence of our God, who made all humanity beautiful. The motivation is akin to a dance rather than a dirge. We celebrate the image of God that is within us all when we "do" pluralism. There exists, even in the darkness of another, the swirling colors of the Northern Lights. There is music in our difference waiting to be heard. Striving to create pluralism from our diversity should feel like a grand and lofty endeavor rather than a nuisance. When we reach across the divide and touch a foreign cheek, we touch the face of God.

Allowing latitude of thought within our church is a profound endeavor. The organized church reflects the image of God when it allows incisive questioning of itself, because God allows the same of himself. The church opens itself to being vulnerable

because God has already done so. Ecclesial vulnerability comes through a deeper understanding of our Creator's willingness to allow us to question him. It's a wonderful and amazing business, but God allows individuals to call his love and his integrity into doubt with uncertainties, questions, and painful assertions that surely must cut to the divine bone. Job, for example, accuses God of making his life meaningless and orders God to just leave him alone (Job 7:16). He continues his protest: "What have I done to you, you who see everything we do? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you? Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins?" (Job 7:20-21, NIV).

Again, what does this imply? It implies that we are free to question anyone and anything. The simple truth is that the right to question the Greater gives us the freedom to question the lesser. All lesser forms of authority—such as our parents, the government, the church, and even the Bible—may be legitimately tested by our thinking. This radical freedom is the precious flower that blossoms from the very heart of God. Church authorities, therefore, should gladly accept the notion of differences of thought among ourselves as par for the course and grant it official status.

Many of the problems we face in our church—such as the ordination of women, gay membership and participation in the congregation, divorce and remarriage, the controversy over contemporary styles of music, how to conduct evangelism, and kneeling for prayer—are issues that proceed from our diversity. They are the chronic growing pains of our success. A healthy church should suffer from a touch of divine arthritis. Clearly, the minute the denomination gained converts from every people, tribe, tongue, and nation, from lowly hut and erudite university, it created a problem for itself (albeit a wonderful problem) by introducing an immense variance into its own structure. We come to the church with our own cultural biases, our own nodal story, our own emotional styles and aspirations. We bring far more than the tone of our skin, the curl in our hair, or the slant of our eyes to the ecclesial table; we bring our minds, our souls, our culture, our everything. It is a sacred reality. And when we decided to educate our membership, we introduced a culture of critical thinking and radical investigation at our core. We ourselves have created a wonderful, open-minded atmosphere that is here to stay. We must make it work through pluralism.

Pluralism brings order. When the diversity of our church is mismanaged, the entities that comprise its diversity turn against each other. Scholar turns against administrator, scientist turns against believer, heterosexual turns against homosexual, liberal turns against conservative, and overseas Adventist turns against

North American Adventist. In my view, we desperately need to commit to creating pluralism.

A search for what the Bible says brings us to the apostle Paul, who was (in my view) the ultimate master of transforming diversity into pluralism. His creative approach to the troubled congregation at Rome is truly impressive. Here he faced a thorny situation, where the cultural differences between the Gentile and Jewish Christians threatened to tear the early church apart. Paul knew that cultural argumentation can split the church as effectively as doctrinal controversy sometimes can. Cultural dissension between Jew and Gentile is, in fact, a major concern of the New Testament.

Without unpacking the problem in Rome in detail, we simply identify it as a conflict over ceremonial sabbath observance and food offered to idols. This was no small issue. Both sides could extrapolate from Scripture why the other side was not within the will of God. To the Jewish Christians, it seemed that the Gentile believers were still serving idols by eating food that had been offered to idols. To the Gentile Christians, it seemed that Jewish believers were denying what Jesus had already fulfilled by keeping ceremonial sabbaths. Both groups were marvelously bent out of shape by the behavior of the other and roundly condemned their divergent behavior. The church at Rome clearly suffered from cultural diversity gone toxic. The apostle seeks to save the congregation with an impressive set of principles.

The first of these is *Do not pass judgment on other believers over disputable matters* (Rom. 14:1-4). But what are disputable matters? One easy way to answer that is to understand what is beyond dispute to Paul. What is nondebatable for him is that love is the fulfillment of the law and demands that we set aside immoral practices such as orgies and drunkenness, sexual immorality and debauchery, dissension and jealousy (Rom. 13:8-14). These infractions are beyond dispute because they are not the will of God; they are sin in a definite sense. But all of life does not fall neatly into such a clear category. Cultural issues and some theological issues often do not lend themselves to such clarity. Cultures, ethnic and otherwise, argue over the morality of polygamy, drums in praise music, eating meat or only vegetables, tattoos as body art, abortion, economic justice, capital punishment, conscientious objection to bearing arms, the ordination of women, and a host of other issues. In morally opaque areas, we are to suspend judgment. Why so? Well, because other people's faith commitment may allow them to perform such a divergent practice (verse 2); because God has accepted them (verse 3); because they are accountable to God and not to us (verse 4); because God is able to make them stand

even when, in our view, they are on a slippery slope (verse 4). These are powerful reasons not to finalize our thinking or to impose our view on others. We allow some issues to set to the firmness of Jello but not to the hardness of concrete.

So now, where does that leave an objecting believer? How do we judge righteous judgment? It seems to me that I must understand the utter sacredness of the deed performed in faith. Of course, I may evaluate its practical consequences for my way of living. I can say, "This is what I see you doing, and this is how what you do affects my life." That's all well and good. But I may never stick a label on those who maintain a divergent practice and impose my way on them. This crosses the line from evaluation to being judgmental. I never am free to suggest that my sister is a fool or to write her off as a non-thinking fundamentalist or a liberal feminist. Labeling is a precarious business (Matt. 5:22), because after we have labeled people, we tend to treat them according to our own labels. In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the sailors aboard a steamship shoot to kill the Africans working on the shore. When someone objects and wants to know why they would do such an outrageous thing, the sailors reply, "Them's enemies." Their label justifies to themselves the treatment they may dispense to others.

Paul's second principle deals with our minds, our freedom to think for ourselves. It says, "One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind" (Rom. 14:5, NIV). Believers allow others latitude to think for themselves. Why? Because that brother who disagrees with me is trying to honor God with his thinking; he does so to the Lord and gives thanks to him (verse 6). Only as we permit genuine freedom of thought and conviction can diversity become healthy pluralism.

The apostle, as seen elsewhere, was an eager promoter of diversity of opinion. He reminded the Corinthians that the differences in thinking and approach between Apollos, Peter, and himself were theirs to enjoy and to treasure. All are yours, he exulted (1 Cor. 3:21). Isn't a difference of opinion among church leaders a beautiful thing? At one point Paul refused to return to Corinth because he feared the congregation might think that he intended to "lord it over" their faith (2 Cor. 1:23-24, NIV). In Philippi there were Christians who did not agree with Paul's mission. To them he wrote: "All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained" (Phil. 3:15-16, NIV). There is a deep-down, marvelous-beyond-words value to our freedom of choice and thought. God risked the safety of his

universe to protect it. The church now honors that risk God took when he let individuals make up their own minds.

Paul's third principle to create peace in diversity involves the issue of belonging. It says: "If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (Rom. 14:8, NIV). Perhaps the most powerful way to change diversity into pluralism in our church is to accept that Jesus also has a relationship with those believers who disagree with us and to acknowledge that they too may sing with joy, "Now I belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me." And what they sing is an astounding truth. We all belong to God! Isn't grace simply amazing?

The fourth principle urges us to be protective of another's conscience (verses 14-16). We come to understand that when someone regards something as unclean, then for that individual it is unclean. This "uncleanness" may not be so in an absolute sense, but whether or not it is actually so is beside the point. Perception counts and is decisive. The person who takes his or her own cultural values seriously is worthy of our deepest respect. One culture may not trivialize what is a matter of conscience for another culture. Christians protect the notion that it is crucial for humans to be true to themselves, because should they act from a basis other than their own faith, it is sin for them. We protect the faith, the conscience, the well-being of those with whom we have a disagreement.

This, in my view, brings us to the heart of the current debate within the church over women's ordination. For many of us in the West, our take on equality demands of us that we allow all, including women, the right to respond to God's call and to reach their full potential. We cannot refuse to ordain women for the ministry. Such a refusal would not be of faith to us and, therefore, would be sin. Is there consideration for our hearts?

By saying this, we do not imply that believers of a differing culture would sin if they should refuse to ordain women. They may disagree with us with a clear conscience, for they too are to be true to themselves. We do not reject them. They may in fact be the honored recipients of Paul's liberating beatitude, "Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves" (verse 22, NIV). We gladly extend this blessing to those who approve of keeping their tradition of not ordaining women in their cultural context. They are free, and so are we.

The fifth principle is a reminder of what holds us together. It is essential to have a common center, something we all believe in, if we are to function as a church. Not everything is up for grabs. Some commitments are still non-negotiable; they remain. Paul reminds us of our grand priority, "For the kingdom of God is

not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval" (verses 17-18, NIV). Here the apostle forthrightly contrasts our cultural values with the kingdom of God and reminds us they are not the same thing. Cultural matters, although important, are clearly not foundational. But the kingdom with its righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit is foundational. We will never find unity on the basis of human culture, nor should we. God is not an American, nor is he an African, nor a Latin, nor an Asian. He has established his own kingdom. The Father's kingdom is where our primary citizenship and our fondest loyalty lie. This is the glorious center of our unity. And it is precisely because the kingdom is so cohesive a force in our lives that we are safe to live out our differences. Here is a gravity that keeps us safely in the orbit of God.

The surprising, even stunning, outcome of the application of these Pauline principles is that they do not definitively resolve the issue at hand by determining who is right and who is wrong on disputable matters. Nobody here captures the flag of an opponent and declares, "God is on my side!" Rather, the differing commitments held by believers remain intact. The copper and the zinc do not smelt to become brass in a furnace of conformity. But something far greater occurs. We find each other. Freedom remains. Minds are not changed, but hearts are. Evaluation continues, but labeling ceases. Neither my way nor your way is chosen, but a third more wonderful way is opened before us, where we can amble on a common path with our own walking sticks and enjoy one another.

We can walk our dogs together, you with your collie and I with my poodle. The mystery is that although we have not solved a moral problem, we have healed the people involved. We see afresh the beauty of Augustine's dictum: "In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity." And we loudly proclaim Paul's seldom-heard benediction on believers who hold differences: "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:5-6, NIV). 🙏

Smuts van Rooyen is a retired minister who taught in the undergraduate religion department at Andrews University, where he also earned a PhD in counseling psychology.

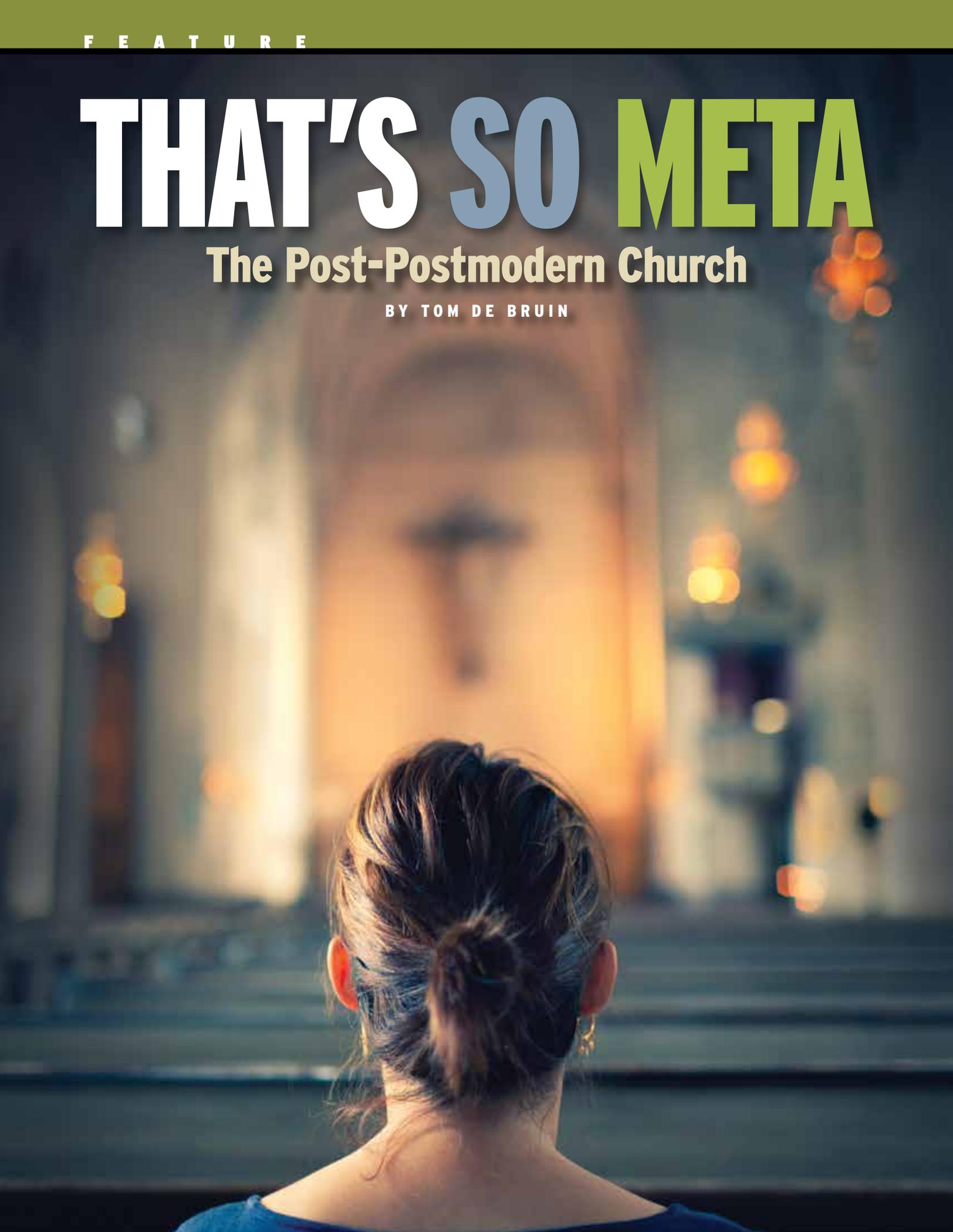
¹ Diana L. Eck, "The Age of Pluralism," Gifford Lecture Series, The University of Edinburgh, Spring 2009.

F E A T U R E

THAT'S SO META

The Post-Postmodern Church

BY TOM DE BRUIN



SOMETIMES IT SEEMS TO ME THAT EVERYTHING IN THIS WORLD is defined by a “post-.”¹ I was born in South Africa to a post-war Dutch immigrant, fleeing post-industrial Europe for a post-colonial future. In the post-apartheid economic drop, we moved, post hoc, back to postmodern Holland, where I still live. The change from a racist to a post-racial society was a shock to me. My inborn fascination with language led me to pursue postgraduate studies at Newbold College in post-structuralism. There I met my postfeminist wife. She studied post-apocalyptic fiction and is now pursuing a PhD in posthumanism. Currently, I work post-pastorally as an administrator in this postlapsarian world. More specifically, I reside in post-Christian Holland. The best part about this paragraph? I didn’t make up even a single one of those words.

These days we seem eager to explain what we come after, but not where we currently are. If you were to ask me where I currently am, I would tell you I live in the Netherlands. We have one of the fastest-growing European Adventist churches, though sadly, like many European churches, our growth happens mainly through immigration. What’s behind these changes in the European church? It has something to do with yet another “post”—in this case, post-Christianity.

United States

Before I bring Europe into the equation, let’s look for a moment at the USA. Nowadays more and more people in the United States are unchurched; in fact, about half of the people living there don’t go to church regularly. Yet, despite this fact, they remain Christian. Let me explain what I mean using some statistics from a recent study by the Barna Group:

“When asked to identify their faith beliefs, 62% of unchurched adults consider themselves Christians. Most of the churchless in America—contrary to what one might believe—do not disdain Christianity nor desire to belittle it or tear it down. Many of them remain culturally tied to Christianity and are significantly interested in it. More than one-third (34%), for example, would describe themselves as “deeply spiritual.” Four in ten (41%) “strongly agree” that their religious faith is very important in their life today. More than half (51%) are actively seeking something better spiritually than they have experienced to date. One-third (33%) say they have an active relationship with God that influences their life and are most likely to describe that relationship as “important to me” (95%), “satisfying” (90%), and “growing deeper” (73%).”²

What this information boils down to is that although half of the population in America does not attend church regularly and might

not represent what Adventists would call “Christians,” Christianity still plays a very important role in their day-to-day lives.

Europe

Now let’s compare this data to the European picture, which is radically different.³

In the Netherlands, a 1999 survey put the portion of the population that goes to a religious service once a month at one in four. Since then this number has dropped to 12-16%. Now not even one person in 10 goes to church once a week, which is less than a third of the percentage of weekly attendees in the United States (26%). In fact, in the Netherlands more than half of the people would never go to church at all if it weren’t for weddings and funerals. If you were to ask a Dutch person, “Does religion occupy an important place in your life?” two out of three would say “No.” If you were to go just a little bit north to Sweden, that number would be even higher (83%).

Among the Dutch, only one in four believes that there is a God.

The worst part is that these are averages. The statistics are skewed by the large, much-more-religious generation of baby boomers. In almost all of these statistics, if you look at the generation born after 1980, you can divide the numbers by half. For my generation we can say: 7% go to church once a month, 85% never go to church at all.

While many in the United States leave the church, it seems that most remain Christian in an important way. Though they may be post-church, they are certainly not post-Christian or even anti-Christian.

Europe, on the other hand, is emphatically post-Christian. What do I mean with this term? We can broadly define a post-Christian society as follows: “A society or culture where Christianity no longer is a meaningful part of civil discourse or public policy. This is a society where, over time, diverse values, religious and secular, have marginalized distinctively Christian beliefs, symbols, and rituals.”

The times they are a-changing. We are looking at new world order, a new zeitgeist. Though it hasn’t yet hit the United States as hard as it has hit Europe, post-Christianity—along with most of the other “posts”—seems here to stay.

Beyond Modernism

To provide relevant context, we need to take a quick look at our history. Rewind your mind to the 1900s Europe. Actually, rewind even further. Back in the 18th century, we had the Enlightenment and later the Industrial Revolution. We had two centuries of great advancement and amazing new scientific discoveries. Many

scientists living in the 19th century even thought that humankind would know everything there was to know within 10 or 20 years. In general, there was a huge sense of optimism.

This society also believed in Progress, with a capital P. Mankind was moving Forward, going Somewhere. In history, we call this time period and all of its ideas the modern era. In this era, society imagined that as a result of their immense knowledge, they would eventually achieve Utopia. A heaven on Earth. This is what people really expected. They were waiting for a perfect, wonderful society, brought about by Technological and Scientific Progress. But instead of a Utopia, what did they get? Armageddon.

Seriously. Almost an entire generation died in the trenches of World War I. And then, just to make sure everyone knew

God so loved the world” was just too big, and it had been misused for too long.

But it *still* gets worse. People realized that the way power gets somebody to believe in big pictures is by building truth claims into them. The Roman Catholic Church claimed it knew the truth, and people wanted to do what was true and right. But this truth was just an excuse to get people to buy into their pardons, to get people to pay them money. And the governments did exactly the same thing. So not only were big pictures (or “metanarratives”) now out the window, but so also was anyone who said anything about truth. This distrust killed the churches. The organization proclaiming “I am the Way, the Truth” was no longer believed.

This was all part of what the French philosopher Jean-François

Although half of the population in America does not attend church regularly..., Christianity still plays a very important role in their day-to-day lives.

it was not a hiccup on the road to Progress, there was another World War from 1940-1945, this time with some genocide added to the mix. What was the result of this double Armageddon? Modernists’ dreams were dashed. Their hopes were shattered. Society expected Utopia and got Dystopia instead. This was a greater disappointment than the Great Disappointment. And people realized a number of things. First of all: Progress clearly did not exist, because it did not happen. In fact, all of those modern ideas with capital letters were lies. But worse than that, society learned that powerful people and organizations use big ideas to oppress other people: Nationalism to get you to fight, Progress to get you to work, Salvation to get you to pay. “The powers that be” paint big pictures so that they can use and abuse people. The Church did it throughout the Middle Ages, and in the 20th century society was reminded that governments do it too.

An Era of Disbelief

As a result of this demonstration of how big pictures are abused by those in power, people not only stopped believing, but they became distrustful of all big pictures. This distrust killed the gospel. “For

Lyotard called the “postmodern condition.” Society had moved past the modern, with all its hopes and dreams, to something new: the postmodern. An age of disillusionment.

Now the postmodern is notoriously impossible to define. That’s a bit of a running joke among academics. Virtually every article on the postmodern begins by saying that its very nature makes it impossible to describe definitively, and then tries anyway.⁴

So let’s give it a go.

In postmodernism there is disbelief in metanarratives. No more Utopias. Furthermore, there is a distrust of truth claims. No more ultimate Truth. Finally, everything becomes fragmented. This started with anti-nationalism, moved into the distrust of major units in society, and eventually even the individual was seen as fragmented.

That is postmodernism, in essence.

In the minds of many, it was science and the critical method that killed religion; but these are tenets of modernity. The decline of Christianity took place much later, when a postmodern generation left the church. A postmodern generation, growing up in a modern world, who automatically distrusted all truth claims and metanarrative. This postmodern generation did *not* raise their children as Christians. And I’m putting that mildly.

The Postmodern Generation

Who is in this postmodern generation? Not me. I was born in 1979, the same year Lyotard published his book *The Postmodern Condition*. He was an academic, not a prophet. He was describing the cultural trends in Canada and France back in the 1970s, not our current culture in the 21st century. Lyotard described my parents' generation, people who are now 50, 60, or even 70 years old. My dad is postmodern; I'm something else altogether.

I am not from the generation that left the church; I am part of the generation that wasn't raised Christian. I am not in the generation that stopped reading the Bible; I am in the generation that doesn't know the Bible. My parents' generation is where you'll find the anti-Christians. My generation is just ignorant.

Of course, I'm talking about Europe here.

The European postmodern generation, torn by a war on their home soil, left the churches behind. In the United States, the postmodern generation protested and demonstrated. Opposition rose against the Vietnam War, against racial segregation, against the discrimination of women. The American belief that certain "truths" are "self-evident" and that people have "unalienable rights" hung on. While the Europeans rejected truth and metanarratives completely, their American peers persisted for a while. Belief in "liberty" and "democracy" remained strong, as did belief in "the church." The effects of postmodernity were never as evident in the United States, and so, for the moment, America is less post-Christian.

For the moment.

However, America has had its own crises recently: the credit crunch, the collapsed World Trade Center, the political stalemate, climate change. In Europe the postmodern generation left the church, but in the United States it is the current generation, not the postmodern generation, that is the most likely to leave it.

Now, generally it is true that people inside the church are less postmodern than those outside. This is probably due to the modernizing tendencies of Adventism. The church loves truth claims and loves the great controversy, our metanarrative. If you go to church regularly, you are formed by church and accept these modern tenets more easily. However, it is a mistake to think that our church members are not postmodern. Adventists have postmodern ministries with postmodern sermons. We show postmodern videos and hand out postmodern postcards.

We seem to feel we are ministering to the postmodern world outside the church, as if postmodernism is some kind of Babylonian influence. But this is a fallacy. Most of the church in the West is postmodern. The church is not ministering to postmodern people. The church is postmodern people

ministering. The divide that we have created does not exist. In essence, we ask our members to remove their hats when they enter the church building—and those hats are their postmodernist identity.

So if my dad is postmodern, what am I? Times change, and the cultural landscape now is very different than it was 40 years ago. While the younger generations are clearly influenced by postmodernity (just as the older generation was influenced by modernity), these generations are moving on. You see, postmodernism died in 2000. We are living in the post-postmodern age. There are new buzzwords that replace the postmodern: metamodernism, posthumanism, neo-modernism, new materialism, to name a few.

We minister in a post-postmodern world. This is a world where postmodernity has happened, a world that has been changed by postmodernity. When we minister, we need to keep that in mind. This is a serious challenge for Adventism.

Post-Postmodernity

At the risk of making us even more exhausted by "posts," what is this post-postmodern, post-Christian culture we belong to? As with all ideas, it takes a while for us to put these things into words. Academics have postulated a number of suggestions about where we are now and where we are headed, but recently I read an article about an idea that really resonated with me: metamodernism.⁵ Note the prefix "meta," as in "metanarrative."

Postmodernity is characterized by the destruction of hope in a better world. The Utopian ideals of progress, ultimate knowledge, and peace died in the trenches of France. This led to great cynicism in our culture. Nothing could be seen as sincere or real. Growing up in a world without hope has led to this thing called metamodernism, and these metamodernist people have found a way to juggle both cynicism and hope in one worldview.⁶ Metanarratives can't be trusted, but without a metanarrative, there is no hope. Metamodernism brings back the hope in "a kind of informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism."⁷ In other words, there's hope in a good future, even though we know that it will never be.

Earlier I said we live in a "post-" world. And that is stupid. If we live in the present, every single thing in the world is "post." Many of us are now post-breakfast. And the past is still with us; the breakfast is in our stomachs. But what does that mean? Nothing, really. Saying we are post-breakfast is much less interesting than saying we are busy digesting. That's why this new trend is not called post anything, but "meta." Beyond modernism. Bigger than postmodernism. Digesting both.

A very simple definition of metamodernism is this: it “attempts in spite of its inevitable failure; it seeks forever for a truth that it never expects to find.”⁸

Dealing With Metamodernism

If we thought that postmodernity was a challenge, then I don't know what this is. In my country, most of this generation is not in the church, but *can you imagine if they were to join?*

How does the church deal with new members who believe in something they know can't be true? How do members react when my generation joins and prays to a God that they know is not there? When they passionately read and interpret the Word of God, loving every syllable but knowing it's produced fiction?

