Motion failed: a report on July 8 WO proceedings

Jul 09, 2015 03:27 pm | Rich Constantinescu

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Yes: 977 No: 1,381 Abstain: 5 Total: 2,363

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Has anybody seen my love?

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Our world is in a lot of trouble. I know this for two reasons. First and foremost, is the word of Christ, recorded in Matthew 24, and second is a brief brush with a family at a local store last night.

Perceived pro-WO wording recommended for church manual, debate ensues

Jul 07, 2015 06:17 am | Rich Constantinescu

“The next item” Wollan said, “to bring the harmony of the church manual in the way we use the term ‘pastor.’ Some places we use the term ‘minister,’ sometimes ‘pastor,’ and we are actually suggesting throughout the manual, to use the word ‘pastor’ instead of ‘minister’ . . . I so move.”

Accusing the brethren: an analysis of Nick Miller's 'final arguments'

Jul 06, 2015 09:02 am | Don Mackintosh

I have asked for my article "Accusing the brethren: an analysis of Nick Miller's 'final arguments'" to be pulled from ADvindicate's website.

The overlooked mandate from TOSC

Jul 05, 2015 02:21 pm | Nicholas Miller

We are heading into the final days before the discussion and vote at the General Conference on the ordination question facing the world church. There is really nothing more to be said about the substance of the underlying issues of gender and ordination.
NAD delegates display disapproval, but Wilson still wins by landslide

Jul 04, 2015 08:13 am | Rich Constantinescu

Raymond Hartwell of the North American Division (NAD) appeared at a microphone to speak. Hartwell briefly stated his respect for the church, the leaders, and the process and immediately requested that, the report of Wilson’s name be referred back to the committee.

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Motion failed: a report on July 8 WO proceedings

Rich Constantinescu

A subdued crowd of delegates and observers left the General Conference 2015 business session at the Alamodome Wednesday, some with slight smiles, some with looks of sadness, some in silence while others talked earnestly. It was a serious end to a day packed with briefings and deliberations about one subject—women’s ordination.

In a 1,381 to 977 decision, the church voted down the motion to allow division executive committees, as they may deem appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.

Wednesday morning before the vote, one could easily see the rise in attendance on the delegate floor and in the stands beyond. Some estimated there was two times the crowd than at some of the other sessions.

Vice President Michael Ryan chaired the session and introduced the item of “theology of ordination” to the body of delegates. Speaking to the assembly, Ryan said the church recognizes this item is not new, but “a road we have walked before.”

Noting there were differences of opinion, Ryan spoke of the “special spirit” present in the Annual Council in 2014 when the General Conference Executive Committee had this item place before them. Ryan attributed this spirit to the assembly taking time to ask for the Lord’s presence. Ryan urged that respect be shown to those who differed. He asked delegates to refrain from applause after comments. He then warned against speakers directing comments towards others during discussion, encouraging everyone to address him when they took the microphone, and speak to their own opinion rather than that of someone else.

Before opening the floor for discussion, for the benefit of delegates who may not know as much about the issue, Ryan invited President Ted Wilson to more fully introduce the agenda item.

Wilson indicated that the entire day was set aside for this issue, with much of it reserved for discussion. He expressed a “heartfelt desire” that the Holy Spirit control all of what took place that day. Wilson asked that no one would “use parliamentary process to cut off debate,” “table the item,” or “try to amend the motion” because he said, “a very careful approach has been taken to place this motion before the body.” He also strongly acknowledged “delegates have the right to do what they would like,” and said, “every delegate is to vote his or her own conscience after study and listening to the impressions of the Holy Spirit.”

Next President Wilson gave a brief history of the agenda item.

“The General Conference in various committees have studied this subject since the early seventies,” he said.
“During the General Conference Session in 1990, specifically on July 11, 1990, the session addressed the question as to the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, responding to a recommendation that came from the 1989 Annual Council that the church not move ahead with that process. The 1990 General Conference Session delegates voted and agreed with that recommendation and the current position that we have was maintained. In 1995 the issue was again addressed at the General Conference Session in Utrecht, Netherlands. On July 5, 1995, the General Conference Session received a request from the North American Division that was passed on to the session . . . There was no recommendation from the 1994 Annual Council to the General Conference Session. It was simply to pass on a request from one of the divisions, the North American Division, that the General Conference invests in each division the right to authorize ordination of individuals without regard to gender. The 1995 General Conference Session decided not to accept the request, and to maintain the current position of the world church."