I am not from the generation that left the church; I am part of the generation that wasn't raised Christian.

When my generation is ironic and sincere *at the same time?*

Now don't get me wrong, I am *not* saying that God is not there or that the Bible is fiction. I am saying that if we are successful in evangelization and retention, we will have members who, *no matter what*, will always think these things. Who think in contradictions and cannot think without paradoxes. And it's a challenge. In my post-Christian country, there is a generation of metamodernists. This generation grew up knowing there is no truth and distrusting all metanarratives, yet feeling a desire for both. If, somehow, despite the generally ineffective evangelism methods of most churches, a metamodernist individual gets in touch with a church, two things happen. On the one hand, this individual feels a coercive force causing her to identify with the Christian message; on the other hand, she will remain intellectually aware of its implausibility. Believing, in spite of herself, in an informed naivety. Believing in a better world that will never truly come, a pragmatic idealism.

And is this so strange? I do wonder. Faith is, after all, “the assurance of things hoped for” (Heb. 11:1, NASB).

Paradoxes

Christianity is a religion of strange paradoxes. James teaches that we will be exalted through being humble (James 4:10). Paul says to

the Corinthians, “Whenever I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10, NRSV). Jesus says that we will receive through giving (Acts 20:35). Paul tells the Romans that by being set free, we become slaves (Rom. 6:18). Jesus teaches that through dying we sustain life (John 12:24). Paul tells the Philippians that gains are losses and losses are gains (Phil. 3:7-8). And Jesus says that if you find your life you will lose it, and if you lose your life you will find it (Matt. 10:39).

Metamodernists thrive on these contradictions. Oscillating between conflicting ideas, moving back and forth between two poles—always focusing on one and ignoring the other, only to immediately swap around and focus on the other, ignoring the one. For metamodernists the metanarrative is not dead; it just

needs some reframing. I see many metamodernists in church. They are people who, despite their cynicism, hope against hope for a better future.

This hope against hope is also something perfectly American and very current. Recently the United States has been producing a lot of young adult dystopian novels and movies: *Divergent*, *The Hunger Games*, *The Maze Runner*. In these stories, the world is terrible and just watching the lives of the characters makes you uncomfortable. There's a future, but how great does that future look to most of us? The government has collapsed, the social structure has disintegrated, the world is over.

I don't want to spoil any of these stories for you, but trust me when I say there's light at the end of the tunnel. It may not be much, but it is a future. These movies resonate with young adults, because the young adults are metamodern. They feel like they were born into a world where everything has collapsed, a world ruined by previous generations. But focusing on that is boring and stifling. They can easily get behind stories where heroes fight against that negativity for a better future, even if it's only a little better.

We need to be a church that allows space for this believing disbelief. For sincere irony. For people who thrive on paradoxes. How can we be that church?

Church for the Post-Christian Age

Fortunately, the problem is not the gospel. The gospel, “God loves you,” is a great message. The meat of the message (or “vegetarian meat-replacement” of the message, I should say) is great. The problem is the modernist “sauce” that we put on the message. To continue the metaphor, the Adventist pioneers developed a wonderful, nutritious dish for the modernist age. The church grew up, big and strong. In many modernist cultures, we are still growing fast. But in the West, we are barely growing at all, and if we do grow, it’s among the modernist immigrants, not the postmodernist (or metamodern) ones.

This is a difficult realization, because through the years the Adventist sauce has slowly become Adventism itself. Our pioneers believed in searching for meaning in the Bible and in finding answers together. While we still believe this, we hardly practice it. We don’t organize evangelism campaigns where we help people search for answers. We show them, we tell them, we teach them.

The main problem is that we know people have questions, so we give them answers. People have questions, so sermons give the answer, or Bible studies give the answer. But that is the wrong way of dealing with contemporary culture. People don’t want answers—or at least, not just one answer. They want to find their own answers.

The inhabitants of this post-postmodern world are good at discovering answers. This is a generation of people who are excellent at looking up all the right answers and then developing their own answers from there. We just need to give them a chance to take that last step. They are story-savvy. They are critical readers. They can deconstruct texts left and right without even knowing that’s what they are doing.

An answer earned is always better than an answer given. This is not even new. Think of the gospels. A man comes to Jesus and asks a simple question: “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus responds with: Well, let me tell you this incredibly complicated story about a man, a Samaritan, a Levite, and a donkey. And then I’ll ask you the same question.” Jesus hardly ever gave answers. Jesus taught by asking questions. He helped people answer their own questions, and often there was more than one answer to be found.

Unlike Jesus, we generally teach by giving answers. Answers that the people around us don’t want. If we want to be effective, we need to assume that people don’t want the truth (even though we know how wonderful it is). We need to assume that they don’t want the great controversy (even though we value it so highly). They don’t want *the* answers. They just want *our* answers.

People want experiences. They want guides. They want little

pieces of the puzzle, fragments that they can add together to make their own whole. Adventism has excellent fragments: health, rest, Jesus, a loving God, a wonderful future, forgiveness. We should share these pieces of the puzzle. We need to connect, not with the health message, but with a great recipe. We need to connect, not with the Sabbath, but with the Sabbath Sofa. If you don’t know what that is, give it a Google.⁹ We need to connect, not with the cross, but by sharing the relief that forgiveness brings to a guilty conscience. We need to connect through Jesus, not theology.

We need to stop thinking that we know the answers, the path, or the life. Rather, we need to share *our* lives, *our* path, *our* answers, so that others can find *their* life, *their* path, *their* answers. So we can find answers together. And we need to keep hoping against hope for a better future. 📌

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¹ This article is based on a presentation given at the One project gathering in San Diego in February of 2015. The author would like to thank the One project for the space to develop these thoughts and all who were present for their helpful comments, which have improved this article.

² www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/698-10-facts-about-america-s-churchless#.VNv4QEJv1vU

³ These statistics are a combination of the results found in the following places: www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/vrije-tijd-cultuur/publicaties/artikelen/archief/2013/2013-3929-wm.htm; http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_341_en.pdf; www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/bevolking/publicaties/bevolkingstrends/archief/2013/2013-het-belangvan-religie-voor-sociale-samenhan-pub.htm; www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/vrije-tijd-cultuur/cijfers/incidenteel/maatwerk/2013-religie-mw.htm; and www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/vrije-tijd-cultuur/cijfers/incidenteel/maatwerk/2013-religie-mw.htm.

⁴ See, for example, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. It begins with the sentence, “That postmodernism is indefinable is a truism.” The first word of the second sentence is “However.” Gary Aylesworth, “Postmodernism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Spring 2015.

⁵ Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, “Notes on Metamodernism,” *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, Vol. 2, Nov. 15, 2010, pp. 1-13. Online at <http://www.aestheticsandculture.net/index.php/jac/article/view/5677/6304>. These two scholars also maintain a blog on metamodernism: www.metamodernism.com.

⁶ Vermeulen and van den Akker, “Utopia, Sort of: A Case Study in Metamodernism,” *Studia Neophilologica*, Dec. 1, 2014, pp. 1-13. Online at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00393274.2014.981964#.VOnJcMaJnww>.

⁷ Vermeulen and van den Akker, “Notes on Metamodernism,” p. 5.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Or check out www.sabbath.org.uk.



HOW ADV CHOOSE THEIR *Could There Be a Better*

My wife and I arrived in the West African country of Cameroon just before Christmas in 1984. I had been hired as manager of the Francophone publishing house for what was then called the African-Indian Ocean Division. In reality, I found upon arrival a medium-size printing operation that did a lot of commercial printing in Yaoundé, the capital city of Cameroon, but did very little actual publishing. Nonetheless, it became an interesting experience.

Little did I suspect that I would be listed as a delegate to represent my new division at the forthcoming General Conference (GC) Session in New Orleans, to be held from June 27 to July 6, 1985, just about seven months after our arrival in the “mission field.”¹ It was soon explained to me that as manager of an institution that reported directly to the division, I was entitled to the status of a “delegate at large” (under Article III, sec. 3c). Just what that meant—and how I was to represent a region of the world of which I, at that point in time, knew hardly anything—was left to my own creativity and imagination.

I had been to the world congress of the church in Vienna in 1975 (without delegate status), but I had not attended the 1980 GC Session in Dallas, Texas, which went down in Adventist history as the occasion when the church adopted the 27 fundamental beliefs. Going to New Orleans in 1985 as a delegate was, therefore, a new adventure that was as exciting for me as it was unexpected. What was even more surprising, however, was that I was chosen to be one of the dozen or so men (yes, only men) from “my” division who would be privileged to sit in the 238-member nominating committee (only six of whom were women), which was chaired by Dr. Richard Lesher, president of Andrews University.

I suppose my experience was similar to that of many other members of this prominent committee, which was to nominate

ENTISTS R LEADERS

Way? BY REINDER BRUINSMA

the General Conference leaders and the leadership for the 10 divisions and three attached unions for the 1985-1990 period.² I did not know why in the world I was deemed worthy to be part of this august group, and I had no idea what was expected of me. Nor did I have any information about most of the people whose names floated (often quite quickly) to the surface. But I did my best to dutifully press the button at the right moment. (This was the first General Conference Session in which electronic voting was used.) Thus I became co-responsible for re-electing Neal C. Wilson as the denomination's president.

In the following decades, I became much better acquainted with the inner workings of the church, as I gradually became a church administrator myself—at the division level and at the union conference level. I attended the GC Sessions of 1990 (Indianapolis), 1995 (Utrecht, the Netherlands), 2000 (Toronto, Canada), and 2005 (St. Louis) as a delegate. In St. Louis it was once again my privilege to “serve” on the nominating committee. At that point in time, I was president of the Netherlands Union. There was an unwritten rule in the Trans-European Division that the union presidents from that division would alternate as nominating committee members. In 2005 the president of the Netherlands Union was among these elect.

I have a clear recollection of the proceedings in this committee with its 193 members, which chose Lowell Cooper and Ted N.C. Wilson as its chairpersons. I knew a lot more in 2005 than I had known in 1985. And, maybe as a result, serving on the nominating committee became a far more frustrating experience. I was acutely aware of how much was clearly “pre-cooked” and how little chance there was to even suggest new names for discussion. I remember becoming quite angry, to the point that I openly voiced my frustration. One particular member of the committee would, after a few pre-considered names had been

put “on the board,” immediately move that nominations should cease. There would be an immediate “second,” followed by a perfunctory “yes” vote—leaving me with the feeling that input from people like me, who did not belong to the inner circle, was almost zero. Having talked with many colleagues from different places around the world, I have concluded that my experience did not substantially differ from that of many of them. And this, apparently, was also true of the session of 2010 in Atlanta, where the nominating committee overwhelmingly voted to nominate Ted Wilson as the church's president for the 2010-2015 period.

How Did We Get This System?

Denominations use different systems to elect their leaders. The Roman-Catholic Church has made the choice of its top leader the responsibility of the College of Cardinals. All cardinals younger than 80 years have voting right when the “conclave” meets. The now 77-year-old Jorge Mario Bergoglio, who adopted the name Francis, was elected the current pope (on the fifth ballot) on March 13, 2013, by a majority of the 117 cardinal-electors. When a pope is elected, no further approval from the church's constituency is required. The Mormon Church simply chooses its top leader on the basis of seniority of service. The longest-serving “apostle” will become the next “prophet.” Denominations of Calvinistic vintage, such as the Presbyterians, have a number of administrative levels. Leaders at each level are elected by representatives from the next lower level. The highest level, the General Assembly, chooses its chairman from among itself. The Southern Baptists—the largest Protestant denomination in the USA, with its 18 million members—holds its assembly, where “messengers” from all local churches participate in the choice of the next leader. They may have several candidates to choose from, although it may also happen that one candidate runs unopposed. And of course, other denominations use still other election models.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a long tradition of putting the main burden for the choice of its top leadership during its quinquennial session on a nominating committee.³ A plenary vote by all delegates is required as the final part of the process, but it is rather seldom that a large majority on “the floor” does not accept the nomination that is presented.⁴ It should be kept in mind that the election process determines not just the church's main officers, but a large number of posts: vice-presidents, the undersecretary, associate secretaries, associate and assistant treasurers, departmental directors and their associates—in total well over 100 persons.

It would seem that many denominations, in particular in the United States, have traditionally used nominating committees

for the election of church officials. Nineteenth-century records of denominational assemblies in the United States, at which leaders had to be chosen, usually refer to a nominating committee as a matter of course. The early Adventist leaders borrowed this procedure, along with so many other aspects of their early denominational activities, from the faith communities they had left behind.

The minutes of the General Conference Sessions indicate that, from the first session in 1863 onward, a nominating committee functioned as the main election mechanism.

During that first 1863 session, the brethren William S. Higley, James Harvey, and B.F. Snook were to be responsible for nominating the “officers” of the newly organized General Conference. For many years the nominating committee of the General Conference Session (an annual event until 1889)

committee. Each world division is allowed to choose 10 percent of its delegation for participation in the nominating committee, while the delegates-at-large may choose 8 percent from their ranks. Those who, at that point in time, hold elected posts in the General Conference or the divisions are excluded from this process (even though they may be most informed about many of the individuals who will be proposed). Since the rules for the appointment of delegates now ensure that the total number of delegates will not rise much above 2,000, the size of the nominating committee is thereby limited to roughly 200.

The full nominating committee is to choose its own chairperson and secretary. The members of the committee meet in plenary sessions but are also allowed “a reasonable amount of time” to meet per division group. In this smaller forum, they must “consider the personnel needs of their division,” and the

WHEN SUGGESTIONS ARE MADE THAT PART OF THE ELECTION PROCESS MIGHT BE DONE PRIOR TO THE GC SESSION—OR THAT THE DELEGATES WOULD BE GIVEN A CHOICE BETWEEN SEVERAL CANDIDATES—THERE IS AN OUTCRY THAT THIS WOULD LEAD TO A LAMENTABLE POLITICIZING OF THE PROCESS. BUT, REALLY, WHOM ARE THE OBJECTORS KIDDING? SHOULD WE JUST PRETEND THAT NO POLITICS ARE INVOLVED?

consisted of just three members. Of course, it must be kept in mind that during the first period of our church’s existence, the total number of delegates was no more than a few dozen. Even the famous Minneapolis General Conference of 1888 was attended by only 90 delegates and served by a nominating committee still limited to just three persons!

Gradually a larger nominating committee emerged, as a few random examples from past General Conference Sessions illustrate. In 1913 the nominating committee consisted of 15 members. By 1926 the number had risen to 38, while in 1958 the committee had enlarged to 90 members.

Presently the General Conference Constitution and Bylaws contain precise rules for the makeup of the nominating

nominations made by these smaller committees for their division leaders will be channeled, through the plenary nominating committee, to “the floor” for a final vote.

How It Works

The bylaws of the General Conference stipulate that as one of the first items of business during the GC Session, several committees must be elected by the delegates. One of these is the nominating committee. The nominating committee will begin meeting as soon as it has been formed. Traditionally, the session begins on a Thursday evening. Everything is done to make it possible for the nominating committee to start its work early Friday morning. It has become almost an undisputed rule that a nomination for the

General Conference presidency is brought to the floor, and voted upon, before the Friday-afternoon business session adjourns. This has not always been without problems. In 1990 the nominating committee decided to nominate George W. Brown (then president of the Inter-American Division) for GC president, but contrary to the expectations, Dr. Brown declined the nomination. After intense discussion, the nominating committee then proposed someone who had not previously been considered a “papabile”⁵: Robert S. Folkenberg. His nomination was probably influenced by the considerable time pressure and by Folkenberg’s high visibility that day as chairman of the nominating committee.

It has been said that members of the nominating committee experience a totally different GC Session than the other delegates. They spend most of the entire conference in seclusion, meeting every day except Sabbath, almost all day, with only short breaks when partial reports are brought to the floor or when it is time to eat. To ensure that meal breaks do not take too much time, they receive preferential treatment in the restaurants.

After the nominating committee has organized itself and chosen its chairperson(s) and secretaries, the first item of business is the nomination of the president. Looking at history, it appears that incumbents who are willing to be re-elected have a good chance to get another five-year term. The session of 2010 was an exception. The outgoing president Jan Paulsen had been expected to announce his retirement (he was 70 at the time of the GC Session), but in his speech during the opening meeting he declared, to the great surprise of many who knew him, that he would accept a new term if the session decided to re-elect him. A large majority of the nominating committee, however, preferred another candidate: Ted N.C. Wilson, who had been a General Conference vice president since the year 2000. Five years earlier, at the General Conference of St. Louis, he had been a close second in the race for the presidency, and in Atlanta he was clearly favored by most delegates from the divisions in the developing world.

Once the name of the presidential nominee has been presented to the delegates and has been voted, the nominating committee deals with the posts of executive secretary and treasurer. Depending on the time frame, the next layer of officials to be nominated is a group of about eight or nine general vice presidents and the 13 division presidents (who are also ranked as vice presidents). Ideally, the general vice presidents should be nominated and voted before the division caucuses deal with the division presidents. The reason for this is that often general vice presidents are recruited from among division presidents, and if newly elected division presidents were invited to a vice

presidential post and decided to accept, it would be awkward for them to tell their delegates that, after all, they would prefer to move to GC headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, rather than to be their division president for the next five years.

Once these positions have been filled, the agenda of the nominating committee focuses on the other elected persons in the Secretariat and in the Treasury, the directors of departments and services and their associates, and the membership of some boards.

Challenges

Most men and women who have served one or more times on a GC Session nominating committee will agree that the committee must work under an enormous time pressure. The sheer number of positions that must be filled makes it impossible to give careful consideration to all of the names that might appear “on the board.” This time shortage makes having ready-made proposals almost unavoidable. The newly elected president has a major say in the composition of the team of close associates with whom he will work. In fact, each time the discussion moves to the next line on the agenda, the committee generally asks whether or not “administration” has any proposals. To some extent this may be inevitable, but many feel there is not enough opportunity to bring forward new names. During recent GC Sessions, short CVs of likely candidates were prepared and distributed in advance. This, of course, means that spontaneous suggestions from the floor are not accompanied by comparable support information and, for that reason, are at a serious disadvantage.

One could wonder whether the new General Conference president, who joins the nominating committee once he is elected, has (or is allowed to have) too much influence on the process. Reports from sources within the nominating committee would suggest that this was certainly the case in Atlanta. Many felt, for instance, that the way in which the appointment of the staff of the Ministerial Association was transferred to the General Conference Executive Committee (after the GC Session) bordered on unacceptable manipulation.

Could We Do It Differently?

When someone suggests that it may be time to re-evaluate the way we elect our leaders during the quinquennial world congress, many who are part of the denomination’s establishment immediately react by stating that we should “not try to fix what is not broken.” The usual argument is that no system is perfect; that our current system has, so far, served us quite well; and that it probably is the best method among all of the options. Also, when suggestions are made that part of the election process might be done prior to

the GC Session—or that the delegates would be given a choice between several candidates—there is an outcry that this would lead to a lamentable politicizing of the process. But, really, whom are the objectors kidding? Should we just pretend that no politics are involved?

Obviously, any change in the electoral process must be carefully considered. We must be reasonably sure that such changes will be beneficial and will make the process more democratic and transparent, giving greater participation to all delegates. Let me briefly suggest a number of aspects that might be put on the table for discussion:

1. What can be done to ensure that the members of the nominating committee have a reasonable knowledge of how the church operates and have sufficient awareness of available candidates—even if that means that we would have a somewhat smaller (but more knowledgeable) committee?
2. What process might be instituted (and what changes in the Constitutions and Bylaws might be needed) to allow for the forming of the nominating committee some time prior to the start of the session?
3. If the committee were chosen in advance of the session, nominating committee members might arrive a few days earlier in the city where the session is held. A day (or part of a day) could be devoted to explaining the procedures of the nominating committee, and the committee might start its work, thus reducing the time pressure.
4. Why couldn't the election of *division* staff be transferred to the major division meeting in the autumn of the year of the GC Session? Current church policy already allows for the possibility of electing/appointing departmental division staff in this manner, but so far most divisions have not opted for this. Shifting the election of the division officers and the departmental staff to a division meeting could result in a greater degree of participation, by more people, and would leave more time at the GC Session for the election of key officials to serve at the denomination's headquarters.
5. Earlier proposals (made under the Paulsen administration) to reduce the number of elected posts at the General Conference departmental level, whereby only the directors of departments and services would be elected during the GC Session and all associate directors would be *appointed* during the Autumn Council, could be revived. After all, there is ample representation from around the world at Autumn Council, which would ensure broad input from the entire world church.

6. It might be wise to study alternative models for electing church leaders, which are used by other denominations. Some denominations (Southern Baptist, for instance) allow multiple

candidates for their top leadership. It would greatly increase the participation of all delegates if they were presented with, say, two candidates for the presidency and other key posts. The nominating committee would have the responsibility to nominate these candidates. The candidates could be given some time to present themselves and to briefly explain some of their main ideals and passions for the church (either through a speech of a predetermined length of time or, for instance, a video interview).

7. The advisability of having term limits (probably a maximum of two consecutive terms) might be thoroughly investigated.

During the 60th General Conference Session in the Henry B. Gonzalez Conference Center in San Antonio from July 2 to July 11, 2015, we will no doubt use the long-established procedures. All who are intimately involved in the process can, however, help to increase its transparency and democratic character. And in everything that is done, we must continue to trust in the presence of the Holy Spirit and pray that he is constantly welcome in the room where the nominating committee deliberates. But let's think beyond 2015 and perhaps devise improvements in our election system that can be voted in 2020 and implemented in 2025. Yes, it takes time to effect change. But if we do not start somewhere, nothing will ever change and the problems alluded to in this article will only become more serious. 🚫

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¹ Detailed information about all General Conferences Sessions since 1863 is available online at <http://docs.adventistarchives.org/documents.asp?CatID=14&SortBy=1&ShowDateOrder=True> and at <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/Forms/AllItems.aspx?RootFolder=%2fPeriodicals%2fGCSessionBulletins&FolderCTID=0x012000DDAC5B94CFBD234AB142FC5C311C732700042C85EA7C1C1A4DB8D75C62A7517A6E>.

² The number of world divisions has varied over time. Currently there are 13 divisions. Sometimes, for various reasons, a union is not part of a division but is directly attached to the General Conference. Presently this concerns only the Middle-East North African Union. The church in Israel is also attached directly to the General Conference.

³ When a vacancy of the presidency—or of another elected position—occurs in the period between sessions, the executive committee appoints a nominating committee and votes upon the nominees (a two-thirds majority is required) during one of its executive committee meetings, preferably the Autumn Council. A special meeting of the executive committee, with wide international representation, was called to deal with the vacancy that resulted from Robert Folkenberg's resignation. With the entire executive committee serving as the nominating committee, Jan Paulsen was elected as the new GC president and was re-elected during the GC Session of 2000.

⁴ This may happen, however, as was the case in 1995 when the nomination of Jacob J. Nortey as the incumbent president of one of the African world divisions was referred back to the nominating committee, resulting in a subsequent withdrawal of his name.

⁵ "Papabile," an unofficial Italian term for likely papal candidates, is now often used in connection with election processes in non-Catholic circles.

RULES OF ORDER AT A GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION

By Gary Patterson

WHETHER FORMAL OR INFORMAL, RULES of order do exist. We learn them from an early age, when we are instructed by our parents and teachers not to interrupt others who are speaking. This is the positive view of rules of order. We also learn the negative rules of order when we are in a bullying situation where the biggest, or meanest, or loudest person of the group dominates the conversation. And it is this type of behavior that proper rules of order and decorum seek to avoid and correct. In an informal interchange with two or three persons, formal rules of order are not needed, and even when the number increases to five or ten, we still can operate fairly well in the exchange of conversation. But it is difficult to carry on a dialogue with large numbers of people, particularly when dealing with business and technical issues.

It was in such a setting in 1863 that U.S. Army engineer Henry Martyn Robert was chosen to preside over a church meeting and sensed that neither he nor the members of the group possessed the skills and techniques needed to effectively proceed with the assigned task. Later, as an active member of several organizations, Robert began to structure a process that would provide an efficient and equitable methodology for dialogue and decision-making. The result was the first *Robert's Rules of Order*, published in 1876, which enabled various organizations to operate with the same set of rules. Through 11 editions and revisions over the past 150 years, these rules of order have continued to be the standard and template for the process of discussion and decision-making for myriad organizations.

It was at the 1985 General Conference (GC) Session that a request was made for more precise written rules of order addressing the specific needs of meetings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Thus, following the session, the General Conference Executive Committee sought to draw up such rules of procedure, and at subsequent GC Sessions and committees,

the *General Conference Rules of Order* have been in effect. The rules of order are provided to delegates of the General Conference Session as an aid to knowing how the session proceeds, and in the interest of efficient process, all participants should study them. The document, which can be read through in less than an hour, is neither lengthy nor technically difficult to understand.

At times, rules of order and procedural manipulation can be used to disrupt the flow of business and decision-making. Such obstructionist tactics misuse the rules. As the *General Conference Rules of Order* states: "These rules of order are intended to be used with a sense of reverence for the divine purpose. They are not intended to provide for quick dilatory parliamentary maneuvers to gain a point, gain undeserved attention, gain advantage by suppressing the wishes of others, or to confuse the chair, fellow delegates, or committee members. These rules, furthermore, should not be used in such a way as to become an excuse for procedural wrangling which could keep sessions or committees from moving forward with dispatch" (pages 2-3).

It does not take much thought to realize that it is not possible for nearly 3,000 delegates to have ongoing open discussion of issues on the floor. In order to get anything done at a GC Session, significant preparation must be done in advance. The agenda for the session is prepared by the Annual Council of the General Conference Committee, which recommends it to the floor of the GC Session for approval. Once the agenda is voted, additional items may not be added

The rules of order are provided to delegates of the General Conference Session as an aid to knowing how the session proceeds, and in the interest of efficient process, all participants should study them.

except by a vote to do so. This may seem arbitrary, yet opening the agenda to any and every whim or wish of individual matters of interest or concern from the floor is obviously a recipe for gridlock.

Though it may seem a remote possibility that any one person's idea will progress to the floor of the General Conference Session, yet that is the way it works. Someone, somewhere, has an idea that moves from a church group, or a conference, or a union, or a committee through the process to the session for a decision. The agenda, after all, is not dropped on a note from the sky. It is a human process, which operates under the guiding hand of Providence.

In protracted floor discussions over difficult decisions and divisive issues, it becomes evident that after a few hours, little new information or ideas are forthcoming. Continuing on at length with repetitive comments in an attempt to sway opinion is counterproductive. On such matters, it is wise to provide for presentation of well-thought and studied summaries of the varying opinions on the matter, then allow for a time limit to be set on floor discussion.

At times, two microphones—for or against a motion—are employed, at which long lines of delegates gather seeking to express their opinions. Unless an overall time limit is set for such debate, as well as limits for individual input, the discussion seems endless. During floor debates, very little (if any) change of opinion occurs. The nearly 3,000 delegates do have opportunity to express their opinion, but primarily this is done by vote, not endless argument.

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood and misused procedures is the call of the "previous question." Some assume that by merely "calling the question," one person may close the discussion and require an immediate vote on the main motion. This is not the case. Although this motion does call for the close of discussion, it requires a second, is not debatable or amendable, and requires a two-thirds majority vote to pass. When this motion is called for, it must be voted on immediately without further discussion. If it passes, then the main motion must be voted on without further discussion.

Another misconception of this motion, often heard during a nominating committee report, assumes that "calling the question" is required after the reading of each name, in order for the report to continue. In such settings, the committee often becomes weary of calling "question," so someone takes it as a duty to repeatedly call "question" in order to keep business from grinding to a halt. This unnecessary process stems from a misperception of the motion.

At a recent General Conference Session, two microphones were set up for delegates making pro and con comments. The lines at each were lengthy and remained so as the hours ran on. A third microphone had been provided for "point of order" issues, and when one delegate came to

that microphone to speak, he was quickly recognized by the chair. The delegate began to speak his opinion on the main motion, but the chair interrupted him and asked what was his point of order. He stated that he did not have a point of order. When the chair asked why he had come to the point of order microphone, he replied, to the amusement of the delegation, "The line is shorter here."

GC Session delegates can avoid such situations by giving careful attention to the rules of order in advance of the meetings. The Motion Summary Table located in the center spread of the *Rules of Order* document is simple and clear. "These General Conference rules of order apply in principle to the world Church. Division committees may adapt, where necessary, these rules of order for use at sessions and executive committee meetings within their territory. Other church organizations, such as local churches, boards, and faculty meetings, may use these rules of order."¹

Gary Patterson, D.Min., is a retired pastor and church administrator. He has served as the president of two conferences, as an officer of the North American Division, as a General Conference field secretary, and as a member of the GC administrative committee.

¹ *General Conference Rules of Order* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988), p. 19. This document is available from the General Conference Secretariat department.

QUESTIONS THAT NEED TO BE ASKED

By Gary Patterson

HAVING NOW PASSED THE 150-YEAR mark of the organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863, it is surely good, common sense to consider whether or not the organization is due for some structural updates. Not that the matter has gone without review in the past, such as in 1901 and 1903 when the General Conference was reorganized; but most of the structural tweaks and adjustments over the past 110 years have been minor ones. Today, in the context of vast changes in membership numbers, as well as in the speed and ubiquity of communication and transportation, it seems reasonable to ask some relevant questions.

First, however, it needs to be made clear what the General Conference is versus what it is not. It is not the body of Christ. The four constituent groups of the world church (General Conference, unions, conferences, and local congregations) are structures created by and for the members of the church to achieve its mission. They are organizations and institutions formed

by people, and as such they are human organizations. This is not a criticism of such organizations, but simply a recognition that all such structures are of human origin.

While the church does attempt to know and do the will of God as revealed in Scripture, it does not automatically follow that every decision and action of this human institution is the will of God. On one occasion in the General Conference Administrative Committee, we were discussing some difference of opinion on a doctrinal position that was being espoused by a segment of the church membership. One of the members of the committee stated, "After all, our doctrines are not determined by popular vote." I replied, "On the contrary, that is exactly how they are determined: by popular vote at a General Conference Session."

And how else would they be determined? After careful and diligent study of Scripture with much prayer and consideration of the views and understandings of others, the church, as represented by its constituent group in session, votes to state the position of the church on doctrine. While we believe in the guiding hand of God in such a process,

it is nonetheless a human decision.

General Motors (GM) is a human organization. IBM is a human organization. And the General Conference (GC) is a human organization. While we would assume that the purpose of the GC differs from that of GM or IBM, with a more noble and godly intent, it is still a human organization. Failure to recognize this reality can easily lead to a resistance or refusal to ask the kinds of questions about its structure that need to be asked 150 years after its initiation. To assume that what was done more than a century ago was for all time and all places is neither a valid nor a safe way to proceed into the future.

Aversion to Centralized Power

When the church was first organized in 1863, it was not without resistance to the very idea of organization. For some, it was tantamount to a return to "Babylon," which they had just escaped and rejected. But James White made it clear that no individual should be expected or allowed to hold legal titles and documents for church property and funds in his own name. Thus, the church as a legal entity came into being.

"In 1894, the General Conference Association consisted of twenty-one members or trustees. The Review board of directors was composed of seven members. The president, treasurer, and auditor of the Review board were all members of the six-member executive committee of the General Conference

Association. Thus there was a sort of interlocking directorate of men in Battle Creek who controlled as far as possible the church and its institutions. It was against this control by a few persons that Ellen White protested.”¹ Thus, 30 years after the initial organization of the church, unions were formed in 1903 in order to decentralize the power of the General Conference.

Throughout the years since that time, there have been attempts to make a distinction between the entities of the local conferences, union conferences, and General Conference (and their related associations as the legal body of such entities). However, this distinction is more in verbiage than reality and has been confusing to constituents when, in session, one entity is adjourned and the other called to order to do business. In such instances, the constituency meeting goes back and forth between the two entities, yet the same constituents do all of the voting.

As stated above, the main reason for the formation of the unions was to redistribute the centralized authority of the General Conference. And as the church membership grew, divisions of the General Conference were formed to serve these unions in geographic groupings. It should be pointed out here, however, that divisions are not a constituent group, but rather a division of the General Conference. (The one exception to this is the South Pacific Division, which actually has for many years operated as a constituent group). As the membership of the world church grew over the last century from under 100,000 to presently

The question arises, Would there now be an advantage to making the divisions constituent entities responsible for election of their own officers and charged with directing the work and finance in the unions within their territory?

approaching 20 million, 13 divisions have been created to address the work of the church in each territory.

Our 100-Year-Old Model

It is in this context that we address the following questions: Does a form of church governance established when the membership was mostly in North America, and under 100,000, need review over 100 years later when membership is 200 times larger, and the bulk of membership is outside North America? When world travel has shrunk from months by ship to hours by air, and communication has gone from months by mail to seconds by electronic media, is the 100-year-old model still most effective?

Funding of the General Conference at the outset was entirely from North America, and as recently as 1987, when I began work in the North American Division (NAD), over 90 percent of GC funding came from the NAD. Furthermore, there was no actual North American Division at that time, its operation being subsumed under the General Conference officers and departmental directors. It was not until

the 1990 GC Session in Indianapolis that the NAD was officially formed and recognized by vote of the GC constituency.

Until that time, all tithe funds from North America were taken directly by the GC, and a portion was granted back to North America for its needs and operation under the direction of the GC treasury. Contributions to the General Conference from the other divisions amounted to less than 10 percent of the GC tithe income, with some divisions contributing nothing at all. Since 1990 that percentage has changed, but the bulk of GC tithe funds still comes from North America.

The question arises, Would there now be an advantage to making the divisions constituent entities responsible for election of their own officers and charged with directing the work and finance in the unions within their territory? Regarding funding, there clearly would need to be contributions from the divisions to the GC, and there would need to be a system of redistribution from the divisions of greater financial ability to those unable to maintain their work on their own.

Several of the current 13 divisions now number their membership in multiple millions, and the assumption that the work in the world field can be directed most efficiently by a central institution at the GC headquarters in the United States is a doubtful conclusion. As in 1903 when the unions were formed, this work needs to be redirected—now to the division fields.

Has the GC Session Become Obsolete?

The world church also needs to review the General Conference Session as it presently

exists. At its beginning, the term General Conference had a descriptive reality. Those first years were just that: a general meeting of the body of the church. And it was possible to do business within that group. But now, even with a representative group of a little more than 0.001% of membership worldwide, it is obviously not possible to conduct an open floor discussion with 3,000 people in a reasonable manner. Such realities cause one to wonder, Has the General Conference Session become obsolete? If a large portion of the work were shifted to division constituencies, perhaps much more could be accomplished and the division fields be advantaged.

One of the responsibilities of the general session is the election of officers for the GC. When there is no change in presidential leadership, generally speaking this is no problem. However, when a change occurs at the time of the session, it creates a severe time crunch. The nominating committee, which consists of 200-plus members from the 13 divisions (speaking multiple languages), is tasked with the responsibility of submitting names for election. It is not formed until the first meeting of the session on Thursday evening.

After organizing itself and electing its chairperson, the nominating committee sets about on Friday morning to nominate a person to serve as president of the General Conference. Even if all goes well, this gives the committee only about eight hours to accomplish this task. It is likely that an eight-hour time limit is too short to accomplish a task of this magnitude.

Should the election of a General Conference president be confined to

a few hours on the first Friday of such a session? Under the system's current design, the nominating committee is asked to recommend not only the officers and departmental leadership of the GC, but also the officers of the 13 world divisions. In other words, the nominating committee has only a few days in which to nominate hundreds of individuals to serve in both the General Conference and the divisions. Clearly, the members of this overworked committee cannot possibly know the needs and personnel of all the divisions. Would the operation of the church and the election of officers be advantaged by creating constituent divisions to work in conjunction with their unions in the election of their leadership?

Even if the entire GC Session of eight working days were to devote more time to the election of a new president, the process would still demand a decision much faster and with less input than the electing of local church officers (a process that generally takes a month or two and requires a first and second reading a week apart). The selection of a new pastor frequently takes several months, with a search committee that works in concert with the local conference leadership. The selection of a college/university president or an academy principal involves a significant time period with careful study and review. Does it seem reasonable for the world church leader to be selected in a few hours by a body that has little opportunity to offer suggestions, discuss options, ask questions, or make prayerful consideration of the options? Should this process be removed from the general constituency and performed by another body, which is given enough time to follow a more careful process?

The question thus naturally arises, How would such a structure make world church decisions? Perhaps part of that question is contained in what the GC Session is

expected to accomplish. In the area of doctrinal belief and statements, there is need for unity. Further, there is need for world church finance issues to be agreed upon. But unity must not be confused with uniformity. The need for divisions to work in their own cultures and situations must not be stifled.

Other Issues to Be Addressed

Though not a part of the issues connected to a general session, the matter of Adventist educational institutions needs to be addressed. What is the future of boarding schools in the age of multiple day academies, rapid travel availability, and online education options? What would be the impact on establishing Adventist culture without such boarding academies, colleges, and universities? And with an increase in Adventist students attending secular universities, what can be done to provide Adventist connections for them there without competing with our own institutions of higher learning?

These are not, of course, all of the questions we need to ask. There are without doubt many more issues calling for attention as we move beyond the 150-year mark as a church institution. But perhaps this is a start. And the problem, if we do not address these issues, will not be whether we like or dislike the answers, but rather whether or not we refuse to enter the dialogue because we don't like the questions. They are there, whether we like them or not.

Gary Patterson, D.Min., is a retired pastor and church administrator. He has served as the president of two conferences, as an officer of the North American Division, as a General Conference field secretary, and as a member of the GC administrative committee.

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Publishing Ministry* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1983), p. 143.

JOB DESCRIPTION FOR A PRESIDENT

By Gary Patterson

WHEN GEORGE WASHINGTON WAS ELECTED to serve as president of the United States in 1789, not only was the job considered in a different context than its present role, but the title he received was understood in a far different way than it is today. Speaking of this transition in an NPR program on Dec. 14, 2013, Mark Forsythe referred to the president as “the most powerful man on Earth,” to which TED Radio Hour host Guy Raz replied, “That wasn’t exactly how it was supposed to sound.”

According to Forsythe, the debate over what to call the leader of the country went on for three weeks in Congress. *King* was definitely out, and *chief magistrate*, while favored by some, also failed to make the cut. In an attempt to avoid any hint of kingly powers, “they wanted to give him the humblest, meagerest, most pathetic title that they could think of,” said Forsythe. “And that was president.”

The title *president*, as stated in Wikipedia, “is derived from the Latin *prae-* ‘before’ + *sedere* ‘to sit.’ As such,

it originally designated the officer who presides over or ‘sits before’ a gathering and ensures that debate is conducted according to the rules of order.” As the word itself indicates, a president is the one who sits before a given group or, as the dictionary states, “an official chosen to preside over a meeting or assembly.” Yet over time, the political equivalent of bracket creep has expanded the authority and influence given to the position, until, as Forsythe expressed, the American president is “the most powerful man on Earth.”

A Shifting Power Structure

This phenomenon has occurred not only in the U.S. government, but in the church as well. In 1863, when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was organized, our nation was only 74 years into the development of its presidential concepts of government, and the somewhat lowly notions regarding the position of president yet remained. But as time passed, and the church grew, and the power of the presidency increased, there was an inclination toward the centralizing of authority in one or a few leaders.

Of this tendency, Ellen White spoke strongly in opposition. Her words sound a bit strange several generations later when she refers to “kingly power,” given that centuries have passed since the United States has been under the rule of a king. Today, even in Britain, the monarchy functions largely in a ceremonial sense. It has been many generations since kings were a dominant force in people’s lives in most countries. But in the mid-1800s, the memory was yet fresh.

Mrs. White says: “God has not set any kingly power in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to control the whole body or to control any branch of the work. He has not provided that the burden of leadership shall rest upon a few men. Responsibilities are distributed among a large number of competent men.”¹

“In 1894, the General Conference Association consisted of twenty-one members or trustees. The Review [and Herald] board of directors was composed of seven members. The president, treasurer, and auditor of the Review board were all members of the six-member executive committee of the General Conference Association. Thus there was a sort of interlocking directorate of men in Battle Creek who controlled as far as possible the church and its institutions. It was against this control by a few persons that Ellen White protested.”²

In her opening address to the General Conference Session in 1901, she stated: “Now I want to say, God has not put any kingly power in our ranks to control this or that branch of the work. The work has been greatly restricted by the efforts to control it in every line. ... There must be a renovation, a reorganization; a power and strength must be brought into the committees that are necessary.”³

Speaking to leadership in 1902, she said, “In no line of work is any one man to have power to turn the wheel. God forbids.”⁴ Not alone did she thus address the leadership in general; she also told President A.G. Daniells directly, “God would not have you suppose that you can exercise a kingly power over your brethren.”⁵

Representative Government

As noted by General Conference President Ted Wilson: “We Seventh-day Adventists believe in a representative form of church governance. Our church is not organized in such a way that policies, actions, and activities of the church are dictated by any one leader or leaders of the General Conference.”⁶

It was specifically to address these control issues that unions—upon which the General Conference is built—were formed. And in the 1901 and 1903 reorganization of the General Conference, specific duties and authorities were designated for these various segments of the church. It is often thought that the General Conference has line authority over all of the different parts of the church and that the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church possesses such authority. But this is not the case. Although the General Conference as a constituent unit does have a single president, the church does not. In fact, within the structure of the church there are hundreds of “presidents” who serve its various conference and union constituent segments.

In order to understand how the church operates, it is important to know how it is structured and whence its institutional authority is derived. There are four principal documents governing the church and four constituent groups in

its structure. The four documents are the 28 fundamental beliefs, the Constitution and Bylaws, the *Church Manual*, and the General Conference *Working Policy*. The four constituent groups are the local church, the local conference, the union conference, and the General Conference. Divisions are not constituent organizations (with the exception of the South Pacific Division), but rather are divisions of the General Conference, providing leadership and direction in defined geographic territories as subsets of the General Conference.

The 28 fundamental beliefs, the Constitution and Bylaws, and the *Church Manual* are determined and modified only by a vote of the General Conference constituency in session. The General Conference *Working Policy* is determined and modified by vote of the Annual Council of the General Conference Committee.

The four constituent groups have authority over specific functions of the church, which belong only to them and may not be usurped or countered by the other constituent groups. The local church is the only constituent level that can take action regarding membership issues; church officer election; appointment and ordination of elders, deacons, and deaconesses; local church budgets and finance; and other such local church functions.

The local conference is the only constituent level that can take action regarding its employees, institutions, finance, and membership in the sisterhood of churches. It also votes to recommend to the union conference individuals for ordination to the gospel ministry. However, it does not have the power to authorize such ordination. This authority rests with the union, along with the authorization of which conferences are included in its membership.

Conferences have the authority to organize churches and to accept or reject them from sisterhood in the conference. But they have no authority over membership transactions. Such authority rests only with the church in business session, which is the constituency of the church. Likewise, union conferences may accept or reject local conferences from membership in their jurisdiction, but they have no line authority over actions taken by conference and church constituencies.

Such a system does not allow, for example, the disfellowshipping of a member at any level other than the local congregation. This is in distinction to a papal system, where final authority rests with the pope. Actions that are assigned by policy to a specific constituent level may not be determined or overruled by other constituent levels of the church structure.

While it is clear that the General Conference in session has authority, what is less clear is just what that authority is and how far it extends. Obviously, it does not have authority to set the speed limit for driving on America’s interstate highway system. This may sound like a foolish comparison, but it serves to indicate that the General Conference authority is limited to actions that are within its jurisdiction. This being the case, it then must be determined exactly which matters are in its jurisdiction and which are not. Though the list is much longer than given here, these few examples will serve to illustrate the point, as delineated in GC Policy B 05, point 6:

“Different elements of organizational authority and responsibility are distributed among the various levels of denominational organization. For example, the decision as to who may/may not be a member of a local Seventh-day

Adventist Church is entrusted to the members of the local church concerned; decision as to employment of local church pastors is entrusted to the local conference/mission; decisions regarding the ordination of ministers are entrusted to the union conference/mission; and the definition of denominational beliefs is entrusted to the General Conference in session. Thus, each level of organization exercises a realm of final authority and responsibility that may have implications for other levels of organization.”

The GC President’s Job

Wilson continued in his article: “On every constituent level a process selects delegates who will represent their group. At the local church level we have nominating committees. ... On the conference and union conference levels, we have constituency meetings, during which delegates discuss and vote on items pertaining to the carrying out of the mission of the church in their areas. On the General Conference (GC) level, there is a GC session every five years.”⁷

It is with this background and in this context that a presidential job description is derived. The constitution of the General Conference addresses the issue, although not as a specific and formal job description. It states, regarding the work of the president, secretary, treasurer, and their associates: “It is the duty of these officers, in consultation with one another, to carry forward the work according to plans and programs voted by the General Conference in session and according to plans and policies agreed upon by the Executive Committee.”⁸

Specifically regarding the work of the president, the constitution states: “The president is the first officer of the General

While it is clear that the General Conference in session has authority, what is less clear is just what that authority is and how far it extends.

Conference, and shall report to the Executive Committee in consultation with the secretary and the treasurer. He or his designee shall preside at the sessions of the General Conference, act as chair of the Executive Committee, serve in the general interest of the General Conference as the Executive Committee shall determine, and perform such other duties as usually pertain to such office.”⁹

It is evident that line authority over the church is not an intended presidential responsibility. Rather, the presidency is a collaborative position in which a major portion of the assignment involves presiding over meetings of committees, boards, and staff. There is, however, more to the position than managing the business and process of the church. It also includes providing pastoral leadership and casting a vision for the worldwide work of sharing the gospel of saving grace in the context of Jesus’ second coming.

In order to investigate how two former presidents perceived this presidential job description, I spoke with Bob Folkenberg and Jan Paulsen, both friends and former colleagues of mine. I asked if they were given or aware of a job description when chosen to fill the office. Both indicated that they had not seen such a document, nor were they aware of its existence.

Having been a member of the General Conference Human Resources Committee for several years, I was of the impression that such a document existed for virtually

every position on the General Conference staff. Ruth Parish, HR director for the GC, assured me that such a document did exist and read its contents to me. I requested a copy of the document for this article. However, the office of the president declined to make it available. It is rather brief and reflects closely the constitution statement quoted above.

Of course, several additional lines of presidential leadership influence extend well beyond the technical and official responsibilities listed in both the GC constitution and the job description, and these reside in personality. No one leader possesses them all, but GC presidents bring to the church, over time, a variety of strengths while working within their own personal styles and abilities. These strengths tend to manifest themselves in five areas of leadership: spirituality, suasion, celebrity, energy, and intellect. Although these characteristics do not appear in the job description, they do influence the way a president operates and impacts the church.

In addition, a president’s history of experience greatly affects both eligibility and readiness for the office. Jan Paulson suggests five areas of “critical importance:”

- Personality, which is even more important than experience
- Ability to genuinely receive others’ perspectives with an open mind, without feeling threatened by them
- Capacity to understand that change is normal in a community that is alive and to welcome the opportunity to work with change
- Respect for the freedom God has given to all to think, speak, and act
- Possession of a generous mind that recognizes that sometimes it is better to be kind than it is to be right

Folkenberg suggested that the most serious lack in leadership at all levels of the Adventist church is “a functional system in place to identify divine objectives and plan initiatives to make and evaluate progress toward achieving these measurable objectives.”

Learning From Recent Elections

Paulsen came to office after having served for many years as president of the Trans-European Division and then as a vice-president of the General Conference. Although he was given no specific instruction or job description upon taking office, his proximity to the president’s work and observation of associated duties, over time, had contributed to his preparedness. In addition, he assumed leadership without the deadline pressure of a concurrent General Conference Session, which allowed more time for both himself and the committees working on the selection to make an informed decision. As Paulsen suggested, “Perhaps electing a president at the session is the worst possible time to do so.”

The 1990 GC Session in Indianapolis demonstrated some of the flaws in our current election process. GC President Neal C. Wilson, who was coming to his 70th birthday during the session, had not indicated an intent to retire. Thus, the nominating committee, which had been elected on Thursday at the beginning of the session, had to face the decision on Friday morning as to whether or not he should be nominated for re-election.

As the morning progressed, it became clear that Wilson would not be returned to office. This meant that as the committee resumed its work after lunch, the members needed to move quickly to have a nominee before the end of the day. At about 1:30 in the afternoon, I was in conversation

with Inter-American Division President George Brown in the Secretariat office when a messenger from the nominating committee walked up to us and said, “Elder Brown, you are wanted in the nominating committee.” We looked at one another and, with a knowing nod, realized that they would probably be asking Brown to consider a request to serve as GC president. For an hour or so, he and his wife wrestled with and prayed over the decision, and for personal reasons, including his age, they decided to decline.

By now it was mid-afternoon, and the committee was starting over again in their search. As the discussion progressed, the focus began to center on Bob Folkenberg, president of the Carolina Conference, who was serving as chair of the committee. Previously he had served in the Inter-American Division, both as a union conference president and as division secretary. Finally, late on Friday afternoon, the nominating committee brought its report to the floor for Robert S. Folkenberg, Sr., to serve as General Conference president.

I asked Bob how much preparation he had for the office, and he said, “About 15 minutes.” While this experience demonstrates the reality of what Paulsen said about doing such a selection at the GC Session, it is also a compliment to Folkenberg for the superior work he was able to do on such short notice.

But the story does not end there. The session adjourned about 5:30 on Friday evening, in preparation for the Sabbath and the great worship events of the thousands in attendance at this huge gathering. Then early on Sunday morning, the Steering Committee met at 6:30, as it does each morning of the session, to plan the day’s activities in advance. In the room, which seated the 25 or so of us on the committee around a long rectangular table, the new president, Bob Folkenberg,

was seated at the head of the table, “presiding” over an agenda that he had little preparation to address.

As members of the committee, who had been working on these plans for months in advance, we were doing our best to bring him up to speed within this short time frame. As the meeting progressed, the door at the back of the room opened and in walked Neal Wilson, who only two days before had been presiding over this committee. For a moment the room froze in silence. No one addressed him. Neal walked around to the side of the table where I was sitting and took a seat next to me. I quietly greeted him, and the meeting resumed under Bob’s direction. For all of my years in administrative circles, Neal had been the powerful and capable leader of us all. And at that moment I realized that the power is in the office, not the person. The process is not perfect, and sometimes it is painful. But God leads, even in our frailties. 🏠

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¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 8 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1904), p. 236.

² White, *The Publishing Ministry* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1983), p. 143.

³ *The General Conference Bulletin*, Vol. 4, Extra No. 1, April 3, 1901, p. 26.

⁴ White, Manuscript 140, 1902, published in *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 4 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), p. 292.

⁵ White, Letter 49, 1903, published in *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 4 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), p. 3.

⁶ Ted N.C. Wilson, “How Your Church Works,” *Adventist World*, May 2014, p. 9.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ General Conference *Working Policy*, p. 7.