Wilson described the forming of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) as a result of the plea of a delegate at General Conference Session 2010 in Atlanta. TOSC’s reports and consensus statement were given to the Annual Council of 2014, Wilson said, from which the motion arose for it to be taken to the General Conference Session 2015.

“This is important that you understand . . . The motion which was passed at the Annual Council coming here is a non-weighted, neutral question,” Wilson said. “It’s a non-neutral, non-directional question, a neutral question upon which you must decide yes or no … the General Conference Session owns this question, having considered it twice in the past.”

Citing the absence of the Urim and Thummim, hovering cloud in the tabernacle, pillar of fire, and a living prophet in our church today, Wilson said, what we have is what the Spirit of Prophecy indicates.

“When the General Conference is in session,” Wilson said, “it has authority, and in some cases, it indicates highest authority… I pledge to you today, that whatever this body votes, after prayerful consideration and review, one way or the other, I pledge to uphold that decision. I ask each of you to do the same. We need to be open to what God wants.”

Wilson closed his introduction with a reiteration and a charge.

“Your discussion and your decision will be based upon your personal study of the Bible, the spirit of prophecy, related materials, the guidance of the Holy Spirit,” he said. “There is an enormous mission and role ahead for God’s remnant church. That role is opening before us as we take our prophetic place in history to proclaim Revelation 14 and Revelation 18, which I might indicate was one of the chapters for us to read today in Revived By His Word. We are to proclaim the loud cry of the third angel, and accompanied by the fourth angel. Let us unite in Christ and His John chapter 17 wish that we may be one in him to accomplish his final plans for the salvation of humanity. Through the Holy Spirit’s power, He will use you and me as a united church. Arise, Shine, Jesus is coming!”

Vice President Artur Stele soon gave a brief report of TOSC and the various biblical research committees and announced that the consensus theology of ordination statement would be read to the delegates. He mentioned three different positions discussed in TOSC, summaries of which would be read to the group.

“This issue has the potential to distract us from the actual work we are called to,” Stele said. “And so . . . the world out there is dying without the knowledge, without the living bread, and we are here sitting on the bread continuing to argue who should deliver the bread to the dying world … Let us decide very quickly on the issue, and let us go about the mission of our Father. Let us not disappoint our Father.”

Ryan then introduced the reading of the synopses of the three positions that emerged as options from TOSC, which were read by Secretary Karen Porter.

Position 1 was against the ordaining of women to the gospel ministry. Position 2 supported the ordaining of women
to the gospel ministry. Position 3 acknowledged the headship of man found in the Bible, but was for the ordaining of women to the gospel ministry where divisions deem it appropriate or necessary.

A special time of prayer followed the reading of the positions.

Ryan asked Executive Secretary of the General Conference G.T. Ng to read an introductory statement, placing the question before the delegates. Ng read previous actions on the issue by two previous General Conferences and eventually posed the question to be voted on that day:

"After your prayerful study on ordination from the Bible, the writings of Ellen G. White, and the reports of the study commissions, and, after your careful consideration of what is best for the church and the fulfillment of its mission, is it acceptable for division executive committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry? Yes or No?"

After Ng finished reading, Ryan asked for clarification so everyone could clearly understand.

"If someone votes ‘yes’ on this question what does that mean?” Ryan said. “And if someone were to vote ‘no’ on this question, what does that mean?”

Ng thanked the chairman.

“‘Yes’ means the opposite of No,” Ng said.

The audience laughed.

“‘Yes’ means that the division executive committees are authorized by the world church, if they so desire, to ordain women to the gospel ministry within their own territory,” Ng said. “If the majority of the world church votes ‘no,’ that means divisions are not authorized by the world church to ordain women to the gospel ministry in their territory. That means the current church policy continues as they have been, and they are not to ordain women . . .”

Over a dozen people had already lined up at one of the microphones to speak. Each speaker would speak for a maximum of two minutes. Those needing translation would be allowed three minutes. Delegates for and against the motion would speak alternately.

North American Division Representative Ray Hartwell spoke in favor of women’s ordination, using as support Ellen White’s ordination by God and her statement that women should be pastors in the Testimonies to the Church. Hartwell referred to women receiving the Spirit in Joel 2 and suggested we may not be honoring God if we do not permit divisions to ordain.

Another North American Division Representative John Brunt was in favor of the motion. He compared withholding ordination from women to separation of Africans from whites in Southern Africa.