⁹ *ibid.*

IN TODAY'S MILIEU OF CHANGE AND CHALLENGE, STRESS AND struggle, growth and empowerment, one quality that every organization seeks is leadership—dynamic, motivating, goal-oriented leadership. Just as leaders with vision and commitment are needed in the world of politics, business, industry, and economy, the church of the 21st century likewise faces an urgent need for leaders who are skilled in conflict resolution; who can facilitate a way forward in the face of tension, schism, and opposing viewpoints; and who can point members to Jesus as the answer to all conflicting claims.

leader's second great need is for character development. Integrity and spiritual depth are predicated on time with God in prayer, self-examination, and study of the Scriptures.³ Seeking heaven's wisdom above wealth, power, or fame will enable the Christian leader to learn from God "not only *what* to do, but *how* to do it in a way that will meet with the divine approval" (emphasis mine).⁴ White even goes so far as to say that the church leader's character development is more essential than his business!⁵

Writing on a plethora of management and leadership topics, Ellen White's perspective included the concepts of knowing God,

SPIRIT-DRIVEN LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE LENS OF ELLEN G. WHITE

BY CINDY TUTSCH

How are such leaders made? What characteristics mark the mission-driven Christian leader? What defines Spirit-driven leadership?

Leadership literature provides valuable, yet often conflicting, answers to such questions. In this article, however, I will focus on the broad conceptual framework for Christian leadership that emerges from the writings of Ellen G. White. I believe that these concepts provide valuable guidance to the church militant at this crucial juncture of our history.

Two Core Principles

At the very foundation of any capacity for Spirit-driven leadership—from parent to administrator to office manager—is the Spirit itself. Regarding the quest for meaning in the workplace, White says that true leaders must be the recipients of the Holy Spirit and continually respond to the grace of God in their lives. She states that the human heart can never know happiness or real meaning "until it is submitted to be molded by the Spirit of God."¹

Ellen White does not see leadership as some mystical mantle placed on a person, anointing that individual with superiority, authority, or infallibility. Instead, she presents Jesus as the Model: "The way to become great and noble is to be like Jesus, pure, holy, and undefiled."²

In addition to a willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit, a

biblical models of exemplary and non-exemplary leadership, the empowerment of a gender-inclusive, age-inclusive, and race-inclusive church for evangelism and service, leadership qualifications, how to respond to the erring, and proactive visioning and planning.⁶

What Is Leadership?

In the context of her unique theological structure of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, White perceives leadership as an opportunity extended by God to all persons to promote Christ and the kingdom of heaven. A Christian leader, therefore, is one who by life and example advances Christ's mission on Earth, both in the proclamation of God's saving grace to sinners and in heralding his coming kingdom. Accepting a position of leadership within a Christian context thus becomes an enormous responsibility. A leader on the side of Christ must continually choose to stand in opposition to the inducements of Satan, which come with tempting conventional trappings such as power, authority, wealth, and position.

While we often link leadership with administration, Ellen White takes a more encompassing view in which *every* Christian is called to be an ambassador for God and his kingdom. Leaders are, therefore, undershepherds who unite with Christ in his redemptive mission.⁷ Surely that includes all of us, regardless of our spiritual gifts.

Leadership Examples

Ellen White draws powerful lessons in leadership from the lives of various Bible characters. For example, in Exodus 18, Moses single-handedly deals with all of the problems confronting Israel. His father-in-law, Jethro, sees in Moses' style of leadership a sure path to burnout, so Jethro counsels Moses to share some of the responsibilities with other trusted deputies. But Moses should continue to "represent the people before God, and ... teach them the statutes and instructions" (verses 19-20, NRSV). In commenting on this, White affirms an important principle of



leadership: "The time and strength of those who, in the providence of God have been placed in leading positions of responsibility in the church, should be spent in dealing with the weightier matters demanding special wisdom and largeness of heart. It is not in the order of God that such men should be appealed to for the adjustment of minor matters that others are well qualified to handle."⁸

The reorganization of the General Conference, strongly and repeatedly urged by Ellen White, is an example of such delegation. In 1903 she commented, "It has been a necessity to organize union conferences, that the General Conference shall not exercise dictation over all the separate conferences."⁹

To her, a true leader is someone who represents God, his character, and his purpose to those whom they are called to lead. Representing God's will and purpose before his people must not be taken to mean that a leader should "play God." In her counsels, there is no place for a dictatorial leader. Her instructions for effective leadership are relational in nature.¹⁰

Ellen White's leadership principles focus on the objective of leadership: to reflect Christ and thus be more effective in saving souls. The success of a person called to leadership results in direct proportion to the leader's willingness to be filled with the Holy Spirit. In that renewed life, every person, regardless of occupation, should use his or her influence to draw others toward Christ and his offer of redemption.¹¹

A leader, through White's lenses, acts only as an instrument to achieve the goal of mobilizing the body of Christ to action, of providing momentum. Thus the leader is no more or no less important than the follower. She saw no hierarchal status or privilege of position attached to leadership. She was highly supportive of education and developing one's talents to their capacity. Nevertheless, in her expanded definition of leadership, it is Christ—not formal institutions of learning—who qualifies the leader for God's purpose. "In choosing men and women for His service, God does not ask whether they possess worldly wealth, learning, or eloquence. He asks, 'Do they walk in such humility that I can teach them My way? Can I put My words into their lips? Will they represent Me?'"¹²

White roots her leadership concept in faithfulness to God, which gives us a universal model of leadership that will not be outdated. A careful study of her writings will lead us to understand leadership in terms that are gender-inclusive, age-inclusive, and race-inclusive. Such leadership will produce a church fully equipped to preach the everlasting gospel, meant for every corner of the globe, as represented by the three angels of Revelation 14. Further, her call for an inclusive and universal leadership model will empower women, youth, and minorities—an empowerment not easily found in contemporary leadership literature.

Qualifications for Leadership

Of the many qualities that Ellen White emphasizes as essential in Christian leadership, we could focus careful and prayerful attention on the following:

1. **A Spirit-Filled Life.** In her perspective, the most important qualification for a leader comprises the calling and empowerment of the Spirit. This anointing comes in response to the leader's willingness to seek, in humility, for the Spirit's renewal and guidance and to respond to his promptings with selfless obedience and service. The Spirit-led leader will then build an inclusive team and will not be eager for power, status, or recognition.¹³ White encourages Spirit-led leaders to build a relationship with their followers based on shared purpose, values, and vision, and to encourage dialogue and dissent¹⁴ as authentic steps to sustainable change. She sees Jesus as the great Model for Spirit-led leadership.¹⁵

2. **Study of Scripture.** Leaders, in White's view, must prioritize time for careful, continual, and deep study of the Scriptures, both to seek a deeper relationship and commitment to God and to find truth and wisdom. An expanding understanding of Scripture, accompanied with dynamic discussion of new truth, will

equip leaders for the challenges of providing leadership in the advancement of truth.¹⁶ When real spiritual life declines, leaders become rigid and avoid discussion of fresh scriptural insights.¹⁷ “The rebuke of the Lord will rest upon those who would bar the way, that clearer light shall not come to the people.”¹⁸

3. **Prayerful Life.** Leaders of integrity must schedule time daily for communion with God. The higher the administrative position, the greater is that person’s need of dependence on God.¹⁹ White wrote that a “living connection with God,” not position, is essential to sound decision-making and development of character.²⁰ Power and strength for service come through

intentionally chosen to represent diversity of thought rather than because they concur with the leader’s views.²⁵ Leaders who do not treat each person with respect and dignity are abusing their authority.²⁶

Comparing the leadership styles of Moses and Aaron, White illustrates the positive and beneficial use of authority versus a weak, vacillating, and popularity-seeking type of administration.²⁷ Though she completely rejects a domineering, autocratic leadership style, she maintains that in times of crises a leader must demonstrate firmness, decision, and unflinching courage. The difference may be found in

ELLEN WHITE GIVES CONSIDERABLE COUNSEL TO LEADERS WHO ABUSE AUTHORITY. IN HER VIEW, THEY SHOULD NOT SEE THEMSELVES AS INFALLIBLE, COVET SUPREME AUTHORITY, OR USE ANY DICTATORIAL OR ARBITRARY METHODS OF COMMAND.

prayer, as Christ demonstrated by example.²¹ For wisdom regarding particularly complex issues, she recommends fasting in addition to prayer.²²

4. **Servant Leadership.** Though White did not coin the term “servant leader,” she does write at length on the concept of servant leadership. She sees Jesus as the primary Model of a servant-leader, combining God’s strength and wisdom with humble diligence. While she encourages leaders to be productive, making the most of present opportunities, she strongly decries pushing for status or a higher position.²³ According to her, a servant leader loves people and works sacrificially and compassionately to save them for the kingdom of God. She believes that a leader’s spiritual character develops and strengthens as a result of actively working to aid the poor and marginalized.²⁴

5. **Shared Leadership.** Ellen White gives considerable counsel to leaders who abuse authority. In her view, they should not see themselves as infallible, covet supreme authority, or use any dictatorial or arbitrary methods of command. She vehemently opposes centralization of power and control while at the same time warns against congregationalism. She was particularly strong in her indictment of any kind of dishonest practice, exploitation, or injustice. Committee members should be

the leader’s motivation; a domineering leader is eager for power and control, whereas a decisive leader is most eager to promote the honor of God.

6. **Inclusive and Empowering Leadership.** White is a strong proponent of the inclusive empowerment of people for evangelism and service. For her, the people of God represent a melded humanity, where prejudice should not exist. The Holy Spirit should be allowed to anoint whom he will, and no hand should be stayed that could be engaged in ministry.²⁸

7. **Ability to Connect.** One of the most essential attributes of strong, godly leadership consists of the cultivated ability to connect with others. White speaks often of the need for patient mentors who will take youth and others with less experience under their wing, carefully encourage and motivate them, and provide opportunities to grow through success and failure. She even calls it a duty for leaders to recognize and develop potential in others.²⁹

8. **Sympathetic Leadership.** Leaders must deal with the erring with Christlike sympathy, offering hope and redemption even in failures. Though White acknowledges that reproof and protest are sometimes needed, discipline and correction must never be given harshly but always in the spirit of Christ’s long-suffering love. She advocates tenacious, patient, even tender interaction with those

who make mistakes, use bad judgment, or undergo other personal failures. Leaders who possess Christlike love promote justice, correct sin, and combat error while maintaining care and compassion.³⁰

9. A Visioning Leadership. In White's view, proactive visioning and planning must be Spirit-led. Decisions should not be made until the leader's team engages in prayer, and sometimes fasting, to ensure they are at one with God's will. She is a strong proponent of expansive visioning, far-seeing thought, and well-considered risk taking.³¹ In this context of visioning, she urges leaders to sometimes delegate planning and future development to those with less experience in order to provide them with important opportunities to enlarge their leadership potential. Additionally, she recognizes that each geographical location has its own challenges, and micromanaged visioning should not be done from a distance.

10. A Caring Leadership. No other area draws White's concern as much as caring for the poor, needy, and marginalized. In the midst of unparalleled prosperity of our nations, neglect of the needy corresponds to spiritual poverty. The perpetual search for meaning in the workplace might find resolution in the minds of leaders who apply her counsel about serving the poor to their personal prioritizing.³²

Surprisingly Fresh and Relevant

All leaders, even great leaders, find themselves in complex circumstances where their leadership becomes challenged or their options seem perilously restricted. In an era of unprecedented information dissemination, communication speed, terrorism, AIDS, globalization, financial meltdowns, and family disintegration, our world may seem quite different from Ellen White's world. Yet, perhaps it is because of the accelerating changes in our world that her counsel to cultivate "a calm trust in God"³³ in the face of life's stressors seems surprisingly fresh and relevant.

White's distinctive and enduring message to leaders is to keep Jesus and the mystery of the cross constant, especially in the flux of societal change. Her leadership principles may well have a significant impact on today's Christian leader, inspiring compassionate action and a deepening commitment to Jesus Christ.

Perhaps Margaret J. Wheatley aptly summarizes Ellen G. White's leadership counsel when she states in the preface to her own book, "I realize that the work is not to introduce a few new ideas, but to change a world view."³⁴ White's counsel to leaders may not just change how we think church or how we do ministry, but also provide principles that would enable us to find unity in diversity. 

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¹ Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1973), p. 196.

² White, Letter 7 to J.H. Kellogg, April 26, 1886, published in *Christian Leadership* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1985), p. 48.

³ See White, "Lights in the World," *Review and Herald*, Vol. 87, No. 45, Nov. 10, 1910, p. 4.

⁴ White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1917), p. 31.

⁵ See White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1889, 1948), p. 423.

⁶ For more expansive analysis of Ellen White's leadership counsel, see Cindy Tutsch, *Ellen White on Leadership: Guidance for Those Who Influence Others* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2008).

⁷ See White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900, 1941), p. 192.

⁸ White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), p. 93.

⁹ White, Manuscript 26, April 3, 1903 Re: The Work of the General Conference, published in *Christian Leadership*, p. 26.

¹⁰ See White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 7 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1902, 1948), p. 259.

¹¹ White, "Christ's Commission," *Review and Herald*, Vol. 55, No. 24, June 10, 1880.

¹² White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905, 1942), p. 37.

¹³ See White, *Last Day Events* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1992), p. 190.

¹⁴ See White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915), pp. 297-298.

¹⁵ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1875, 1948), p. 190.

¹⁶ White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 127.

¹⁷ White, *Gospel Workers*, pp. 297-298.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 304.

¹⁹ White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 30.

²⁰ White, "Lessons from the Life of Solomon—No. 13," *Review and Herald*, Vol. 82, No. 50, Dec. 14, 1905, p. 9.

²¹ See White, "Lights in the World," *Review and Herald*, Nov. 10, 1910.

²² White, *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1989), p. 234.

²³ White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 30-31.

²⁴ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1871, 1948), p. 25.

²⁵ White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1915, 1943), p. 321.

²⁶ White, *Lift Him Up* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988), p. 225.

²⁷ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1890, 1958), p. 323.

²⁸ See White, "The Duty of the Minister and the People," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Vol. 72, No. 28, July 9, 1895, pp. 1-2.

²⁹ See White, *Christian Leadership*, pp. 55-56.

³⁰ See White, *Gospel Workers*, pp. 30-31.

³¹ See White, Letter 28, 1859, to Brother John Byington, Battle Creek, Michigan. Unpublished letters and manuscripts collection at the Ellen G. White Estate Research Center, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

³² See Tutsch, *Ellen White on Leadership*, p. 149.

³³ White, *The Upward Look* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), p. 55.

³⁴ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1999), p. xi.

CIRCUMSTANCES ALTER CASES AND THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

BY JON PAULIEN

“Circumstances alter cases.”

The phrase was often used by Ellen White. A positive example can be found in volume 6 of *Testimonies for the Church*: “While we present methods of work we cannot lay out an undeviating line in which everyone shall move, for *circumstances alter cases*. God will impress those whose hearts are open to truth and who are longing for guidance” (emphasis mine).¹ In the second volume of *Manuscript Releases*, she wrote: “*Circumstances alter cases*. I would not advise that anyone should make a practice of gathering up tithe money. But for years there have now and then been persons who have lost confidence in the appropriation of the tithe, who have placed their tithe in my hands, and said that if I did not take it they would themselves appropriate it to the families of the most needy ministers they could find. I have taken the money, given a receipt for it, and told them how it was appropriated” (emphasis mine).² She also cautioned people not to use the phrase as an excuse to ignore God’s Word and follow their own selfish motives and purposes.³

I did a little research and learned that Ellen White did not make up the phrase; it is actually an old English proverb,

probably going back to the 17th century. In the *Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, I found the following definition: “A general principle may be modified in light of particular circumstances.” According to the *Dictionary of Idiomatic English Phrases*, “It is necessary to modify one’s conduct by the particular circumstances or conditions of each case.”

Circumstances and the Bible

Let me share some examples of how “circumstances alter cases” can be seen in the Bible. In Genesis 17, God offers Abraham an “everlasting covenant” (verse 7). That sounds pretty permanent. This everlasting covenant would be for “you and your offspring after you throughout their generations” (verse 9, ESV). That’s pretty permanent, too. And, of course, the sign of that everlasting covenant was the circumcision of all males among the descendants of Abraham.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the early Christian church adopted circumcision as a mandatory rule for all followers of Jesus. In fact, some of the most passionate believers among them confidently asserted, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1, ESV). But at the council described in Acts 15, church leaders discovered that the Holy Spirit was calling uncircumcised Gentiles such as Cornelius. What to do? They rethought Genesis 17 and concluded that circumcision was specifically for the physical descendants of Abraham but was not required for the Gentiles (verse 19). Later on, when Timothy accepted Jesus, Paul required him to be circumcised because the Jews in that area knew that even though Timothy’s father was a Greek, he had a Jewish mother (Acts 16:3). The full Gentile Titus, on the other hand, was not circumcised (Gal. 2:3). Circumstances alter cases.

The book of Leviticus offered rules and regulations for Israel’s experience of wandering in the desert and living in tents around the tabernacle. Leviticus 17 addressed the private slaughter of animals intended for food or sometimes even for sacrifice. Some people did the slaughtering at their tents; others did it outside the camp. Under no circumstances were the Israelites to neglect to bring their slaughtered meat to the door of the tabernacle to be inspected by a priest (Lev. 17:4). Even better was to let the priests handle the whole process (verses 5-6). A crucial factor in this regulation was the proper draining of blood, which was not to be eaten (verses 10-11). This was to be “a statute forever for them throughout their generations” (verse 7, ESV). This is a reasonably clear text, and it sounds pretty universal and permanent.

A generation later, however, the circumstances were about to change. Moses created a “second law” (Deuteronomy), which

would apply to Israel's settled existence in the Promised Land (Deut. 12:1). In Deuteronomy 12, Moses instructed the Israelites to continue bringing animals for sacrifice to designated locations, such as the sanctuary (verses 13-14). But the slaughter of meat for food was no longer part of the regulation. They could freely do that slaughtering where they lived, as long as they did it the right way, respecting the blood regulations (verses 15-16). You see, animals to be sacrificed could be transported live, so the distance between home and sanctuary was not critical. But with meat, freshness begins to decline the moment an animal is slaughtered, so requiring the people to transport meat as far as 50 miles back home before they could eat it made no sense. Circumstances alter cases.

In Daniel 2 and 7, we see that God himself made this kind of adjustment. In both chapters a human being saw a vision of the future that involved four kingdoms, followed by the kingdom of God. To Nebuchadnezzar, this vision came in the form of an idol (*tselêm*— Dan. 2:31-33; 3:1-6). This may seem a startling metaphor for God to use, but it made perfect sense to the pagan king. After all, to Nebuchadnezzar the great kingdoms of the world were beautiful, shining examples of the gods they worshiped. Now notice that when God gave essentially the same vision to Daniel, the Hebrew prophet, he shaped the vision as a replay of the story of creation. There was a stormy sea (Dan. 7:2), then animals appeared (verses 3-8), then a son of man was given dominion over the animals (verses 13-14). Just as Adam had dominion over the animals at creation (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:20), God's second Adam, the son of man, would have dominion over the kingdoms that were hurting Daniel's people. Circumstances alter cases. What is unique in this example is that God himself is the one doing the contextualizing. You can't blame the change on the human author of the text.

These passages call to mind principles that run parallel to the proverb "circumstances alter cases." One of these is "God meets people where they are," and another is "there is more than one right way to think." When you consider the four Gospels, it would be foolish to ask, "Which Gospel writer was right: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John?" They were all inspired, and they were all right. Yet each gives a unique and different picture of Jesus. There is more than one right way to think. Is Jesus divine, or is he human? Wrong question! There is more than one right way to think about Jesus. That doesn't mean that all ways of thinking are right. But truth must not be limited to one form of expression. Circumstances do not alter all cases, but absolutizing revelation in many circumstances undermines the very principle that is driving the text.

Moving to the New Testament, we have another example of

how circumstances alter cases. The council of Acts 15 reached a decision that Gentiles should not be troubled by practices like circumcision (verse 19) but should refrain from eating food that had been ceremonially polluted (*alisgêma*) in relation to idols (verse 20). This was one of several regulations that would allow Gentiles and Jews to more comfortably fellowship together. In disseminating the decision of the council, the leaders clarified their meaning with a different word; Gentiles should not eat food "sacrificed" or offered (*eidôlothutos*) to idols (verse 29).

Paul addressed the same issue in 1 Corinthians 8-10, but he did so in greater depth. He mentioned food offered to idols [*eidôlothutos*] six times: 8:1, 4, 7, 10; 10:19, 28. He asserted that "no idol in the world really exists" (1 Cor. 8:4, NRSV) and that "an idol is nothing" (KJV); therefore, offering or sacrificing food to idols does not in any way change the food or affect our relation to it (verse 8). So eating such food is not an issue for intelligent Christians, in spite of the decree of the council in Acts 15. But since not all Christians have this knowledge (1 Cor. 8:7), one must be sensitive to the impact one's own practice will have on the faith experience of another (verses 9-13).

In addition, while idols have no real existence, Christians should generally avoid temple practices, as they may involve the presence of demons, which would make it a dangerous place to go (1 Cor. 10:16-21). On the other hand, if an unbeliever invites you to dinner (verse 27) or if you are shopping in the marketplace (verse 25), don't worry about whether the food was offered to idols or not; go ahead and eat without asking questions. But if someone, likely a fellow believer, objects that the food was offered to an idol, then don't eat it (verse 28), not because an idol is anything, but because of the conscience of the one who said it (verses 29-33). You don't want to damage that person's conscience or walk with God (1 Cor. 8:10-13). In matters like this, council or no council, it is important to use common sense (1 Cor. 10:15). While not opposed to the action of the council, Paul was using common sense to clarify its intention in various situations. In a different place, the policy should be applied differently. Circumstances alter cases.

In Romans (written about 50 years after the start of the Christian era), Paul spoke very positively about the role of civil government. Christians should be subject to civil authority, because such authorities have been instituted by God (Rom. 13:1). To resist such authorities is to resist the same God who appointed them (verse 2). In fact, the civil authorities act as servants (*diakonos* or "deacons") of God to keep order in society (verses 3-4, 6). Christians should treat civil authorities with honor and respect, for the sake of conscience (verses 5, 7).

But 40 years later, the situation seemed to have changed. In

the book of Revelation (probably written around A.D. 90), civil authorities enmeshed with false religion can be described as vicious, persecuting beasts (verses 1-2, 11) who are hurting and will hurt God's people (verses 7, 10, 15-17). They also blaspheme God himself (verses 1, 6). Since Romans was probably written from Corinth, in the same general region of the empire as Asia Minor, we see a very different attitude toward civil authority in the same region, but at a different time (40 years later). Circumstances at different times and in different places call for a fresh application of biblical principles. Circumstances alter cases.

Illustrations From Adventist History

In the early 1800s, William Miller's attention was drawn to Revelation 10. Coming toward the close of the seven trumpets, this chapter had something to say about the period of Earth's history just before Christ's second coming. That meant Revelation 10 must be speaking specifically to the time in which he lived. Miller rightly saw that Revelation 10 built on Daniel 12 (Rev. 10:5-6, cf.

Within Scripture, there are clear examples of circumstances altering cases. We cannot take the most straightforward reading and assume that it applies universally in all circumstances.

Dan. 12:7). A sealed book (Dan. 12:4) was now open (Rev. 10:1-2). In particular, what had been sealed in Daniel were the prophetic time periods, the 2300-day prophecy (Dan. 8:13-14, 26) and the 1260-day prophecy (Dan. 12:7, 9). Since those time periods, in Miller's calculation, ended in 1798 and 1843-1844 respectively, he came to believe that Revelation 10 was talking about the very time period in which he was living, the last 45 years before Jesus' return (1798-1843). If the cleansing of the sanctuary was Jesus' second coming, the world was about to come to an end. The message was electrifying, the biblical arguments were compelling, and a great movement arose.

Everything was in place except the coming of Jesus itself. But it never happened. When Jesus did not come on Oct. 22, 1844, people began to notice that the open scroll in the prophecy would be sweet in the mouth but bitter in the belly (Rev. 10:8-10). In other words, there were clear indications in the text that God knew about The Great Disappointment before it happened, but the Millerites had completely missed that part of the prophecy. The purpose of Revelation 10 was not to provide the date of the second coming, but to galvanize the final proclamation of the gospel to the world (Rev. 10:11; 14:6-7). The Advent understanding of Revelation 10 had been perfectly clear and compelling before 1844. But after October 22 of that year, our church pioneers were forced to reread and rethink what the Bible had to say about their era. Circumstances alter cases.

The same thing can happen with the writings of Ellen White. According to records at the 1919 Bible Conference, the General Conference (GC) president was holding meetings in the city we know as Oslo. Attendees had come from all over Scandinavia. One of the attendees was an extremely thin and pale colporteur based in Hammerfest, which at the time was the northernmost city in the world. Hammerfest rarely received any canned goods back then, and fruits and vegetables were extremely expensive when they arrived at all. A man on a missionary salary could not afford either. So when A.G. Daniells (then GC president) asked the unhealthy-looking man what he ate back home, the man replied, "Mostly the north wind."

The primary food options in Hammerfest at the time were reindeer meat, fish, potatoes, and starchy foods such as cornmeal mush. The colporteur was an ardent follower of Ellen White's writings, so he refused to eat any animal products. Hence, he was extremely thin and pale, giving evidence of poor health. Daniells advised the man to center his diet on reindeer meat when he got back home. But on the long boat ride home, the GC president began to feel a bit guilty about his advice and how that might play around the world. So when he returned to the United States, he made the long trek across the continent to visit Elmshaven to get Ellen White's reaction.

According to Daniells, Ellen White's response was: "Why don't people use common sense? Don't they know that we are to be governed by the places we are located?" After further conversation, she was concerned enough to wonder if her *Testimonies for the Church* should not be recalled and "fixed up"—in other words, written in a way that principles given to particular people in particular circumstances could not be absolutized in an unhealthy way. Circumstances alter cases.

Dealing With “Biblical” Claims

What does all this have to do with the ordination of women? Is women’s ordination an issue where circumstances alter cases? Before I get into recent events and the upcoming General Conference Session, let me share an important distinction in biblical interpretation. When we say that a particular teaching is “biblical,” I draw a distinction between teachings that are exegetically compelling and teachings that are exegetically defensible. Some biblical doctrines are exegetically compelling. In other words, the Bible raises the very question we are concerned with and answers it with compelling clarity. Everyone sees clearly what the Bible is saying and either follows it or chooses not to.

On the other hand, many so-called biblical teachings are defensible from the Bible, but not totally compelling on the basis of the Bible alone. Such teachings do not contradict the Bible but require reasoning, tradition, experience, history, science, or other sources in order to be convincing. For example, the Bible itself never addresses the issue of smoking. And no text in the Bible tells us that tobacco is bad for us or spinach is good. So while Christians may ban smoking on the basis of biblical principles, it requires nonbiblical (mostly scientific and experiential) evidence to make the case.

When it comes to women’s ordination, no text raises the question or addresses the issue directly. All biblical arguments are derived from texts addressing other issues. So any argument from the Bible on women’s ordination needs to be exegetically *defensible* (not contradict the Bible), but it can never be exegetically *compelling* in the sense that it will oblige all to understand and accept the conclusion from the Bible alone.

The interesting thing about the observations in the first half of this article is that even exegetically compelling texts may not *always* apply in a new situation. The practice of circumcision in the church was based on clear, compelling texts. The rules on meat slaughter for Israelites in the desert were based on a clear, compelling passage. The ruling in Acts 15 was direct and clear; so was Paul’s counsel regarding civil authorities in Romans 13. But even when the Bible texts are compelling and clear, circumstances can alter cases. How much more should this principle apply when neither side’s exegesis compels the other?

Now I don’t want to be misunderstood or misquoted on this point. I am *not* saying that anything goes. I am not advocating situational ethics; I am not advocating that all values and principles can be altered at will. But I *am* pointing out that within Scripture, there are clear examples of circumstances altering cases. We cannot take the most straightforward reading and assume that it applies universally in all circumstances. As Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 10:15, when it

comes to matters of church policy, we need to consider time and place and use common sense.

Can This Apply to the Ordination of Women?

The hope a few years ago was that the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) would come to a consensus on the meaning of ordination and then on the question of the ordination of women. If, after two years of worldwide deliberation, TOSC remained divided on the latter, the committee would offer solutions that would preserve the unity of the church in the midst of such division. Here’s what actually happened.

On July 23, 2013, by a vote of 86 to 8, TOSC adopted a very significant statement on the meaning of ordination. It defined ordination as “the public recognition of those the Lord has called” to church ministry. According to the statement, ordination confers “representative authority” rather than “special qualities” or a role in a “kingly hierarchy.” These are important distinctions. In other words, ordination is the church’s way of saying “this person speaks for us.” It does not convey unique power or place a person in a higher rank than others.

Based on these points, the question became whether or not “the Lord has called” Adventist women to church ministry. Can women represent the church in such roles? The reality is that, in many parts of the world, women *are* being called to ministry. They *are* serving in such roles. Unless ordination has some magical effect or promotes a kingly hierarchy, hiring a woman to serve in church ministry is simply the church’s modern way of saying “she speaks for us.” Women serving in ministry at the call of the church are as good as ordained now.

As noted above, there is one aspect of this issue that I think doesn’t get enough attention. There is one thing we should all be able to agree on. The Bible *never* addresses the question of women’s ordination. No Bible writer ever asks whether women should be ordained. The issue simply does not arise in the text. That means that arguing the case for or against women’s ordination seeks expanded meanings from Scriptures addressing other issues. As a result, it is rare for anyone to change his or her mind on the subject based on Bible study alone. And if the Bible does not directly address a subject, then the conclusion will be driven more by culture, tradition, and God’s providence (the sense of God’s working in a particular context) than by Scripture.

An example of such a process in the Bible is found in Acts chapters 8-15. Before Acts 8, Christians assumed that the church was a subset of Judaism and would include only Jews. But then Philip met the Ethiopian, Peter met Cornelius, and Peter had a dream. By Acts 15 it became apparent that the Spirit was working

with Gentiles and bringing them into the church without circumcision and without prior conversion to Judaism. The church then took a fresh look at Scripture and saw possibilities there that they had missed before (verses 13-19). The mission of the church and the guidance of the Spirit, rather than the reading of Scripture, demanded the inclusion of the Gentiles. You didn't have to become Jewish in order to become Christian. Through these experiences, the church learned to read the Bible differently for a new situation. Circumstances alter cases.

Proposed Solutions

As TOSC continued, the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church produced a remarkable document in favor of ordaining women (and the Trans-European Division produced an even larger document). By way of contrast, the divisions of the church opposed to women's ordination seemed to have done little fresh study. The one exception to this was the minority report from the North American Division, which broke some new ground. It suggested that male "headship" was a core element of biblical

The simplest approach to honor the Bible and yet preserve unity is to affirm that the Bible does not directly address the question of women's ordination. It neither mandates the ordination of women to the gospel ministry nor forbids it.

theology that limited ordination to only men. This was a new theological approach that had never been promoted in Adventism before the mid-1980s (introduced by Samuele Bacchiocchi) or even in Christianity in general before the 1970s. That doesn't make it wrong by itself, but historically Adventism is rightly skeptical of such radical theological departures. I find it interesting that headship arguments were used against the ministry of Ellen White in the 19th century. With that in mind, the faculty of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary has concluded that

headship theology takes a dangerous turn away from the Adventist understanding of the Bible, and I think they are right.

Here's where the story gets interesting. Instead of one "solution" to the division in the church on women's ordination, TOSC came up with three. In short, the first proposal denies ordination of women to the gospel ministry and also rescinds the ordination of women as local elders. If accepted, this proposal would return the church to the situation it was in before 1970. The second proposal affirms that the Bible supports the ordination of women to the gospel ministry but stipulates that it should not be imposed in regions where it is deemed detrimental to the church's mission. The third proposal affirms that the Bible exhibits a pattern of male leadership but that such biblical patterns can be adapted to changing circumstances. Church entities that feel their mission requires the ordination of women could apply to do so. The second and third proposals allow circumstances to alter cases, but I don't think any of these three "solutions" would lead the church to unity. We have got to do better.

Two of these suggested approaches seem almost guaranteed to destroy the unity of the church. For example, some favor a mandate that ordination to the positions of both pastor and elder be restricted once again to males only. Since the church first moved away from that position in the 1970s, the Western world has shifted enormously in favor of full equality and inclusion for women. I remember how, in the 1950s, nearly everyone assumed that some roles should be filled only by men: physician, soldier, lawyer, police officer, truck driver, president of the United States, and airplane pilot, to name a few. Today women fill virtually all roles in the workplace, except ministry in some churches. For the Adventist Church to step back to the 1950s would be devastating to the mission of the church in the Western world (and in some other places). In my travels to parts of the world that are opposed to women's ordination, I find the younger generation largely open to full inclusion, although the church leaders in those regions are still reluctant.

Another approach that would destroy the unity of the church would be to mandate the ordination of women worldwide. This would be devastating in many cultures, where full inclusion of women is not yet the societal norm. For the church to move ahead in those areas would unnecessarily complicate its ability to share the gospel at this time. The Middle East, Africa, and parts of Asia and South America likely fall into this category. It would hurt the mission of the church to force a global vote on women's ordination either way. I am glad, therefore, that church leadership is not promoting either of these approaches at the upcoming General Conference Session.

The problem with all three “solutions” is that they presume the Bible is reasonably clear on the subject, one way or the other. Option No. 1 finds the Bible so clearly against women’s ordination that it not only takes the field, but also pillages the opposition. Not a formula for unity. Option No. 2 presumes that the Bible, rightly understood, teaches women’s ordination but that those who disagree can get permission to continue their traditional practices. Not likely to be accepted in many parts of the world. Option No. 3 presumes that the Bible models male “leadership” and suggests that those who want to ordain women can apply for permission to do so.

Whenever you have dueling positions on a topic, each claiming to be from the Bible, there are only two ways to make sense of the situation. Either one side is perverse (deliberately twisting Scripture to get their way) or else the Bible is, in fact, unclear on the subject. I have good friends and many former students on both sides of the women’s ordination debate. I cannot look either side in the eye and say, “You are perverse; you are deliberately manipulating the Bible to get your way.” To do so would be to pass a terrible judgment on people I have enjoyed as colleagues for many years. But if the Bible does not address the question of women’s ordination, that fact should be the foundation of the church’s position, rather than according victory to one side or the other.

Options for Unity

That leaves two options for attaining unity. One is being proposed by *Adventist Today* Editor J. David Newman. He asserts that ordination as generally practiced is a tradition inherited from the Middle Ages. The word “ordination,” after all, is derived from Latin; it is not found in the Greek of the New Testament. Given that reality, Newman suggests we not ordain anyone and solve the problem in that way. I could live with such a position, but since the Adventist pioneers adopted ordination as a practical necessity rather than a biblical mandate, something like ordination is probably needed in the church.

I suggest, therefore, one other option. The simplest approach to honor the Bible and yet preserve unity is to affirm that the Bible does not directly address the question of women’s ordination. It neither mandates the ordination of women to the gospel ministry nor forbids it. Neither party would have to give approval to a theology they disagree with. Let’s just agree that the Bible doesn’t directly address the question and, therefore, differences of opinion on how to apply the Bible to ordination today are to be expected. When differences like this are the norm, unity requires decisions about ordination to be driven by other evidences than the direct teachings of Scripture. Divisions and

union conferences should be allowed to ordain women or not ordain them, based on the leading of the Spirit and the demands of mission in those territories. Circumstances alter cases.

Some might ask: *Won’t such a policy destroy the unity of the church?* Similar differences in policy did not destroy the unity of the New Testament church. Others may question: *What will happen if an ordained woman is called to a union that doesn’t ordain women?* The same thing happens now with female church elders. If an ordained female elder moves to a church that doesn’t ordain females as elders, she cannot expect to be an elder in that church (for better or for worse). Likewise, if an ordained female pastor receives an invitation to pastor in a union or division that doesn’t ordain women, she must understand that her ordination will not be recognized there and respond to the invitation with that in mind. If an unordained female pastor is invited to a region that ordains women, she should not be compelled to accept ordination. While there will be relational challenges in the process, the overall unity of the church need not be destroyed on the basis of such an arrangement. Practical arrangements in one local church need not affect arrangements in another. Circumstances alter cases.

The good news is that this very outcome is a real possibility this coming July. According to the document recommended unanimously by top church leadership and voted overwhelming by the Annual Council, delegates to the 2015 General Conference Session can vote to allow “division executive committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.” A “yes” vote on this question respects the years of study that have failed to settle the question on the basis of the Bible. A “yes” vote on this question recognizes that the church in many parts of the world already invites women to fill pastoral roles, recognizing the Holy Spirit’s call to them. A “yes” vote on this question acknowledges that the Bible often allows circumstances to alter cases. A “yes” vote on this question allows the mission of the church to flow in each territory, while respecting differences in the way we read Scripture. As Ellen White herself often said, “Circumstances alter cases.” 

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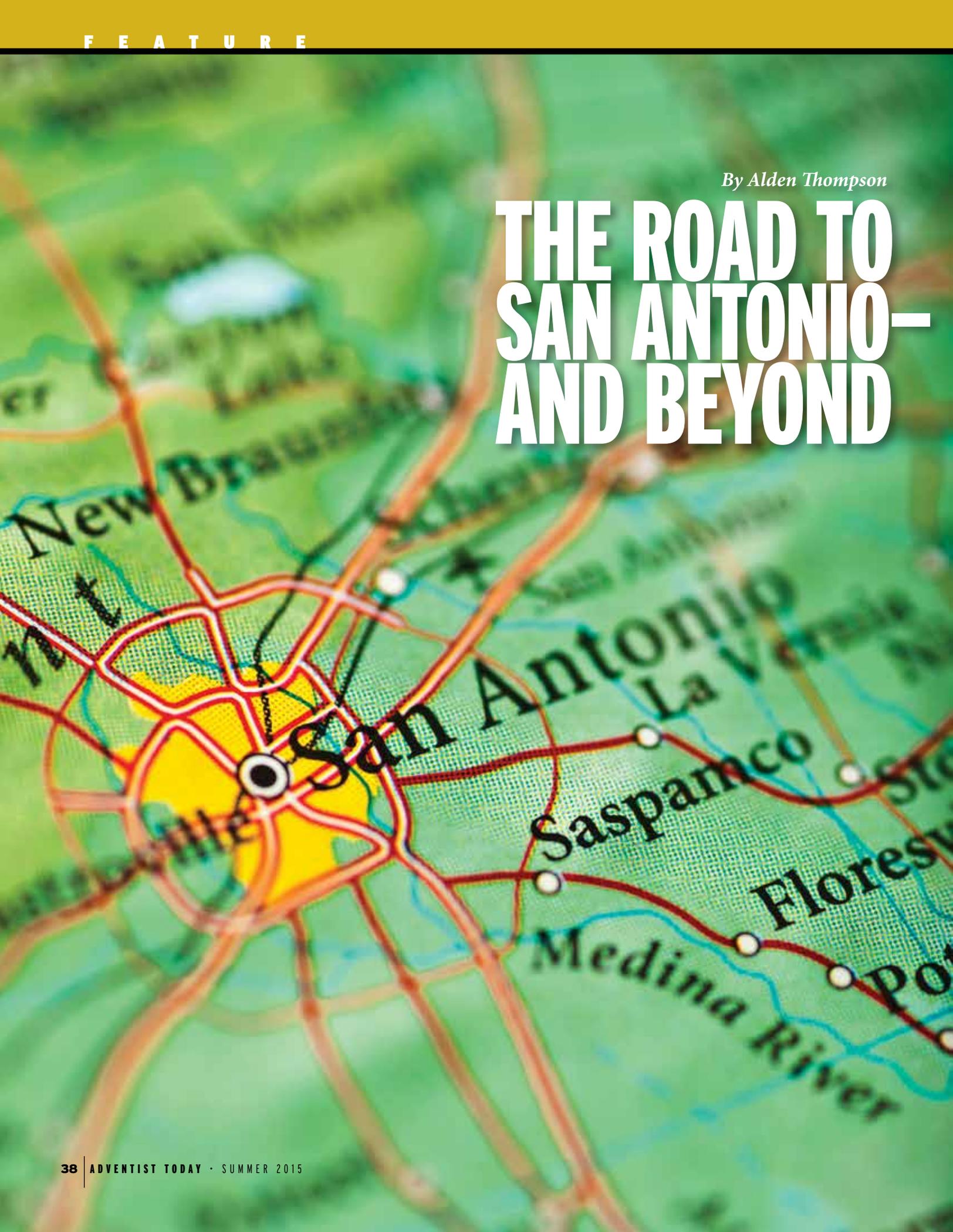
¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1901), p. 339.

² White, Letter 267, 1905, pp. 1-2, published in *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 2 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), p. 100.

³ White, *Review and Herald*, Sept. 14, 1905.

By Alden Thompson

THE ROAD TO SAN ANTONIO— AND BEYOND



EDITOR'S NOTE: *We are quickly approaching the start date for the most significant General Conference Session since 1888. Changes to the 1980 statement of fundamental beliefs and to the role of our organization's leadership are two of the most crucial issues. While immediate changes to the organizational structure of the world church are highly unlikely, we can at least talk about ideals and attitudes, and we can dream about the future.*

Key Principles

As we navigate the “road to San Antonio,” we can take a cue from Ellen White’s perspective at the stormy 1888 General Conference (GC) Session: doctrinal issues should never put a Christlike spirit at risk. After a particularly contentious session over the law in Galatians, she wrote: “Many hours that night were spent in prayer in regard to the law in Galatians. This was a mere mote. Whichever way was in accordance with a ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ my soul would say, Amen, and Amen. But the spirit that was controlling our brethren was so unlike the spirit of Jesus, so contrary to the spirit that should be exercised toward each other, it filled my soul with anguish.”¹

The tendency to value doctrinal correctness over spiritual purity probably led Ellen White to exaggerate. Did she truly not care which interpretation of the law in Galatians was correct? Perhaps we could put this forceful statement in a category I have labeled “prophetic overstatements,” strong utterances from prophets who are deeply concerned. A couple of excerpts from Isaiah 1 make similar declarations: “I cannot bear your worthless assemblies” (verse 13, NIV) and “When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening” (verse 15, NIV). In short, when their hearts ache, prophets speak forcefully. So on the road to San Antonio, we put this principle first:

1. Reflecting the spirit of Jesus is more important than issues of structure, authority, or doctrine.

Yet having stated that principle, we must concede that issues of structure, authority, and doctrine are not unimportant. Indeed, they often determine whether or not we are willing to be Christlike in our attitudes. Here Jesus offers a crucial corrective to the tendency of human leaders to draw power to themselves. When James and John asked for the top places in his kingdom, Jesus said, in effect, Follow your Master: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matt. 20:28, NIV). If God himself took human flesh in order to model right relations for his people, then service, not position, is the only thing that matters. Hence a second principle on the “road to San Antonio:”

2. Servant leaders are called to serve, not to rule.

Some of Ellen White’s most pointed statements on this topic come in the ninth volume of the *Testimonies for the Church*. Addressing “the Workers in Southern California,”² she

expressed concern over the tendency to equate high office with high capability. “A high position does not give to the character Christian virtues,” she wrote. “The man who supposes that his individual mind is capable of planning and devising for all branches of the work reveals a great lack of wisdom.”³

But she spoke of “a greater danger,” namely, the growing feeling among the workers “that ministers ... should depend upon the mind of certain leading workers to define their duties. ... The president of a conference must not consider that his individual judgment is to control the judgment of all.

“In no conference should propositions be rushed through without time being taken by the brethren to weigh carefully all sides of the question. Because the president of a conference suggested certain plans, it has sometimes been considered unnecessary to consult the Lord about them. Thus propositions have been accepted that were not for the spiritual benefit of the believers and that involved far more than was apparent at the first casual consideration. Such movements are not in the order of God. Many, very many matters have been taken up and carried by vote, that have involved far more than was anticipated and far more than those who voted would have been willing to assent to had they taken time to consider the question from all sides.”⁴

It is a tragedy for all when workers cannot disagree with their leader. Hence a third principle:

3. Leaders must maintain an ethos that encourages constructive criticism.

Jesus laid down the principle of servant leadership, and the apostles practiced what he preached. Paul, the johnny-come-lately apostle, was therefore willing to confront Peter “to his face” (Gal. 2:11). Even secularists know that a good CEO surrounds himself or herself with associates who know more than the CEO does. Shouldn’t that be the case in the church, too?

Notice this sobering quotation from Ellen White: “The younger worker must not become so wrapped up in the ideas and opinions of the one in whose charge he is placed, that he will forfeit his individuality. He must not lose his identity in the one who is instructing him, so that he dare not exercise his own judgment, but does what he is told, irrespective of his own understanding of what is right and wrong. It is his privilege to learn for himself of the great Teacher. If the one with whom he is working pursues a course which is not in harmony with a ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ let him not go to some outside party, but let him go to his superior in office, and lay the matter before him, freely expressing his mind. Thus the learner may be a blessing to the teacher. He must faithfully discharge his duty. God will not hold him guiltless if he connives at a wrong course of action, however great may be the influence or responsibility of the one taking the wrong course.”⁵

This is a daring prescription, for challenging a superior could very well cost a worker his or her job. Perhaps this quotation should be on the desk of every leader, a constant reminder to ask: Am I encouraging my subordinates to share their job-related concerns, their insights, their suggestions with me?

On that subject, the name of George I. Butler loomed large in the 1870s. In 1873 the General Conference voted to endorse Butler's tract titled *Leadership*. In it he declared the leadership of James and Ellen White to be "incontestable" in the church; and in matters of church polity, all in the church were to give "preference" to Elder White's judgment. When both Whites objected, Butler retracted his position, published a "confession" in the *Review and Herald*, and presented a resolution at the next GC Session asking that the General Conference endorsement of the tract be reversed.⁶ Subsequent events in Butler's experience show, however, that he had not undergone a fundamental change in thinking; he was still simply responding obediently to authority!

In any event, at the General Conference Session of 1877, the church voted a resolution that clearly established the General Conference as a *group*, not the General Conference president as an *individual*, as having authority over the church.⁷ The same resolution sought to recognize both the authority of Scripture and the rights of the individual conscience in relationship to voted actions: "Resolved that the highest authority under God among Seventh-day Adventists is found in the will of the body of that people, as expressed in the decisions of the General Conference when acting within its proper jurisdiction; and that such decisions should be submitted to by all without exception, *unless they can be shown to conflict with the Word of God and the rights of individual conscience*" (emphasis mine).⁸

During this period, Ellen White also sought to establish a proper role for the authority of the General Conference. In 1875 she penned the well-known testimony describing the General Conference as the "highest authority that God has upon the earth."⁹ If removed from its context, the statement could be used simply to reinforce a concentration of authority at the General Conference level. The original point of the testimony, however, was to underscore the very principle that was to be voted in 1877, namely, the *broadening* of authority to a representative group rather than *concentrating* it on an individual, namely, the General Conference president, James White.

Personal Preparation

To enable the church to live out the broad principles noted above, I offer three suggestions:

1. Pray. At the very beginning of the volatile 1901 General Conference, Ellen White's opening remarks were forceful and pointed. Due to a lengthy stay in Australia, she was appearing

at her first General Conference in some 10 years and did not hesitate to link the past with the present: "I feel a special interest in the movements and decisions that shall be made at this Conference regarding things that should have been done years ago, and especially ten years ago, when we were assembled in Conference, and the Spirit and power of God came into our meeting, testifying that God was ready to work for this people if they would come into working order. The brethren assented to the light God had given, but there were those connected with our institutions, especially with the Review and Herald Office and the Conference, who brought in elements of unbelief, so that the light that was given was not acted upon. It was assented to, but no special change was made to bring about such a condition of things that the power of God could be revealed among his people."¹⁰

As she spoke, she repeatedly called the delegates to a higher standard: "At the last Conference which I attended here, there was gossiping and controversy in every house. If the people had prayed instead of gossiping, if they had talked with God, the condition of things would have been very different."¹¹

"There are those who have stood as managers and yet have not managed after God's order. Some have served on committees here and committees there, and have felt free to dictate just what the committee should say and do, claiming that those who did not carry out these ideas were sinning against Christ."¹²

Her strong words no doubt contributed to the miracle of 1901, described in the official report in the *General Conference Bulletin*:

"To sketch the inner history of the Conference just closed, would require the skilled pen of heavenly inspiration. Even that which has been apparent to beholders, has challenged their admiration to the verge of incredulity. From rumors that thickly flew across the horizon of every part of the field, a few weeks ago, hardly a delegate appeared at this session who did not anticipate worry, and even disaster more or less serious. Various theories were afloat, which most, if not all, had previously canvassed, and decided their merits or demerits. Whispers of disintegration were borne from ear to ear, and speculations as to the final result were rife. ...

"Take it altogether, this has been one of the most peculiar, yet the very best, General Conference ever convened by Seventh-day Adventists. There has been no particular outward demonstration of joy, but a quiet, deep-seated calm has apparently attended everyone, producing an expression of the sweetest peace. All differences of sentiment, which had been the cause of more or less alienation, were buried under the gentle droppings of the Holy Spirit, accompanying the words of instruction from the servants of the Lord. From the first of the business meetings, not one unkind word was spoken on the floor, not a single rebutting

argument was used. But all seemed to vie with one another in maintaining the rules of courtesy and Christian deportment.”¹³

To repeat Ellen White’s words from the 1901 GC Session: “Let every one of you go home, not to chat, chat, chat, but to pray. Go home and pray. Talk with God. Go home and plead with God to mold and fashion you after the divine similitude.”¹⁴

It worked. It can work again.

2. Read. Much of my thinking about church governance has been shaped by the content of *Testimonies to Ministers*, a compilation of longer Ellen White documents published in 1923. Years ago a teaching colleague told me that because of reading that book during his undergraduate years, he had turned from the study of medicine to preparation for ministry. I was likewise deeply impressed by the counsel in the book. If delegates could absorb the entire volume before the upcoming GC Session, we just might begin speaking of the miracle of San Antonio.

One quote in particular has burned its way into my soul: “When men cease to depend upon men, when they make God their efficiency, then there will be more confidence manifested in one another. Our faith in God is altogether too feeble and our confidence in one another altogether too meager.”¹⁵

3. Memorize. In the chaos of daily distractions, I have found memorization to be a helpful tonic. A word from the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus’ response to James and John are both worth burying deep in the soul:

Matthew 7:12: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (NRSV).

Matthew 20:25-28: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (NIV).