South American Division representative Carlos Steger spoke against the motion and affirmed the unity of the church. He quoted John 17:17 that says “sanctify them by thy truth.”

“We cannot have unity if we do not have truth,” Steger said.

The proposal to allow divisions to ordain would disunite the church, Steger said, and we would not be united by biblical truth.
Inter-European Division Representative Frank Hasel spoke against the motion. He urged prudence, warning against treating it as a fundamental belief. He asked how to protect the freedom of those who had a conscientious objection to female ministers and pointed out that those for women’s ordination do not have the same conscientious objections to male ministers as those objecting to women’s ordination.

North American Division Representative Larry Geraty said that the “so-called mission fields now comprise 90 percent of church membership” and appealed to the Global South members for missionary help to the NAD for church growth.

“[Those who] have ordained men . . . have already accommodated to modern custom without biblical authority,” Geraty said, “because there is no biblical basis for ordaining men as we practice them. There are many examples of the Global North being willing to accommodate customs of the Global South in our worldwide church . . .”

West-Central Africa Division Representative Uchechukwu Nwadike spoke against the motion.

“Jesus is the truth, the way, and the life,” Nwadike said. “If Jesus is the truth, He practiced the truth, He did the truth, He taught us the truth, and so if Jesus is the truth, and did not ordain any woman to the gospel ministry, and that is truth, we should follow the truth and nothing but the truth, and it shall be well with the church.”

Others spoke before the lunch break, and when the break arrived and people were still in line, they were promised their places would be kept.

North American Division representative Bradford Newton spoke after lunch in favor of women’s ordination on the basis that it is best for our youth, our need to evangelize, and to submit to each other.

General Conference Representative Mario Veloso said that in the many years he had participated in these committees, the arguments for the ordination of women had not changed.

“Accept the same way of reading the Scriptures, not having two different ways,” Veloso said. “One, the biblical. The other, cultural. We need to stick with the Bible.”

North American Division Representative Marc Woodson expressed his fear that many are elevating the issue to a testing truth. He said it wasn’t, and urged that unity is not uniformity.

General Conference Representative Doug Batchelor spoke against the motion, briefly giving his testimony of searching for the true church and how he found the Seventh-day Adventist church. He said that fulfillment of the Spirit falling in Joel 2 does not require ordination and noted successful soul winners of both genders that Amazing Facts trains in its school of evangelism. Batchelor warned if the church has two theologies of ordination, it will send a message of confusion to the world.

“We’re living in very interesting times, with same-sex marriage and transgender bathrooms,” he said. “Our culture is awash in gender confusion, and I think this is not time for us to get fuzzy about what the differences are between men and women, which I believe is very clearly defined in the Bible.”

Batchelor suggested we consider that other churches have accepted women’s ordination and have had their mission negatively affected.

Inter-European Division Representative and conference president in Belgium Jeroen Tuinstra spoke in favor of women’s ordination and said he was “just trying to keep this church real.”

Tuinstra had earlier spoken in favor of accepting homosexuals in church fellowship as well as those in heterosexual live-in relationships.

“Reality in my part of the world is that God is calling women to the full ministry and leadership,” he said.
Tuinstra told of a young lady who felt the call of God to be a pastor and cried because “her church saw her as less capable, as less called.”

Euro-Asia Division Representative Guillermo Biaggi shared reasons for his convictions for a ‘no’ vote.

“Decided not to challenge or question the Lord on what he has not revealed, or has revealed,” he said. “It would be better for our church to have one body of ordained pastors for all the world, and not to have different bodies of ordained pastors by divisions. We need to learn of the experience of other Christian churches that had decided this question in a positive way and later they have followed with undesirable and unethical decisions.”

Biaggi concluded it would be difficult to explain to other Christians that Adventists are a Bible-based church if they voted ‘yes’ on women’s ordination.

For the rest of the afternoon, arguments expanded and recapitulated familiar sentiments.

North American Division Representative Jay Gallimore spoke of the divine order God outlined at creation with special roles for both male and female.

“It is to that divine order that the apostle Paul appealed when he reserved the office of elder for a man,” Gallimore said. “He was directing the church into the same order established at creation, the sanctuary, and Jesus’ twelve apostles … the gifts of the spirit, of which pastoring is one, are given to everyone, including children. Children may have the gift of spiritual nurture, as well as men and women, but the office of overseeing the church and the family is reserve for men.”

If the body voted ‘no,’ Gallimore said, “a large portion of North America will bless you.”

North American Division Representative Roscoe Howard spoke in favor of the motion.

“Culture is so pervasive that we cannot get away from it . . . culture invades everything,” Howard said.

North American Division Marvin Ray noted that while the membership of North America has become a minority in the world church, its finances remain a majority. Thus he asked the Global South to give the minority understanding and compassion.

“As you were being formed and growing, we strove to give you the tools and understanding within your culture,” Ray said, asking that variance be allowed to divisions if the motion did not passed.

He said that if this were not done a ‘no’ vote would be both divisive and destructive.

North American Division Representative Louis Torres spoke to the issue of conflict within divisions on this issue. He pointed out that the Guam/Micronesia mission of the NAD, which is very evangelistic, is not in support of ordaining women. He noted that other conferences in the NAD are not in favor as well. Torres said that the Spirit of God was using women evangelistically in his field without them being ordained.

The chair then invited former President of the General Conference Jan Paulsen to address delegates.

Paulson said because a ‘no’ vote would “cause rupture and serious damage to our global church,” the church should vote ‘yes.’

He pointed to his leadership roles for most of fifty-five years in the church.

“For the record, the spirit that guided me during the years when I provided leadership for the church did not leave me when I left office,” he said. “I believe that I know this church . . . well. I know what it is that holds us together.”
Paulsen then spoke directly to African delegates, asking they trust church leadership, assuring them of his love and investment in Africa. Paulsen’s statements were not well received by some of the African delegates, who could be heard protesting his comments directed at them.

North American Division Representative Jim Howard addressed some of the comments regarding Ellen White.

“Ellen White uses the term ‘pastor’ and the term ‘pastoral labor’ to refer to anyone who exercises the spiritual gift of pastoring, the nurturing of the flock through personal visitation and ministry,” he said. “Ellen White describes pastor’s wives and even church members doing pastoral labor, but when speaking of the office of minister, Ellen White writes, ‘The primary object of our college was to afford young men an opportunity to study for the ministry, and to prepare young persons of both sexes to become workers in the various branches of the cause.’”

He noted that Ellen White here in Testimonies volume 5 p. 60 identified young men for the ministry, and persons of both sexes for other branches of the cause. Howard then quoted Testimonies volume 5 p. 597, saying, “Those who enter the missionary field should be men and women who walk and talk with God. Those who stand as ministers in the sacred desk should be men of blameless reputation.”

Ellen White was making a distinction in both of those places, Howard said, also speaking to the problem of assuming that divisions within themselves were united on the issue. He said this “is simply not the case. In the North American Division there is a sharp divide on this issue.”

General Conference Representative Natasha Neblett spoke against the motion.

“If the division has not acknowledged all the convictions within their own division, how can we anticipate that they will appreciate and be considerate of the convictions of the world church on other issues, when we have once set a precedent that each locality can decide for itself?” She said. “I am a young woman, a young adult, an ethnic minority, and the leader of one of the largest youth movements in Adventism . . . God has already called me to work for Him, and that is all the calling I need. While people recognize my work as president of the young adult conference, they should give more recognition when I become a wife next February and a mother after that, since the Spirit of Prophecy says, that that position is higher than the minister in the desk, and the king on his throne. We should focus on giving that the dignity and honor that it deserves. I say ‘no’ to the question and ‘no’ to dividing the church.”

Ryan gave President Wilson the opportunity to speak. Wilson asked for the clock to be set to two minutes like the rest of the delegates.

“With all humility and with respect I speak to my brothers and sisters,” Wilson said. “Most of you know already where I stand on this issue. I humbly submit that my views are rather well known, and I believe very biblically based. Plainly said, but I will not refer to them after this. I don’t want anyone to misunderstand. I have heard the angst and the emotional deep feeling by so many. I think we all hold these views rather strongly. But let me give you a very strong, pastoral appeal. I believe we need to stay together as a church in making a united decision, not separately. We have had a fair and open process. Our real challenge for the future, Brother Chair, is to maintain a sweet spirit. After the vote is when we really will be tested, whichever way it goes. I want us to focus on the mission, and upon evangelism and not continue agitation on either side for this issue. The mission of the church is so precious to all of us. We have been entrusted with the proclamation of the Three Angels Messages and today we are reading Revelation 18, the fourth angel. My dear Brother Chair and the rest, I will be praying. Let us stay together.”