A Dream for the Future

One of the San Antonio agenda items involves proposed changes to our statement of fundamental beliefs. That is fraught with danger. We should remind ourselves that many of our Adventist pioneers would not have assented to our current statement of beliefs. James White, for example, was stridently anti-trinitarian, even going into print in 1852 against “that old Trinitarian absurdity,”¹⁶ a line which the kinder, gentler *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* renders as “the ‘old Trinitarian’ idea.”¹⁷ The only Adventist statement of beliefs in his era was the non-trinitarian statement of 1872. It was also unofficial and non-binding:

“In presenting to the public this synopsis of our faith, we wish

to have it distinctly understood that we have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline, having any authority with our people, nor is it designed to secure uniformity among them, as a system of faith, but is a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them.”¹⁸

Rather than posthumously disfellowshipping James White, we could insert the original 1861 church covenant at the head of our current statement of beliefs. It was used by our Adventist forebears when they first began organizing local conferences. “We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together, as a church, taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus Christ [Rev. 14:12].”¹⁹

I would gladly sign such a covenant, for it identifies essential Adventism. The rest is commentary—important commentary, to be sure, but one step below those precious Adventist beliefs that bond us together in Christ.

If San Antonio can point us in that direction, we could joyously stand and sing the doxology. Together. 

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¹ Ellen G. White, Manuscript 24, 1888, published in *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), p. 223.

² White, Oct. 3, 1907, published in *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1909), p. 277.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 277-278.

⁵ White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915), pp. 102-103.

⁶ *Review and Herald*, Feb. 25, 1875, pp. 70-71; August 26, 1875, p. 59. See discussion in Richard Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1979), pp. 267-268.

⁷ Schwarz, p. 268.

⁸ *Review and Herald*, Oct. 4, 1877, pp. 105-106.

⁹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1875), p. 492.

¹⁰ *General Conference Bulletin*, Vol. 4, Extra No. 1, April, 3, 1901, p. 23.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 24.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 26.

¹³ *General Conference Bulletin*, Vol. 4, Extra No. 20, April, 25, 1901, pp. 457-458.

¹⁴ *General Conference Bulletin*, April, 3, 1901, p. 26.

¹⁵ *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923), p. 214.

¹⁶ *Review and Herald*, Aug. 5, 1852, p. 52, cited by George Knight, *A Search for Identity* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), p. 17.

¹⁷ “Christology” in *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, Don Neufeld (ed.), second revised edition (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1996), Vol. 1, p. 353.

¹⁸ From the preamble to the 1872 (unofficial) “Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists” (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1872).

¹⁹ Adopted in 1861 at the organizing session of the first SDA conference (Michigan), recommended for use in the organization of local churches; published in *Review and Herald*, Oct. 8, 1861; *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, p. 416).



Proposed Changes to the 28 Fundamental Beliefs

“Yes, please” or
“No, thank you”?

By Adventist Today staff

Delegates to the General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas, will be asked to vote on recommended changes to the official statement of 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Adventists Voice
Concerns About
Changing Our
Creation Statement

By Adventist Today staff

WITHIN OFFICIAL CHURCH PUBLICATIONS, ADMINISTRATORS have not permitted any expression of opposition to their proposed changes in Fundamental Beliefs No. 6 and No. 8, regarding the chronology of creation and the extent of the biblical flood. With these changes, they are supporting a scientific theory known as Young Earth Creationism.¹ In fact, church leaders purposefully excluded Adventist voices known to be opposed to these changes

The changes recommended by top church administrators have been published.¹ While these suggestions are supported by some and opposed by others, many Adventists feel that instead of having a list of doctrines, we should just say that we believe what the Bible says. Adventists don't need a creed. No matter what your personal opinion, *Adventist Today* offers an analysis of the proposed amendments to our statement of fundamental beliefs, which are now being promoted by top church administrators.

Language

Many of the proposed changes to the list of 28 doctrines and teachings are editorial improvements. They replace 19th-century English with 21st-century usage, such as replacing the word “fruitage” with “fruit.” They try to remove gender bias against women by using inclusive language where both genders are intended, such as replacing “man” or “mankind” with “human” or “humanity.”

from their 2014 International Conference on Science and the Bible, according to published statements by General Conference Vice President Michael Ryan.²

For balance, *Adventist Today* has asked several solid and committed Seventh-day Adventist men and women, who hold positions of trust in this church but who are opposed to changing our present statement of belief on creation, to explain why. (Writers of the following statements will be identified by their position of service in the church so we can focus on their arguments, not on names and faces.)

Adventist Theologian:

The new statement has been produced by obscure means and so is not representative of the whole spectrum of Adventist thought. The current statement comports very nearly with the actual words of the Bible, whereas the new one does not. It inserts human interpretation into the formulation rather than relying on the words of the Bible.

The current statement is well-written, whereas the proposed one seems to be cobbled together with words and phrases inserted in unhappy ways, making the reading rough.

The new statement exhibits decided fundamentalist characteristics. Thus far, Adventism has, for very good reasons, avoided going into fundamentalism. This new statement would push the denomination decidedly toward fundamentalism.

Wider, More Open, Less Restrictive

Other changes open and widen our doctrines, such as in Fundamental Belief No. 11, where “Growing in Christ” is expanded to include a Christian obligation to service to the whole of humanity. (This is something Adventists do, but it was not formalized before.) In Fundamental Belief No. 23 on “Marriage and the Family,” which is heavily edited, at least one change is more open and inclusive by stating that unmarried persons are equal parts of the church family with married persons.

Further liberalization or modernization of Adventist belief is where the proposed amendment to Fundamental Belief No. 23 drops the instructions for parents to be “loving disciplinarians,” instead urging us to be “*loving, tender, and caring guides.*” And in Fundamental Belief No. 26, the “Second Coming of Christ” is no longer held to be “imminent,” but more humbly “*near.*” Even Fundamental Belief No. 18 on “The Gift of Prophecy” is softened a bit, removing the description of Ellen White as “a continuing and authoritative source of truth” and relying on the

We don't know exactly how creation took place, because no human was there to watch it. The Bible does not give details, so why is there a drive to be so specific? We are in danger of saying more than we know.

The new statement represents a significant shifting away from the historical position of Adventism where doctrines were descriptive, telling the world what we commonly believe, to a new position where doctrine is prescriptive, where doctrine will be used to define an orthodoxy that all must subscribe to or else be punished.

Adventist Young Pastor:

I will not be a delegate. If I were, however, I would almost certainly vote “no” on the proposed changes. Here are five reasons why:

1. On a basic philosophical level, I think the move is both unnecessary and unwise and that it will serve to create fewer conversations, worse theology, more control, more fear, and ultimately (and ironically) a less-stable community.

2. The primary motivation for making this change is not theology or passion for truth or mission. It's fear. The fear that “if we don't hold to a literalistic understanding of six days, the Sabbath becomes irrelevant” seems to be the main objection—and it is nonsense. If we were to view the creation week in a broader sense, we might come to see the even more broad and cosmic implications of Sabbath, besides its weekly observance. In

less pretentious statement that her writings “provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church.”

Narrowing, Tightening, More Restrictive

However, instead of opening, progressing, and widening our doctrines, some amendments under consideration would tighten, restrict, and narrow Adventist practice and belief. Some of the proposed changes reinforce doctrines our founders would not have agreed to, but which do have wide support (although not have complete unanimity) in the church today, such as the doctrine of the Trinity. Fundamental Belief No. 5 on the “Holy Spirit” adds the definitive statement “*He is as much a person as are the Father and the Son,*” which our church founders could not have agreed to.

No edits were made to Fundamental Belief No. 14, which by stating clearly that “male and female ... are all equal in Christ” and that “we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation” could be a foundation statement for permitting gender equality in ministry and leadership. However, fully

many respects, Adventists have squandered the gift of the seventh day by placing it into a legalistic framework of literalistic observance. Saturday Sabbath is a thing of great value and great truth.

3. Exegetically speaking, the case for a literal six-day creation week (particularly if that supposedly includes all of the universe) is not terribly strong. In Genesis 1 and 2 alone, we find dozens of poetic usages of the original Hebrew language and beautiful structuring of sentences and phrases to communicate much more than simply what meets the eye. At the very least, we need to admit that far more is going on in the passage than merely a literal six days—and certainly not less. ... John Lennox, a mathematics professor at Oxford, writes of this passage: “The Galileo incident teaches us that we should be humble enough to distinguish between what the Bible says and our interpretations of it.”³

4. By changing Fundamental Belief No. 6, we would be going from a broad statement that mirrors what the Bible actually reads to a very narrow interpretation of that reading. This is very dubious.

5. The statement that “God created all that is” is far more important than quibbling/fixating on details. All of the time and effort and money spent on narrowing the belief has taken a great deal of focus away from the world we could be engaging with! We are plagued by a fundamentalist form of atheism led by writers such as Richard Dawkins and the late Christopher Hitchens, who themselves were able and virulent evangelists for their cause against Christianity. But instead of spending our time and energy

excluded by the editors are the same-sex-attracted. The proposed rewording of Fundamental Belief No. 23 on “Marriage and the Family” twice replaces the existing term “marriage partners” with “*a man and woman,*” intentionally excluding the possibility of monogamous, lifelong boyfriend or girlfriend relationships for those born with sexual inversion. While this change may reflect the position of many Adventists, it does narrow and restrict our official statement.

Fundamental Belief No. 6: Creation

Perhaps most contentious are the attempts of General Conference administrators to change Fundamental Belief No. 6 on “Creation.” The present statement of belief is based strictly on the Bible. The attempted changes would insist that there is only one way to understand the Bible and then enforce an extra-biblical chronology on creation! Adventists agree that God created everything and that the Sabbath is the memorial of creation as well as a promise of re-creation or redemption. But

helping people through the philosophical and theological storms created by these men (with something real and unique we have to offer in that storm: namely, the great controversy story), we bumble around looking at and arguing with ourselves. Rather than engaging in the wider world theologically, we fight inward, further insulating and isolating ourselves from those without. It’s absurd. It’s a travesty and a shame. Who created us matters. The details of how/when are far less important than the story itself, and as long as we aren’t telling it, people are dying—spiritually and psychosocially.

So absolutely, if given the chance, I’d vote “NO” and I’d encourage any delegate with the actual opportunity to do the same. This is a red herring, a distraction placed on us by leadership who are afraid of the wrong bogeyman.

Adventist Elementary School Teacher:

I see no problem with Fundamental Belief No. 6 *as currently stated.*

I’ve noticed that there are proposed changes to other fundamental beliefs, such as the elimination of archaic language or the clarification of certain passages. These kinds of changes seem reasonable.

Adventist Physician:

If we have any “fundamental belief” that is not found in Scripture, it should *not* be a fundamental requirement of the

all Adventists *do not* agree on when or how God created.

The Bible itself is majestic in its simplicity and openness. “In the beginning” is *when* God created. Genesis 1 tells us *what* God created, but it does not reveal how. The General Conference revisions do not wish to leave it that way.

Moving beyond the biblical statements, they insert interpretations that those days were “*recent*.” And against all physical evidence, they also impose an extra-biblical chronology on creation, insisting that it had to happen in 144 hours only 6,000 or so years ago. While many Adventists believe this is true, others do not believe this can be true. But that is not the relevant question. The pressing questions are as follows:

- Is it wise for our church to tie ourselves to just one possible interpretation of Genesis when there are several possible interpretations?
- Is it prudent to hang our doctrines on a poorly supported scientific theory (namely, Young Earth Creationism) rather than permitting the statement of our beliefs to remain independent

denomination. Likewise, given that our fundamental beliefs should be based upon Scripture, any attempt to go beyond Scripture is substituting human reasoning for “the wisdom that is from above” (James 3:17, KJV). If wisdom from above thinks that a topic can be covered briefly, who are we to add our own interpretation to the Bible?

Now, we can talk, discuss, interpret, and argue with the best of them. No problem. For example, you might wish to speculate on what species of fish Jesus broke and distributed for feeding the 5,000. (Was it clean, or unclean? High in Omega-3? Why not a vegan lunch? etc.) But while interesting, any position of the denomination on the topic should remain: Jesus broke the loaves and fishes. Likewise, I don’t think we should change our present biblical statement on creation by adding interpretive details. Leave our position on creation as it is ... simple, elegant, and entirely biblical.”

Adventist Scientist:

The current statement of the church’s fundamental belief in God the Creator conveys in a concise way the literal meaning of the creation story, which is that God made the heavens and the earth as a place where he could dwell with the humans created in his image as an act of love. It is a beautiful and well-written statement. The proposed changes to the statement are problematic in at least two ways.

However, instead of opening, progressing, and widening our doctrines, some amendments under consideration would tighten, restrict, and narrow Adventist practice and belief.

Adding the word “*recent*” is almost meaningless, since no comparative time scale is specified. After all, an event that occurred 14 billion years ago is recent when compared to eternity, and an event that occurred 200,000 years ago is recent when compared to an age of 14 billion years. When did God create the heavens and the earth? Genesis says that God created “in the beginning.”

Also, the suggested literalistic language can obscure the primary meaning, the bigger meaning, of the creation story. The Bible tells us what God did and why. Focusing on how and when is not the Bible’s concern.

The statement should not be changed.

Adventist Registered Nurse:

As a mother and grandmother, the changes proposed to Fundamental Belief No. 6 are troubling to me for the following reasons:

I would like our church to continue to be the warm and welcoming place for my adult children and young grandchildren that I found when I was a child and young adult. These changes would make it more restrictive, narrower, and less welcoming to those who understand the creation story in a different time frame from the one implied by these changes.

Young adults of this generation are better informed than we were at their age; they have much more information at their

from any particular scientific opinion?

- Is it not dangerous for us to try to make definite what Scripture has left open? Should we be voting to tell God how and when he had to create, based on our limited current understanding?

Leaving Fundamental Belief No. 6 in its present biblical form could solve these dilemmas.

This is the complete text of our current official statement on creation:

“God is Creator of all things, and has revealed in Scripture the authentic account of His creative activity. In six days the Lord made ‘the heaven and the earth’ and all living things upon the earth, and rested on the seventh day of that first week. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His completed creative work. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was ‘very good,’ declaring

the glory of God. (Gen. 1; 2; Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; Heb. 11:3.)”

General Conference administrators have proposed the following changes (indicated in **bold**) to statement No. 6:

“God is **the** Creator of all things. He has revealed in Scripture the authentic **and historical** account of His creative activity. In **a recent six day creation** the Lord made “**the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them**” and rested on the seventh day. Thus He established the Sabbath as a perpetual memorial of His creative work, **performed and completed during six literal days that together with the Sabbath constituted the same unit of time that we call a week today**. The first man and woman were made in the image of God as the crowning work of Creation, given dominion over the world, and charged with responsibility to care for it. When the world was finished it was “very good,” declaring the glory of God. (Gen. 1-2; 5; **11**; Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 19:1-6; 33:6, 9; 104; **Isa. 45:12; Acts 17:24; Col. 1:16**; Heb. 11:3; **Rev. 10:6; 14:7.**)”

“By changing Fundamental Belief No. 6, we would be going from a broad statement that mirrors what the Bible actually reads to a very narrow interpretation of that reading.”

—ADVENTIST YOUNG PASTOR

fingertips than we ever had. To insert into our beliefs extra-biblical interpretation and try to make the text say more than it actually does will only make our church less believable to these thinking, inquiring young minds, and it will bring discredit to other things our church tries to teach.

Adventists can learn in heaven how old the Earth is; we don't have to pretend we know it all now, when we don't.

Adventist Senior Pastor:

The language of the current statement is pure Scripture. Do not add extra-biblical words to make the statement say more than the Bible actually says.

The proposed statement changes would divide Adventists. Loyal Seventh-day Adventist believers with a full commitment to God, our Creator, interpret Genesis in various ways.

It is not true that we must change the statement to protect the Sabbath. The Sabbath is represented not only in Genesis, but in all of Scripture. The seven-day week and the Sabbath are completely independent of all ties to the age of universe. We obey because of the Creator, not because of the timing of his creation.

Under Ellen White's influence, Seventh-day Adventists came to understand that God reveals himself both in the book of Scripture and the book of Nature. “The book of nature and the written word shed light upon *each other*” (emphasis mine).⁴ So we must listen to the evidence from science in our interpretation

Using Your Voice

How might you respond to the proposed changes?

If you think it wise and useful for the entire church to make the proposed changes, then of course you can vote YES. If you have concerns about making these changes, you can simply vote NO.

But there are other possible responses. For example, those who agree that some of the changes are useful and helpful but who do not wish to accept all of the changes could respond like this:

“Sister/Brother Chairman: I move that we AMEND the movement before the delegates to state that *we accept* the recommended editorial changes proposed for our statement of fundamental beliefs, *with the exception* that we DO NOT insert extra-biblical chronological statements that specify the timing and duration of Creation. Leave these sections unchanged in order to reflect what the Bible says and nothing extra, except to update the biblical references.”

(At this point, any delegate(s) agreeing with you would need to call out, “I/we second this motion.”)

As an alternative, one could always use the following parliamentary tool of caution and conservatism, which is to “table” or postpone the motion:

“Sister/Brother Chairman: I move we POSTPONE consideration of this motion until wider study can be given to these recommendations by members on all sides of possible controversial issues (such as Fundamental Belief Nos. 6, 8, and 23.)”

Of course, all of these motions must have support of a majority of GC Session delegates if they are to succeed, so it would be very wise for all delegates to give careful and prayerful consideration to these issues before they come to San Antonio. 🇺🇸

¹ The final draft of the 28 fundamental beliefs that will be sent to the General Conference session is online at http://www.adventistreview.org/assets/public/news/2014-10/FUNDAMENTAL_BELIEFS_STATEMENT-last_version.pdf. The first round of changes, which were approved in 2013, appear in purple, and the second round of changes, approved in October of 2014, appear in blue.

of Scripture, as well as listen to Scripture in our interpretation of science.

Today most Adventist theologians, even the conservative ones, believe that the universe and the material Earth are billions of years old. This is the result of clear scientific information that demonstrates the reality of a scale of the universe unimaginable and unimaginable in Ellen White’s time. Had we attempted to nail down a creation statement of belief before 1950 that went beyond the biblical text and narrowly expressed our understanding then, we should have to change it today in the light of clear scientific evidence. Why tie ourselves to one interpretation now?

Both Bible scholars and believing scientists agree that no single interpretation trying to put the Bible texts and science together is without difficulties. Every option involves problems. So what should we do? We should be careful about claiming too much. It is OK to say we don’t know certain things. Not all of our beliefs carry equal weight. Not all are central to faith or salvation.

God is the Creator, the Architect, of a magnificent universe in which he has placed us. He has made us in his image, and he is eminently worthy of our love and worship. Precisely when and how are questions for us to study and pray about, and we should hold our opinions with humility and grace. Our present statement meets those requirements. I would urge the delegates not to change it at this time. 🇺🇸

¹ Seventh-day Adventists in the past have been prominent in the **Young Earth (or Young-Life-on-Old-Earth) Creationism** movement that attempted to give scientific support to a plus-or-minus 6,000-year age of life on Earth. Today many Seventh-day Adventists support **Intelligent Design**, which teaches that science shows that life was designed by intelligence and plan, not randomness and chance. This scientific movement is also compatible with **Old-Earth or Progressive Creationism**, which does not require a short chronology of God’s actions and uses the Genesis account as a general outline of creation, not a strict chronology. Some Seventh-day Adventists feel that the scientific evidence of some form of evolution directed by God is the best explanation of life on Earth, called **Theistic Evolution** or **Creation by Evolution**. *Adventist Today* takes no position on which form of science supporting creation is correct, but feels that all believers in the God of the Bible who created by Jesus Christ our Savior should be permitted to study and support or oppose these theories, using Scripture and the best science they can find.

² Referring to liberal Adventists “who envision themselves as mavericks, liberated thinkers, enlightened beyond faith and the Word,” GC Vice President Michael Ryan said: “Oh how thrilled I am that there are none attending this conference. But they have been known to attend Bible and Science conferences.” Read the transcript of this sermon, delivered at the 10-day International Conference on the Bible and Science in St. George, Utah, on Aug. 23, 2014, online at <http://www.adventistreview.org/affirming-creation/blessed-is-that-teacher>.

³ John C. Lennox, *Seven Days That Divide the World: The Beginning According to Genesis and Science* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), p. 35.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Christian Education* (Battle Creek, MI: International Tract Society, 1894), p. 196.

GENESIS 1-11—A DIFFERENT GENRE

Let's Tell
the Truth
BY DESMOND FORD

ADVENTISTS HAVE LONG PRIDED THEMSELVES AS BEING “THE people of the book.” (Did not Ellen White insist, in the beginning and near the end of her book *The Great Controversy*, that the Bible and the Bible only is the source of religious truth?!) But could it be that our pride is misplaced and that it is only a form of ignorant thoughtlessness?

In Adventist circles, controversies regarding Genesis are not about chapters 12-50 but instead center on the first 11 chapters. Our disagreements with old-earthers and evolutionists stem from our interpretation of these initial chapters of the Bible's opening book. For example, chapters 6-8 are about Noah and the great flood, and for more than 100 years Adventists have accepted the comments of Ellen G. White regarding the nature of that flood. We have taught by voice and pen that the geologic column with its fossils is the evidence and result of a worldwide deluge.

Here, of course, we clash with almost all paleontologists and geologists, who insist that the column could not have been born in the catastrophe of a single year but is the result of long ages. The evidence for this is impossible to deny; are not the earliest fossils chiefly of single-celled variety or algae, etc., followed by strata with increasingly complex forms of ancient life? There are no human skeletons partway through the column. There is no jumble of human and animal fossils to suggest a giant catastrophe that mixed together all living things. Furthermore, the various geologic strata are progressively aged. (There are now about 50 methods of dating the earth and its contents, and while some may squabble about a few of these methods, it is not possible to reject the combined testimony of the rest.) The admitted absence of transitional forms indicates progressive creation, not evolution.

Adventist Influence Among the Well-Educated

Only in the Third World are Seventh-day Adventists winning significant numbers of people. Elsewhere our evangelistic efforts

are barren. Very few educated people attend any meetings advertised by Adventists. And so long as we insist on advocating hoary traditions long ago exploded, we will never reach the ear of people of intelligence and culture.

Let me illustrate our impact (or lack of such) upon the learned. The 2010 book *The Selfless Gene* by Charles Foster is a deliberate slight upon Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene*. Foster has no love for Dawkins and goes out of his way to say why, even taking a whole book to do it.

Well, we can agree with Foster there. And we may agree with those who consider Dawkins a scientific journalist of the fundamentalist variety. But much more important is that Foster's book says many good things, despite his agreement with evolution; yet he has no love for Adventism.

On page xiv of his preface, Foster writes: “In his 1860 debate with Huxley, Wilberforce tried to parody Darwinism into extinction. He famously failed. Since then, Christianity and Darwinism coexisted pretty happily—although with little real conversation—until the relatively recent rise of creationism, a movement that sprang fully deformed from the loins of Seventh-Day Adventism.”

Then on page 23 we read: “The roots of modern creationism go further back. Its pedigree is soundly Seventh-Day Adventist. The founder of Seventh-Day Adventism, Ellen G. White, claimed to have been shown by God in a vision in 1864 that he had created the world in six twenty-four hour days, and that the fossils were all artifacts of the Noahic flood. These ideas were promulgated by George McCready Price in his *The New Geology* (1923), and taken up, popularized and transmuted into the Young Earthers' canon by Henry Morris.”

Now, the first thing you probably noticed about that statement is that Foster doesn't know everything—he doesn't even know the proper capitalization for Seventh-day Adventists. The second

thing to note is this: by creationists, he means chiefly those who are committed to a young Earth of between 6,000 and 10,000 years. That does not embrace all Seventh-day Adventists.

But the main thing we should notice is that here we have a representation of the way many intelligent people view Adventists. Of course, we can keep our sailing ship afloat by moving between Third-World ports and continuing to shrink as regards educated First-World parishioners. Or, we can follow the counsel of a fallible but wise pioneer who advised us to give up long-cherished views if further information proves them to be wrong.

You may have noticed that the original *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* series reflected George McCready Price in the relevant areas of Genesis, but the more recent edition does not.² Of course, we still cling to the idea that fossils came only as a result of the biblical flood, but we have learned that Price was just plain wrong in many things that he wrote—godly and intelligent man though he undoubtedly was.

We live now in the 21st century, not the 19th century. Much has been learned and proved over that period, and because of the computer age and the Internet, it is difficult to ward off what seem to be bombshells on the “remnant.” It is now undeniable that Ellen White and the early Adventist church in general believed in a “shut door,” excluding the rest of the world from salvation. We have learned that the “Dark Day” mentioned in *The Great Controversy* came from forest fires, and that the meteoric showers of 1833 were the Leonids that arrive every 33 years. We no longer teach that Turkey is coming to its end with no one to help her—a prelude to Christ’s return. We no longer teach that Daniel 12:4 has to do with scientific knowledge. Even the famous Armageddon battle in God’s ancient land has lost its popularity among scholars in the fields of exegesis and eschatology. The list is very long. These offer but a sample.

Our own scientists in Adventist colleges and universities do not teach the things advocated by George McCready Price. Most of them do not believe that Noah’s flood caused the millions of fossils that have since been excavated from the column. They consent, for the most part, that our world is 4.5 billion years old. Many other Adventists who give themselves to reading agree with the typical scientific view.

I well remember a few years ago attending a lecture by Ken Ham of *Answers in Genesis*. During the question-and-answer period, I asked him if he could name a single geologist respected by his peers who agreed with the stance taken in *The Genesis Flood* by Whitcomb and Morris (the bible of fundamentalist

young earthers). He did not answer my question, but moved on to another topic for obvious reasons. Whitcomb and Morris could not find any support from geologists for their theories about the flood of Noah’s day and the geologic column, which had been borrowed from Price.

Yet, it is clear that Genesis *is* talking about a worldwide flood. There would be no need for a giant vessel to succour animals and people if the coming flood could be avoided by migration. For well over 2,000 years, commentators on Genesis have agreed that the flood of Genesis chapters 6-8 was worldwide. How could it be otherwise, when we are told that the water covered the highest mountains by 15 cubits?

Strangely, the solution to this problem does not seem to have occurred to most fundamentalist Christians. It is quite simple. Consider how the contents of Genesis 1-11 are beyond all human experience and thus are often described as mega history. We have not talked with God as did Adam and Eve, and we have not known a pristine Eden whose only shadow was a wicked serpent. Certainly we know of no people who have lived to nearly 1,000 years, nor in secular history is there any account of a global catastrophe caused by water. Genesis speaks of giants in those days, and if the usual interpretation is correct (which I doubt), we must confess also to our ignorance of special humans who are partly the result of the sexual activities of apostate angels. Nor do we know of any towers that so threatened heaven that stark judgment was invoked and executed. No one can deny that Genesis chapters 1-11 are very different from the rest of Genesis, chapters 12-50. The stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph are a contrast to the stories of Methuselah, Noah, and the builders of Babel. In the latter section, mega incidents impress us by their scarcity.

What then? Many of us are fully committed to the fact that Genesis—all of it—is inspired of God and worthy of all acceptation. Again we repeat that the solution is simple. How do we explain Luke 16 about the conversation between Earth and heaven by the lost and the saved? How do we explain the tormenting flame of the grave scorching the rich man? We know Sodom and Gomorrah are not still burning, though once subject to everlasting fire. Adventists have been correct here in not literalizing these stories, as other churches have.

Adventists have tended to be skittish about literature—without good reason. But there is a penalty sometimes for striving after virtue. The wise man in Ecclesiastes tells us that it is possible (though rare) to be “righteous overmuch” (Eccl. 7:16). Because of our poor acquaintance with literature, Adventists tend

to be literal-minded and thereby miss a great deal of the depth of Scripture itself. How many of us get Christ's point in the parable where those who refuse a wedding invitation are sentenced to death? Or, how many sense the incongruity of the impossible debt mentioned in Matthew 18, or the behavior of the master in Luke 16:1-8? We even seem able to read such verses as the necessity of eating Christ's flesh and drinking his blood without asking too many questions.

One-third of Christ's teachings are parables and metaphors. Usually reference works list 40-50 of these. Obviously a Christ who can speak of men swallowing camels and of the blind leading the blind is not tied to the bonds of literalism. That's why he can liken himself to a door, a vine, a loaf of bread, and the sun (light of the world).

Let us teach our children and our church members, many of whom are childlike, that the Bible contains many different types of literature and that all of them are valuable, all are inspired, and all are perfect for their purpose.

However, we have forgotten that there are parables in the Old Testament also. Many scholars regard the whole book of Jonah as parabolic, and Christ's allusion to it is akin to our quotations from Shakespeare. [Equally intelligent scholars do NOT read Jonah as a parable.] Certain it is that most Christians have understood the Song of Songs (*Canticles*) as having more significance than a superficial reading might suggest. But let me ask, what about Genesis chapters 1-11? Are there some similarities between these chapters and Judges 9 and 2 Samuel 12:1-12? We know that some of Christ's stories are aiming at the false religious practices of the Pharisees. Is Genesis also warning by parables against the prevailing pagan religions of its day?

May I quote again from Foster, since by now you are holding it in your hand? Although not infallible, he is thought-provoking: "There is almost universal scholarly agreement that the Genesis accounts are at least in part polemical documents, designed to contradict the view of the world and the gods enshrined in the competing Mesopotamian and Egyptian religions. It is an anti-polytheistic tract. 'In the beginning, God ...' it starts. Not

gods and not creatures. The book opens by the clearest possible assertion that there is God (and only one of them), and there are creatures. They are not the same. There is a colossal divide. To worship anything created is to make a basic and terribly dangerous mistake.

"The week is redeemed from its bondage to the sky. The Mesopotamians had seven-day lunar cycles, and in obeisance to the moon, the seventh day was a fast day—a day of ill luck. You had it wrong, says the Bible: the seventh day has nothing to do with the moon. And to make the break explicit, the seventh day becomes not a time to fast, fear, and mourn, but a time to celebrate" (pages 131-132).

Most of the top evangelical scholars today see these controverted chapters in Genesis as a different literary genre from chapters 12-50 in the same book. For examples, see *Old Testament Survey* written by scholars of Fuller Theological Seminary or the *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1: Genesis 1-15* by Gordon J. Wenham.

We have already suggested the chief reason why scholars take this stand. Anyone reading Genesis 1-11 senses quite quickly that this is no ordinary literature, and it is not about ordinary events. Most of us don't plan on reaching nearly 1,000 years of age; neither do we expect to build a huge 350-foot-long boat.

One thing that must be taken into account is that Genesis chapters 1-11 reflect many of the myths that were current in Moses' day. This is particularly true not only of chapter 1, but also of chapters 6 and 7. There are 17 easily recognizable parallels between the Noah story and existing myths. Scholars are well aware of them. Alexander Heidel's 1963 classic, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, is worthy of our attention. He frankly admits the parallels but rightly denies that the Genesis story is a mere copy.

This use by Genesis of well-known stories begins with chapter one. Though the chapter is a hundred times saner than those that are next most well-known, nevertheless the parallels *are* here. We are forced to ask the question: In the inspiration of Genesis 1-11, was God most concerned with history and science, or with the spiritual well-being of the first recipients?

Henry Drummond, popular author of *The Greatest Thing in the World*, wrote more than 100 years ago, but comments written in our own day are remarkably similar. For example, here are some lines from Drummond regarding the first chapters of Genesis: "There was no science then. Scientific questions were not even asked then. To have given men science would not only have been an anachronism, but a source of mystification and confusion. ... Why was not the use of stars explained to navigators, or chloroform to surgeons? ... What is it to early man to know how

the moon was made? What he wants to know is how bread is made. How fish are to be caught, fowls snared, beasts trapped and their skins tanned—these are his problems. ... But that it does not inform us on these practical matters is surely a valid argument why we should not expect it to instruct the world in geology. ... Genesis is a presentation of one or two great elementary truths to the childhood of the world. It can only be read aright in the spirit in which it was written, with its original purpose in view, and its original audience. What did it mean to them? What would they understand by it? What did they need to know and not to know? ... The first principle, which must rule our reading of this book, is the elementary canon of all literary criticism, which decides that any interpretation of a part of a book, or of a literature, must be controlled by the dominant purpose or *motif* of the whole. And when one investigates that dominant purpose in the case of the Bible, he finds it reducing itself to one thing—religion.”³

Why bother with issues that to many seem esoteric? Because when our children go to university, they will be disillusioned regarding their childhood inheritance of stories about Noah and the flood. They will learn that this Earth is very, very old as testified by the geologic column, as well as by radiometric dating and archaeology.

Many of us know families whose children have lost their evangelical faith while attending university. Southern Baptists, the biggest religious Christian group in America, reported in 2012 that 60 percent of the more than 46,000 churches in the Southern Baptist Convention reported no youth baptisms (ages 12-17) in more than seven years, and 80 percent reported only one or two baptisms among young adults (ages 18-29).

In our own small denomination, we too confess that most of our children and youth leave us. That’s why this article is important. So many of our churches are filled primarily with old people.

Suppose we could conscientiously teach our families that Genesis 1-11 is as truly inspired as John 1-11, but is a different literary genre; would that not be worth doing? What do we have to lose? On the other hand, consider what will most surely be lost if we don’t do this.

Our church leaders sigh over our terrible losses, but what are we doing about it? Suppose those children you know and love best are carried away by the popular skepticism concerning Genesis. Will you feel that the church should have done something to prevent such losses? If so, what?

First, we must approach the inspired text with both care and prayer. It is difficult if not impossible to put away all our preconceived ideas, but the danger is lessened when we are aware of our biased state. Then we might ask, “How have evangelical scholars who are committed wholeheartedly to Christ interpreted

these chapters, and what is the evidence they offer?”

Consider him who is our example as well as Savior. How much scientific wisdom did he impart? Indeed, in what areas did he speak, apart from what is needed for our salvation? If he were to speak of science, which science? That of Moses’ day, David’s day, his own day, our day, or the science to come—which alone may be largely accurate?

The main reason many Adventists fear to follow the suggestions here made is that such would seem to diminish the stature of Ellen G. White. Most of our people are unaware that in the last 50 years, our own scholars have realized that an infallible, inerrant Ellen White is only a myth. Without diminishing her true value, we can now confess that her statement “only God and heaven are infallible” fits her also. Thirty-five years ago, an article written by a loyal, top Adventist scholar named Donald McAdams was printed in *Spectrum*.⁴ It stated that some facts about E.G. White were now established beyond question: Ellen White used many sources, and she was influenced by contemporary writers and was not inerrant.

All should read the recent work on Ellen G. White, written by both Adventist and non-Adventist scholars and printed by the Oxford University Press.⁵ It also is not infallible, but it does give an up-to-date understanding of Ellen G. White as cherished by loyal Adventist researchers.

So what, then, is our privilege and duty?

Let us teach our children and our church members, many of whom are childlike, that the Bible contains many different types of literature and that all of them are valuable, all are inspired, and all are perfect for their purpose. Not only is there in the Bible direct prose, but also poetry, apocalyptic, law, history, parable, and so on. Genesis 1-11, drawing from real events involving real people, has presented the past in parabolic form for religious reasons. Read again Henry Drummond’s comments and rejoice to agree with him. In this manner our denomination may be saved from ridicule and rejection and our children spared from loss of faith. ✚

Desmond Ford, retired Adventist theologian with doctorates from Michigan State University and the University of Manchester (UK), writes from Shelly Beach, Caloundra, in Queensland, Australia.

¹ See pp. 9, 595.

² Volume 1, *Genesis to Deuteronomy* was written in 1953 and revised in 1976 and 1978. A digital edition was released in 2011.

³ George Adam Smith, *The Life of Henry Drummond* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2005), pp. 258-261.

⁴ Donald R. McAdams, “Shifting Views of Inspiration: Ellen G White Studies in the 1970s,” *Spectrum*, Vol. 10, No. 4, March 1980, pp. 27-41.

⁵ Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and R.L. Numbers, *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Freeing the First Angel and Reopening the Doors of Adventism

BY JACK HOEHN

Then I saw another angel

Heaven has many messengers; Seventh-day Adventists are surely among them.
This is our charter; this is our mission.

Flying in the midst of heaven,

We are to fly in the middle—not too high, not too low, not too right, not too left—with a ministry of reconciliation, or bringing together, of common ground.

Having the everlasting gospel

The good news we have is not to be dependent on Darwin or Newton or Einstein or Hubble.
It is also not dependent on Martin Luther, John Calvin,
Dwight L. Moody, or Ellen G. White.

To preach to those who dwell on the earth—

All creatures that on earth do dwell need to give Him praise.

To every nation,

This news is for Islamic nations, Buddhist nations, Confucian nations, Hindu nations,
Catholic nations, Protestant nations, Communist nations, Socialist nations,
Capitalist nations, big nations, little nations, every nation.

Tribe, tongue, and people—

Our message must be global, universal, ecumenical, transcultural,
trans-philosophical, trans-doctrinal, and transtheoretical.

Saying with a loud voice,

This truth dare not be whispered, hidden, buffered, or silenced
by disputable detail, personal interpretations, and minority opinions.
It needs to be a loud, bold, universal truth that can be declared on front pages
everywhere.

“Fear God and give glory to Him,

Withdraw glory from chance, randomness, and purposelessness.
Withdraw a fear of meaningless and hopeless insignificance
and replace it with universal awe for the Creator.

For the hour of His judgment has come;

There is now a tipping point, a pivot of history, and everything depends
on one broad, universal, transcultural, widely acceptable fact.

And worship Him

(Please, church, It does NOT say worship WHEN; it says worship HIM.)

Who made

(The angel does not ask humans to worship HOW God made.
It demands no vote on WHEN God made.)

Heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”

Heaven’s first angel’s message is a broad—not a narrow—interpretation of Creation.
It is a truth intended to bring together mankind’s diversity of opinion
on one central fact: God is your Creator.
The angel mentions nothing about the days of creation
nothing about the method of creation,
nothing about the chronology of creation,
only the fact of creation.

If Adventists are to be bearers of the first angel’s message, we need to have
something to say loudly to every university, every scientist, every political party,
every nationality, every theory of creation: God did it. Worship Him with us.

Come from your Friday mosques, come from your Sunday cathedrals
and join on the universal Sabbath made for mankind
with Jewish sisters and brothers, united not in science, not on chronology,
not over methods of Creation or one interpretation of Scripture.
United in universal worship of the Creator, irrespective of science,
excluded from this grand program of common worship
only by unwillingness to agree that God did it.

The “fear of the Lord” is not the end of wisdom; it is the beginning of wisdom.
United in universal Creator worship, there remains much room for honest science,
careful exegesis, and thoughtful coordination of the facts of science
with the truths of revelation.

Each theory of how and when God created will have to bend and learn
from each other. But please, Adventist church, don’t tie down the wings
of the mighty angel,
don’t muffle its voice of universal unity by a narrowing or restriction
of the grand truth of Creation to one narrow opinion on its timing and duration.

Reopen the doors to Adventism by keeping our fundamental belief
on creation inclusive and open to all willing to worship God as our Creator.

John B. “Jack” Hoehn, MD, is a family physician practicing with the Adventist Health Medical Group in Walla Walla, Washington. Earlier in his career, he served for 13 years as a licensed Adventist minister and for 13 years as a medical missionary in both Lesotho and Zambia in Africa.

It boggles the mind!

Despite appearances to the contrary, hyraxes (a.k.a. “coney” or “rock badgers”) are *not* ruminants. In fact, it is physiologically impossible for these small, rodent-like mammals to regurgitate food and rechew it.¹ In short, despite the motions of their lips and the testimony of Leviticus 11:5, they are not chewing a cud, as do cows and antelopes.

Any Seventh-day Adventist who accepts this datum, which clearly contradicts the explicit biblical text, is not reckoned as a heretic by those in the church hierarchy. Ain’t that peculiar?

contradicts the inspired Word, is not considered to be heretical by those in the church hierarchy. Ain’t that peculiar?

For many people, one of the scariest animals is the bat. Indeed, the bat is the only mammal capable of genuine flight.⁶ (Flying squirrels do not really fly, but glide.) Unlike most grade-school children, God seems not to have known the authentic classification of bats, because he specifically included them among birds in Leviticus 11:13, 19.

However, any Seventh-day Adventist who acknowledges the biological fact that bats are mammals rather than birds, despite

HOW DOES THE HIERARCHY DECIDE WHEN IT’S OK TO IGNORE THE BIBLE?

BY RICHARD W. COFFEN

Snakes—from giant anacondas (most massive) and Asiatic reticulated pythons (longest)² to the tiny Barbados threadsnake³—acquire sustenance by eating other creatures, including reptiles, mammals, birds, and insects.⁴ This diet, however, differs from God’s own description of reptilian fare: clods of dirt, a.k.a. “dust” (Gen. 3:14), a perspective seconded by the prophet Isaiah (65:25).

Any Seventh-day Adventist who admits that snakes devour other living creatures and not clods of dirt—a position that clearly contradicts the plain testimony of Scripture—is not reckoned as a heretic by those in the church hierarchy. Ain’t that peculiar?

Part of the taxonomical data that serves as a field test for an insect is that such creatures move about on six legs. By definition an insect is “a small animal that has *six* legs and a body formed of three parts and that may have wings.”⁵ This widely accepted data, learned by most of us in grade school, flies in the face of Leviticus 11:20, which bold-facedly asserts that such creatures go about on all *fours* (and are clean meat, to boot).

Any Seventh-day Adventist entomologist who teaches that insects crawl around on *six* (*not four*) legs, which clearly

their ability to fly—which clearly contradicts God’s own words—is not considered a heretic by those in the church hierarchy. Ain’t that peculiar?

We find the scriptural classification of hares⁷ rather similar to that of hyraxes. A “thus saith the Lord” avers (with “no ifs, ands, or buts”) that hares chew the cud (Lev. 11:6). The scientific data, however, proves otherwise. Hares, despite the twitching of their noses and the motions of their mandibles, do *not* chew a cud as do deer and goats.

It is interesting, however, that hares produce two kinds of solid excrement: hard/dry and soft/moist pellets. They eat their soft and moist feces immediately upon defecating them. This excrement provides the animal with additional nourishment and recirculates moisture. Nevertheless, what these lagomorphs do is not the same as what ruminants, such as deer and sheep, do. The two groups have quite distinct gastrointestinal tracts.⁸

Interestingly, any Seventh-day Adventist who avers that lagomorphs do *not* chew cuds as do ruminants, which clearly refutes God’s⁹ own words, is not considered a heretic by those in the church hierarchy. Ain’t that peculiar?

Jesus asserted that the mustard seed is the tiniest of all seeds

(Matt. 13:32). And, indeed, the mustard seed is quite small: between 3/64 and 5/64 of an inch (one and two millimeters) in diameter.¹⁰ However, contemporary scientists know that there are indeed smaller seeds. Flowering duckweed (*Wolffia*) produces fruit that is just 1/100 of an inch, and this minuscule fruit contains an even tinier seed.¹¹ Orchid seeds are even smaller.¹² Some are as minute as 1/300 of an inch.¹³

However, any Seventh-day Adventist botanist who acknowledges the biological fact that mustard seeds are *not* the

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most minuscule of seeds, which clearly contradicts Jesus' own teaching, is not considered a heretic by those in the church hierarchy. Ain't that peculiar?

Jesus, in his nocturnal conversation with Nicodemus, averred that we humans do not know where the wind comes from (John 3:8). The fact is that contemporary meteorologists do indeed know where the wind is coming from, when it will arrive, and how gusty it will be. Every night on the local evening news, we are informed as to how windy it will become, when the winds will reach our geographical area, and from which direction they are coming. Such information is daily fare for any of us who go online or listen to either the radio or television.

However, any Seventh-day Adventist who acknowledges this regularly accepted information, which clearly controverts Jesus'

own words, is not considered a heretic by those in the church hierarchy. Ain't that peculiar?

Most of us feel quite certain that we know what angels look like. We have had access to Arthur S. Maxwell's *The Bible Story* books since the 1950s. Tens of thousands of sets have been sold. We've seen the illustrations, which show angels as feminized males adorned in white frocks. Scripture, on the other hand, refers to celestial beings as "seraphim" and "cherubim." Isaiah tells us that the heavenly beings he calls "seraphim" have six wings. With two of the wings, they cover the face; with another two, they cover the phallus;¹⁴ and with two, they fly (Isa. 6:2). There is also a "pagan" picture of a seraph with six wings.¹⁵

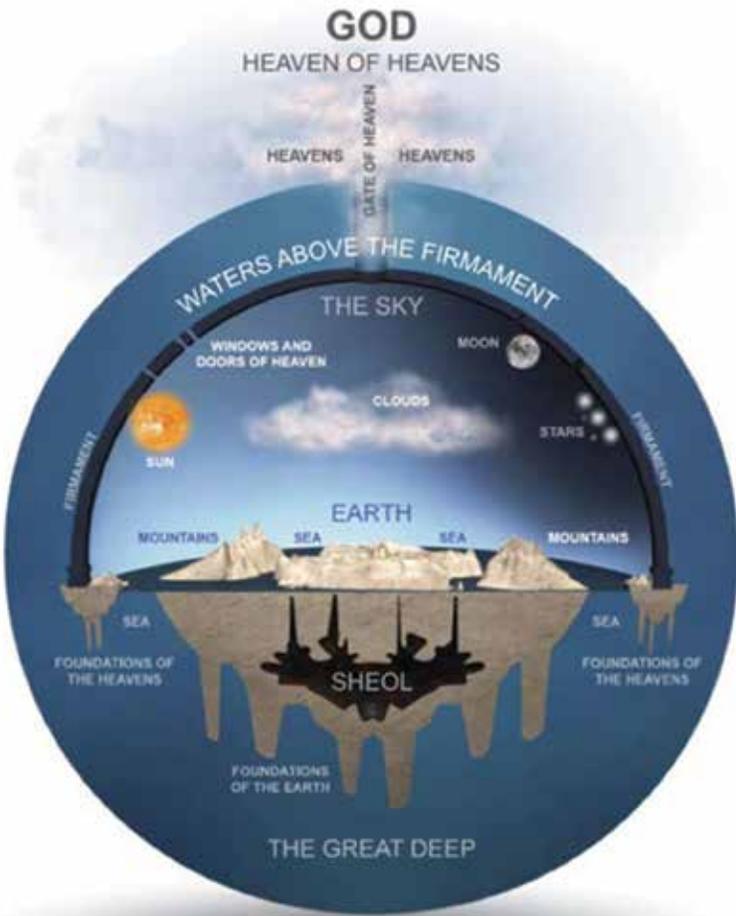
Ezekiel saw in vision what we would consider to be heavenly attendants beside or maybe even forming the underpinning of God's throne. These creatures had an overall humanoid appearance but were composite creatures, consisting of four wings, four faces (the faces were of a human, lion, ox, and eagle), and feet like those of a cow. The overall appearance of these "alive ones" was flamelike, similar to Isaiah's seraphim, which means "fiery" (Eze. 1:5-14). Later, when Ezekiel said that such creatures had four faces, the face of a cherub replaced the face of an ox (Eze. 10:14). Additionally, he called this composite creature a cherub (verse 7).

Elsewhere Scripture refers to cherubim (the proper plural of "cherub"), and archaeologists have found these composite creatures pictured in the ancient Near East. In Mesopotamia, for example, they were gryphon-like animals,¹⁶ such as human-headed bulls with wings. They guarded the gates to cities.¹⁷ In Scripture, cherubim¹⁸ are associated with the Hebrew mobile God.¹⁹ In Jewish and Christian thought, seraphim were viewed as the highest order of angelic beings, followed by the order of cherubim, which was trailed by other orders of heavenly beings.²⁰

Yet any Seventh-day Adventist who envisions heavenly beings as totally anthropoid, albeit effeminate, is not considered a heretic by those in the church hierarchy. Ain't that peculiar?

As most biblical scholars agree, the ancient Near Eastern and biblical schematic of the cosmos, which looked something like the graphic²¹ on page 55, is that of a disc (planet Earth) supported by columns, while at the same time Earth floats on water, with a solid "firmament"²² arcing overhead. In fact, it was conceived as so concrete that Job 37:18 describes it as "solid as a mirror" (NET). This "firmament" was believed to be studded with stars as well as inset with windows that can be either open or shut; somewhere underneath the flat *terra firma* lies *sheol*, the realm of the dead.^{23, 24}

Interestingly, any Seventh-day Adventist whose view of the cosmos is informed by the most recent astronomical data, even though 21st-century cosmology differs drastically from that of



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Scripture and the ancient Near East, is not considered a heretic by those in the church hierarchy. Ain't that peculiar?

But here comes the strangest feature of all. Although Seventh-day Adventists can with impunity espouse ideas that contradict explicit—even “thus-saith-the-Lord”—passages of the inspired Word, leaders in the Adventist hierarchy condemn them as heretics *if* they believe in a long-age chronology for planet Earth, despite the fact that a short chronology for Earth is *not* explicit in the Bible and there is no “thus saith the Lord” that unambiguously and unequivocally asserts that our blue planet is only “about” 6,000 years old.

No wonder we pride ourselves on being God’s “peculiar” people!²⁵ 

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¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyrax>. See also http://www.aishdas.org/toratemet/en_pamphlet2.html.

² <http://www.extremescience.com/biggest-snake.htm>.

³ <http://www.reptilesmagazine.com/Snakes/Wild-Snakes/Smallest-Snake>.

⁴ <http://www.defenders.org/snakes/basic-facts>.

⁵ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/insect>.

⁶ <http://www.defenders.org/bats/bats>.

⁷ The rabbit, although hare-like, did not exist in the ancient Near East, according to *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 6, David N. Freedman (Ed.), (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 1142.

⁸ <http://www.grisda.org/origins/04102.htm>.

⁹ In the previous reference, Leonard R. Brand demonstrates that although he may be an effective biologist, he is a defective biblical exegete. First, he ignores the literary context by predicating *Moses* as speaker in Leviticus 11:6: “Did *Moses* know what he was talking about?” Here Brand shows his ignorance of the text itself, which clearly indicates that not *Moses* but YHWH, the omniscient deity, is the speaker (verse 1). Second, in his apologetics he ignores the cultural context by assuming that the ancient Near Eastern *Moses* was an astute biologist who knew the anatomy and other biological data pertinent to lagomorphs—information that, to judge from the scientific references he cites in his essay, apparently has been only recently discovered.

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mustard_seed. See also <http://carm.org/is-mustard-seed-smallest-of-all-seeds>

¹¹ <http://www.neatorama.com/2007/09/05/worlds-smallest>. See also <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lemnoideae>.

¹² <http://christiananswers.net/q-aiia/mustardseed.html>.

¹³ <http://diogenesi.wordpress.com/2007/06/22/what-is-the-smallest-seed-in-the-world>.

¹⁴ Many, if not most, Old Testament scholars regard the term “feet” here as a Hebrew euphemism for the male genitalia.

¹⁵ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, Siegfried H. Horn (Ed.), second edition (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1979), p. 1006.

¹⁶ *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, Leland Ryken and James C. Wilhoit (Eds.), (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 579.

¹⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cherub>.

¹⁸ The proper spelling is *cherubim* rather than *cherubs*, although the latter spelling is becoming popular.

¹⁹ Paul Achtemeier, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), p. 161.

²⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_angelic_hierarchy. See also <http://angels-angelology.com/hierarchy-and-orders>. See also <http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/reading/angels.html>.

²¹ See also *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1, pp. 1162ff.

²² The Hebrew word translated “firmament” in the KJV comes from a root that means “hammered out” (“thin”). The verbal root means “to hammer out,” and the noun root means “hammered-out plate,” according to Willem A. VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), p. 1198.

²³ Scripture says that the witch living at Endor had an *ob* or was an *ob*. This was a hole in the ground—natural or dug with a spade—through which the “shades” in the underworld (Hebrew *sheol*) could erupt. In other words, it was a kind of doorway to the underworld. See, for example, <http://biblehub.com/hebrew/178.htm>; <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14960-witchcraft>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witchcraft_and_divination_in_the_Hebrew_Bible;

Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., “Second Millennium Antecedents to the Hebrew ‘OB,’” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 86, No. 4 (December 1967), pp. 385-401.

²⁴ <http://wp.patheos.com.s3.amazonaws.com/blogs/exploringourmatrix/files/2012/11/Ancient-Hebrew-view-of-universe.png>

²⁵ The terminology of “peculiar” people as used in 1 Peter 2:9 is most often misunderstood. The Hebrew term (*segullah*) and the Greek term (*periousios*) both mean “acquired private, personal property,” and neither word has anything to do with being “strange” or “odd,” a connotation dating from the early 17th century.



What is the G of the ADV

Just as God raised John the Baptist to prepare the Jewish nation for the first coming of Christ, so likewise he raised the “Advent Movement” to prepare the entire human race for Christ’s second coming. When this mission will be finally realized, Jesus’ last-day prophecy will be fulfilled: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14, NKJV). Those who commit the sin of unbelief by willfully rejecting this good news of salvation will have nobody to blame but themselves for being eternally lost (Mark 16:15-16; John 3:18; Heb. 10:26-29).

The Everlasting Gospel

The gospel of the kingdom that Christ predicted (Matt. 24:14) is spelled out in detail by the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14. John the Revelator declared: “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come, and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’” (verses 6-7, NKJV).

This gospel is called *everlasting*, since God planned it before the foundation of this world, or before time began (Eph. 1:3-4; 2 Tim. 1:8-10). Furthermore, God promised it because Adam and Eve sinned (Gen. 3:15), and this promise was kept alive throughout the Old Testament by signs and especially the sanctuary message, God’s visual aid of the plan of salvation (Ex. 25:8-9).

The statement that “the hour of His judgment has come” (Rev. 14:7, NKJV) must not be confused with the *investigative judgment* of the believers. Rather, it refers to judgment of every individual who has heard and is convicted of the truth of the everlasting gospel and has reached the age of accountability. Such individuals have made a decision for or against Christ that will decide their eternal destiny in the final judgment.

The next statement in the first angel’s message, “and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (verse 7, NKJV), is linked to the Sabbath commandment. But it is

GLOBAL MISSION

BY JACK SEQUEIRA

ENTIST MOVEMENT?

also used in the New Testament to distinguish between the true God and all false gods (Acts 14:13-15).

The second angel joins the first angel in proclaiming the everlasting gospel but adds the fact that “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (Rev. 14:8, NKJV). The word *Babylon* comes from the Semitic root word *Bab-el*, meaning “the gate of God.” When used spiritually, it means humans trying to reach heaven by their own works or through human effort, that is, *legalism*. The tower of Babel is a good example. This self-fulfillment described in verse 8 refers to the great city of Babylon built by king Nebuchadnezzar and his boastful claims recorded in Daniel 4:30: “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?” (NKJV).

Later, when Belshazzar became the king of Babylon, he knowingly and deliberately desecrated the golden vessels of the Hebrew sanctuary. As a result, he was found wanting and God wrote on the wall: *MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN*. The aged prophet Daniel, after reminding the king of his deliberate act of rebellion, explained the meaning of the words on the wall: “MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians” (Dan. 5:22-28, NKJV). This explains the fall of Babylon, which is used as an example by the second angel of Revelation to represent every subsequent attempt of men to save themselves by human effort or rebellion against God.

Every non-Christian religion of the world today bases salvation on human effort or works. The everlasting gospel proclaimed by the second angel declares that all such religions have failed, since they have no power to save anyone. As the apostle Paul declared: “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His [God’s] sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20, NKJV).

The third angel joins the first two angels in proclaiming the everlasting gospel, plus it adds with a “loud voice” (Rev. 14:9)

the consequences of deliberately rejecting the good news of the kingdom: “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation” (verses 10-11, NKJV). God’s wrath poured out without mixture of mercy, as experienced by Christ on the cross (Matt. 27:45-46), is the second or eternal death. It is goodbye to life forever (Rev. 20:14-15). The power behind the beast and his image is Satan. He is the one who tries to convince the whole world to reject the everlasting gospel (Rev. 12:9; 13:4).

Meeting the Challenge

The greatest challenge the Adventist church faces today, in its global mission, is that approximately 70 percent of the world population belongs to various non-Christian religions, of which Islam is the largest and the fastest-growing. Muslim scholars accuse the Christian gospel of being *legal fiction*, on the basis that no law allows an innocent person to be punished for the guilty. The following two statements fully support this Bible principle: “Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin” (Deut. 24:16, NKJV) and “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (Eze.18:20, NKJV).

Yet the New Testament clearly states that Jesus, who committed no sin (2 Cor. 5:21), died on the cross in the place of sinful mankind—“the just for the unjust” (1 Pet. 3:18, NKJV). No Christian denomination today, including ours, has satisfactorily answered this charge of *legal fiction*. Unless we can prove that Christ had the legal right to die on behalf of mankind, we will never be able to fully convince the majority of the non-Christian world of the truth of the everlasting gospel.

The only way the problem of *legal fiction* can be solved is by presenting the everlasting gospel in the context of biblical

solidarity, the idea that all men constitute or share a common life. While this concept is familiar to the Jews, it is foreign to the Western mind and needs to be explained. A text found in the Old Testament will help us understand biblical solidarity: “Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children [Esau and Jacob] struggled together within her; and she said, ‘If all is well, why am I like this?’ So she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her: ‘Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger’” (Gen. 25:21-23, NKJV).

Notice that Esau and Jacob represent two nations (the Edomites and the Israelites), not individuals. So Esau, the older, did not serve Jacob, the younger. Rather, the Edomites served the Israelites. This is biblical solidarity language, and the Bible makes many references to it.

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Turning to the New Testament, we read in Hebrews 7:7-9: “Now beyond all contradictions the lesser is blessed by the better. Here mortal men [Levitical priests of the Old Testament] receive tithes, but there he [Melchizedek] receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak” (NKJV).

Levi was the great-grandson of Abram, who was renamed Abraham. When Abram paid tithe to Melchizedek (see Gen. 14:18-20), Isaac and Jacob and Levi were not yet born. So how could Levi pay tithe in (or through) Abraham, long before he was

born? This makes no sense to the Western mind. But the answer is in Hebrews 7:10: “For he [Levi] was still in the loins of his father [Abraham] when Melchizedek met him” (NKJV). This is biblical solidarity.

With this concept in mind, let us examine how God qualified Christ to legally represent the entire human race and be its substitute in his work of redemption. The first thing we must realize is that the human race, to which we all belong, is the multiplication or extension of Adam’s life after he sinned (Acts 17:26). The Greek word used in the New Testament to describe this corporate, condemned human life is *bios*, from which we have the English word *biography*. In contrast, the divine eternal life of Christ is *zoe* in Greek.

Unfortunately, both of these Greek words are translated in our English Bibles as *life*, which makes it very difficult for readers to distinguish between the two. Here are a few texts in which the words *bios* and *zoe* are used in the original but translated in our English Bibles as the word *life*:

**The Greek Word BIOS
(Translated “Life”)
Used in the New Testament**
Luke 8:14
Luke 21:34
1 Timothy 2:2
2 Timothy 2:4
1 Peter 4:3
1 John 2:16

**The Greek Word ZOE
(Translated “Life”)
Used in the New Testament**
Matthew 19:29
Mark 10:30
Luke 18:30
John 8:12
Acts 3:15
1 John 5:11

The “In Christ” Motif

In the incarnation, God united the corporate human *bios* life, which stood condemned to death, with the divine *zoe* life of Christ in the womb of Mary (Luke 1:35). Thus he created a second—or the last—Adam out of the first Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). The word *Adam* in Hebrew means *mankind* (for example, see Genesis 5:1-2 in the King James Version and New King James Version). Just as the first Adam condemned to death the entire human race at the Fall, so also Christ, the second or last Adam, reversed mankind’s legal status and justified to life the entire human race at the cross (Rom. 5:18). This is because the entire human race was “in the loins of” these two Adams, to use the description from Hebrews 7:9-10.

This is the truth as it is *in Christ*, the central theme of Paul’s theology. Throughout Paul’s epistles, a key phrase appears, and if this key phrase were removed, there would be very little left of Paul’s exposition of the good news of the gospel. This

recurring phrase is the expression “in Christ” or “in Christ Jesus.” Sometimes it is expressed by other identical phrases, such as, “in him” or “by him” or “through him” or “in the beloved” or “together with him,” etc.

This phrase was first introduced by Christ when he told his disciples: “abide [remain] in Me” (John 15:4, NKJV). If we fail to understand what the New Testament means by the expression *in Christ*, we will never fully understand the message of the everlasting gospel. The “in Christ” motif is based on biblical solidarity, and it is what qualified Christ to legally represent the human race and be its substitute.

By living a perfect life, from birth to manhood (30 years in the Bible), Christ as man’s representative and substitute met the full requirements of the law: *obey and live*. But this perfect obedience did not cancel the sins of mankind. Therefore, Jesus went to the cross and met the justice of the law on behalf of all humanity: *disobey and die* (2 Cor. 5:14; Lev. 17:11). On the cross, the corporate *bios* life of mankind died forever the second death in Christ. In the resurrection, God so loved the world that he gave the divine *zoe* life of his Son, Jesus Christ, to the human race (John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 John 5:11-12). This is the basis of the doctrine of adoption (Gal. 4:4-6; Heb. 2:11).

Thus Christ, by his doing and dying, rewrote the history of the human race and changed the legal status of humanity from condemnation to justification. This is the incredible good news of the everlasting gospel. Note how Paul expounds this truth in Romans 5:15-18, based on biblical solidarity or the “in Christ” motif: “But the free gift is not like the offence. For if by the one man’s [Adam’s] offence many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to the many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned [Adam]. For the judgment which came from one offence resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from *many offences* resulted in justification” (verses 15-16, NKJV, emphasis mine).

Note what Paul is saying here. While Adam’s one sin condemned the whole of mankind to death, Christ’s obedience took care of not only the one sin of Adam that condemned all men, but also the personal sins of the entire human race—past, present, and future. This is the significance of the phrase “much more.”

Turning to verses 17 and 18, the apostle expounds this truth further: “For if by the one man’s offence death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as through one man’s offence judgment

came to all men, resulting in condemnation; even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life” (NKJV).

According to the above passage, what Adam passed on to the human race (*condemnation and death*) is inherited, while what Christ accomplished for humanity in his work of redemption (*justification to eternal life*) is God’s supreme gift to mankind. And, like any gift, it has to be received to be experienced (John 5:24). This is what *righteousness by faith* is all about (note the word *receive* in Romans 5:17).

This incredible good news of the everlasting gospel, based on biblical solidarity, will one day lighten the whole world in a *loud cry* with the glory of Christ, making it inexcusable for anyone to be lost. No present-day denomination, including ours, is proclaiming this gospel truth. Calvinists are right in preaching the good news of the gospel, but they are wrong by limiting it only to the elect, the ones God predestined to be saved. Hence,

IF WE FAIL TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT MEANS BY THE EXPRESSION *IN CHRIST*, WE WILL NEVER FULLY UNDERSTAND THE MESSAGE OF THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL.

they define their gospel as “limited atonement.” Arminians, on the other hand, are correct in claiming that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world; but unfortunately, they deny that on the cross Christ actually secured salvation for the entire human race. Instead they teach that God only *made it possible* for all men to be saved—hence, their doctrine of “provisional salvation.”

Where Do We Go From Here?

To restore our divine global mission, God in his great mercy brought to our church the most precious message of *Christ Our Righteousness* in 1888. Ellen G. White not only approved this message, but she clearly stated that this was the beginning of *the loud cry*. To understand why this message was rejected, I recommend reading two well-documented books by Ron
Continued on page 62



Exodus 3-4: “Oh Lord, Send Someone Else”

By Alden Thompson

God’s blessing hadn’t made life easy for his people. They were slaves. No one could remember what it was like to be free.

But God had a plan. With a “strong right arm,” he would spring his people free. The haughty Egyptians would learn a thing or two; the world would sit up and take notice. All of that would be an important step in winning back a world that had rebelled against its Creator.

God had been grooming a leader for his people. But first he would have to twist the man’s arm. So God set out to do just that.

Moses was a miracle child, gifted and self-confident. When his mother hid him in the bulrushes, she knew he was special. When Pharaoh’s daughter found him, she also knew it. And as the story suggests, Moses was rather easily convinced, too.

So he began to act like someone special—killing an Egyptian taskmaster, for example, and burying the evidence in the sand. But Pharaoh heard. Gifted, self-confident Moses ran for his life.

God sent his servant out to herd sheep for 40 years, which was bitter medicine for a high-octane activist like Moses. But that’s just what he needed: high-IQ Moses, low-IQ sheep. Either the man cracks, or he learns patience. Moses learned patience.

In fact, Moses seems to have traded in all of his self-confidence for patience. First too eager, then too shy. That’s why God had to twist his arm.

First, God caught his attention with a burning bush. Moses took off his shoes and hid his face. God was there. The place was holy.

“My people are in deep trouble,” said God. “I’ve seen their bondage; I’ve heard their cry. Come, Moses. I’ll send you to Pharaoh, and you’ll set my people free.”

Now Moses may have traded self-confidence for patience. But patience wasn’t the only thing he’d learned while herding sheep. He had also learned to

talk with God. His shoes were off, his face hidden, but he wasn’t afraid to talk.

So God and Moses got into it. God asked him to go; Moses resisted—and pulled out a string of excuses that wouldn’t quit. Let’s listen.

Patience wasn’t the only thing Moses had learned while herding sheep. He had also learned to talk with God. His shoes were off, his face hidden, but he wasn’t afraid to talk.

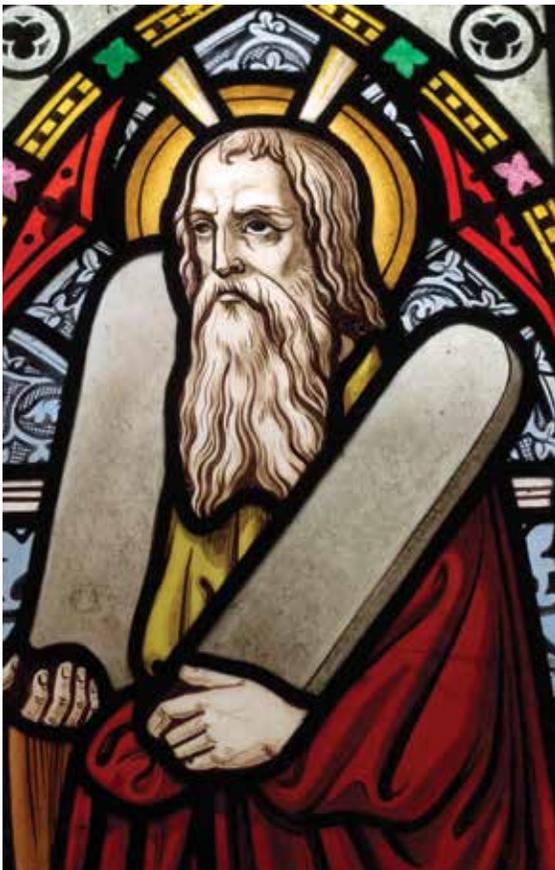
“Who do you think I am, anyway, that I should tell Pharaoh to let your people go?”

“Don’t worry,” urged God. “I’ll be with you and bring you back here to worship me at this mountain.”

“I don’t even know your name,” protested Moses. “When I tell the people, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me,’ they will ask me your name. What am I supposed to say?”

“Easy,” said God, “My name is ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ Just tell them the great ‘I AM’ has sent you.”

Moses might have seen a twinkle in God’s eye, had he been brave enough to peek. Did God really answer his question? Maybe. Yahweh (as it probably was pronounced in Hebrew) was a tantalizing name. His people would use it in worship. It would set their God apart from all others. Yet an awesome sense of mystery would always surround that name. No one



could ever plumb its depths.

But there was more. “Gather my people together and tell them the plan. Then go to Pharaoh and say: ‘Yahweh, the God of Israel, has told us to come worship Him in the desert.’ Pharaoh will resist, but after a few plagues he’ll give in. And the Egyptians won’t send you out empty-handed, but loaded with gifts.”

Moses shook his head. “They’ll never believe me. I can already hear the rollicking sneer: ‘Yahweh never appeared to you at all!’”

Watch out, Moses. This is where the conversation gets serious.

“What’s in your hand?” God asked innocently.

“My rod.”

“Throw it to the ground and see what happens,” suggested God. Moses dropped his rod, took one look, and ran. A live, writhing snake!

“Grab it by the tail,” God commanded. (Who else could get away with a risky mandate like that?)

Moses obeyed and got back his rod. Next God did a quick change with Moses’ hand: to leprosy and back. Impressive.

“Try those two signs on the people,” said God. “If that doesn’t work, pour out some water from the Nile. It will take a while, but the Nile will turn to blood. They’ll believe.”

“Oh Lord,” groaned Moses, “I’m just not a talker. My tongue always gets tangled.”

Moses was out of good excuses; God’s patience was wearing thin: “Who made your mouth and tongue, Moses? Who makes a man dumb or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, Yahweh? Now get going. I’ll take care of your mouth and tongue.”

Moses threw up his hands in despair: “Oh Lord,” he cried, “send someone else!”

And that’s when God got angry (Ex. 4:14). He made one last concession to his chosen but reluctant leader. “Alright, Moses, your brother Aaron can go along as your spokesman. Now, take your rod and go.”

Moses went. He couldn’t have guessed all of the great plans God had in store. Yahweh, the God of the burning bush, intended to set his people at the crossroads of the world to witness to the greatness of the God of gods and Lord of lords.

Winning back the world would not be easy. Yahweh’s own people, Israel, would waver in their faith. But now, Yahweh at least had Moses on his side, the gifted miracle child who had learned his lessons well among the sheep. He had learned to talk with God—bluntly, if necessary. He had learned to trust. And he had learned to obey.

Sequeira *continued from page 59*

Duffield: *The Return of the Latter Rain* and *Wounded in the House of His Friends*.

One of the main reasons the pioneers of the church failed to understand and appreciate the message of *Christ Our Righteousness*, presented in 1888, was because E.J. Waggoner and A.T. Jones presented it in the context of biblical solidarity, a concept foreign to the pioneers' thinking. Although most of the Adventist pioneers opposed the precious message, one who fully accepted and proclaimed it alongside Waggoner and Jones was Professor W.W. Prescott. At the General Conference of 1895, he presented a series of studies on *The Divine Human Family* that summed up the truth of *Christ Our Righteousness*.¹ These studies were clearly presented in the context of biblical solidarity. Here is Prescott's key statement on the subject, in the style of that time: "Jesus Christ was the representative of humanity, and all humanity centered in him, and when he took flesh, he took humanity. He took humanity and he became the father of this divine-human family, and he became the father by joining himself in this way to humanity, and the flesh which he took and in which he dwelt was our flesh, and we were there in him, and he in us, just as Levi was there in Abraham; and just as what Abraham did, Levi did in Abraham, so what Jesus Christ in the flesh did, we did in him. And this is the most glorious truth in Christianity. It is Christianity itself, it is the very core and life and heart of Christianity. He took our flesh, and our humanity was found in him, and what he did, humanity did in him."²

Understood in the context of biblical solidarity, here is how Paul expounds on the truth he presented in Romans 5:15-18: "For since by man came death, by

Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:21-22, NKJV). The *all* in the second statement refers to all of humanity; the believers at the second coming of Christ, and the unbelievers at his third coming. This is because Paul proves in context that Christ is the source of the resurrection of all mankind (verses 12-22).

Another gospel statement Paul makes in the light of biblical solidarity is found in 2 Corinthians 5:14: "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge [or are convinced] thus: that if One died for all, then all died" (NKJV). The text does not say "as if all died," as some of our scholars would like to interpret it.

Because some of our New Testament scholars today have failed to understand the concept of biblical solidarity, the basis of the 1888 message, they oppose the truth of Universal Legal Justification (ULJ), that on the cross the entire human race was actually legally justified to life (Rom. 5:18). And as long as we oppose this truth, as it is in Christ, many more will go down into Christless graves. Therefore, the question still remains, as posed by the subtitle of Ron Duffield's latest book, *Wounded in the House of His Friends*: "When Will the Aborted Latter Rain Resume?" 

Jack Sequeira is a retired pastor, missionary, and author who writes from Salem, Oregon.

¹ The series of sermons by Prescott, which were presented during the General Conference Session in Battle Creek, Mich., Feb. 1-13, 1895, have been published in pamphlet form by Dr. Richard Marker under the title *The Divine Human Family*, which is available from www.jacksequeira.org.

² W.W. Prescott, "All in Him," *The Divine Human Family*—No. 2. Originally published in *The General Conference Bulletin* Feb. 6, 1895, p. 24. Online at <http://docs.adventistarchives.org/docs/GCB/GCB1895-01-01ex.pdf#view=fit>

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EDITORIAL PHILOSOPHY

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the editorial board. One of the purposes of this magazine is to encourage dialogue between those of differing viewpoints within the Adventist Church. Thus, we will publish articles ranging throughout the conservative-liberal continuum.



Adventist Man

A SATIRICAL LOOK AT ADVENTIST LIFE

Welcome to Adventist Man!

If you've seen previous issues of this magazine, then a page near the back featuring white print on a red background is nothing new. But if you're holding *Adventist Today* in your hands for the first time, which might be the case if you received this issue at the General Conference Session, a bit of explanation—what Mark Twain called “splanning”—might be helpful.

Who is Adventist Man? I'm the guy you see at the upper left-hand corner of this page. “Adventist Man” is a humor column, and in the drawing I am flexing my muscles to intimidate you into laughing.

No, seriously. Who's writing this? Over the years there have actually been several different writers speaking as Adventist Man. My real identity is secret, but I am a Seventh-day Adventist member in good standing.

Isn't humor rather out of place in a church magazine? Probably not, since Psalm 2:4 asserts that “He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them [His enemies] in derision” (NKJV). The same God who didn't rebuke Elijah for satirically taunting the prophets of Baal, and who only gently rebuked senior-citizen Sarah for snickering at the thought that she could have a child, evidently approved of her naming her boy “Laughter.” So this same God can probably handle an occasional chuckle among his disciples.

Also, there's a very good chance that several of Jesus' parables evoked such chuckles, maybe

even hoots of laughter. A camel pressing its hairy nose against a needle's eye? A foolish farmer bumbling and fumbling as he tries to cobble together a vineyard tower without first counting the cost?

Maybe even the multiplied loaves and fishes were so mind-boggling that each new creaking basketful borne by a staggering disciple drew incredulous giggles. If, as Mark 12:37 says, “the common people heard Him [Jesus] gladly” (NKJV), wasn't this gladness expressed with more than huge eyes and solemn nods?

But again, why do we need a humor column in a deadly serious world? Actually, the focus of Adventist Man has changed over the years, depending on who was writing it. Some have chosen to use the kind of sharp-pointed irony and satire a few Old Testament prophets used. For a time, Adventist Man even used cartoons. I personally have been writing the column since 2011, and the editor and I decided to try a less satirical approach and to make the humor more gentle.

Your current Adventist Man didn't grow up as a Seventh-day Adventist. As I gradually got acquainted with church members, I found myself charmed and impressed by their sense of humor. The church back then took world conditions very seriously. Those were the days when Adventist pastors and evangelists mailed out brochures that pictured nearly empty hourglasses and clock hands that stood at 11:58 p.m. And behind those hourglasses and clock hands flamed orange nuclear mushroom clouds.

Yet these good people—pastors, evangelists, church school teachers—were able to see the

humorous side of life. Their ability to poke good-natured fun at each other was delightfully disarming. And it was also confidence-inspiring. Because these people seemed secure that the Judge of all the Earth was also a kind and loving heavenly Father, who would see them through life's darkest days. They felt that the Creator who had programmed humorous antics into cats and dogs and monkeys and frisky calves was Someone who, even in the presence of their enemies, could prepare them a table with a leisurely and sumptuous feast, where they needn't peer fearfully at their slavering foes but could relax and socialize.

I firmly believe that now, more than ever, even in the presence of enemies we never could have imagined back then, we desperately need to remember that though “a broken spirit dries the bones,” “a merry heart does good, like medicine” (Prov. 17:22, NKJV). That's why Adventist Man exists—for comic relief. Because those who lose their sense of humor are in mortal danger of fanaticism.

And that's no laughing matter.

So what do you say we lighten up a little?

Do you have a tough question? Adventist Man has “the answer.” As a former member of “the remnant of the remnant,” Adventist Man was ranked 8,391 of the 144,000—and working his way up. Now he relies solely on grace and friendship with Jesus. You can email him at atoday@atoday.org.

Hot GC News Coming Soon On Twitter from San Antonio*



****Service begins July 1***

Adventist Today will offer **BREAKING NEWS** about the General Conference Session, beginning July 1, with commentary and context about developments.

IMMEDIATE QUESTION-AND-ANSWER SERVICES will also be available for those who seek private responses and clarification on unfolding events.

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