At 4:30 p.m. discussion was closed. Several attempts were made to postpone the decision until the next day, which were unsuccessful. Delegates voted by secret ballot.
The motion failed.
Church votes not to allow divisions to ordain women to the gospel ministry

Shane Hilde

July 8, 2015

Is it acceptable for division executive committees, as they may deem it appropriate in their territories, to make provision for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry?

Yes: 977
No: 1,381
Abstain: 5

Total: 2,363

A more detailed report to follow.

1.1K332
Has anybody seen my love?

Gerry Wagoner

July 7, 2015

Our world is in a lot of trouble. I know this for two reasons. First and foremost, is the word of Christ, recorded in Matthew 24, and second is a brief brush with a family at a local store last night.

Jesus gazed down the corridor of time towards the end and warned us that, “because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold...[but] he who endures to the end shall be saved” (NKJV, Matthew 24:12).

IT’S PROBABLY THE ONE THING WE ALL AGREE ON

Love. We all love it. Everybody needs it. It is probably the one thing that the world and the church agree on (other than that fast food is quick, and that governments tend to be corrupt). The Bible says, "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." The world says, "That's right, except for the God part," and "All you need is love, man!" But what kind of love are we talking about here? There are different kinds, no? Come with me to Rome, A.D. 67.

Life was winding down for Paul. Though on death row, he had time for writing. In his follow-up letter to his Christian friend Timothy—after speaking encouraging words—Paul tells us that one of his traveling associates had fallen in love (2 Timothy 4:10). "Mr. Wagoner, that is soooooo romantic!" Hold on. What kind of love was it, and who or what is being loved?

"Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world." Translation "I'm outta here dudes." Just as there are different types of love (agape, storge, philio, and eros) there are different objects for it, and some of them are diametrically opposed to God. In fact, the more we love God, the more we hate the things He hates and the more we love this "present world" the less able we are to care about the one to come.

MAY THIS BE THE BEST YEAR OF YOUR LIFE

So we stopped at a local store last night to uhh . . . refuel. As my wife and I walked towards the store, a woman and a cute little girl got out of a vehicle parked by the sidewalk. A man (a male anyway) rolled down the driver's window and screamed at the woman and the little girl. Get your *#@&*%!! in there, you #$@&%*! The woman flinched—she glanced at us, dropped her eyes and entered the store. After making our selections inside, we approached the woman. As we talked with her the daughter came over and sat next to us. They both responded to respect and kindness. My wife affirmed the woman as a mother, and her countenance lit up; the little girl broke into a beautiful smile. Everybody needs love, friend. As we left, I told the mother & daughter "May this be the best year of your life." She teared up slightly as she thanked us. But our kindness didn’t solve all her problems.

On the ride home, Nancy and I discussed this family, how anger damages people, and how true love brings hope and healing. We prayed for the mother, the daughter, and the live-in "lover" (some lover, huh?). Had I an opportunity to speak with the angry chap, I would have asked him "Has your life turned out the way you hoped it would?" Such questions—spoken kindly—go to the heart of a person, unearthing rocks of regret and the pain of loneliness. It can make us aware that something authentic is missing. And something is missing for a growing number of people on earth. "The love of many shall grow cold. . ." I ask myself, "Gerry, has anybody seen your love?" Praying for people can help keep your love alive—perhaps theirs too.

TWO KINDS OF LOVE DESCRIBED IN THE BIBLE
So the next time you hear these idioms: "For the love of Mike!" (Or Pete), "Love makes the world go round", "Misery loves company", "All you need is love" and its churchy counterpart "Just preach love not doctrine, man!" ask this critical question. "What kind of love are they talking about?" Is it biblical? Surprisingly, it actually is.

Though this kind of love is found in the Bible, it's described as the wrong kind of love. There are those who "love darkness" in John 3:19. The Bible excludes from heaven those who "make and love a lie" (Revelation 22:15). The "love of money is the root of many evils" (1 Timothy 6:10), and of course, we have the potluck posse in Matthew 23:6 "They love the best seats at feasts." Available in many flavors, false love is almost worse than true hatred.

Real love--that walked among us

Now let's turn our attention to real love--the power of creation, the pulse of harmony that runs the universe. It walked among us (John 1:14). And we still can't get over it.

A new concept of agape came into a Roman world filled with cruelty and despair. This love embodied in the life, death, and resurrection of a lone Galilean man named Jesus. He brought to view in His life a love that overturned all human values because it revealed dimensions of God's character that no one had thought possible. Jesus was God's Son and He died as a cosmic outcast nailed to a Roman cross! People couldn't get over the idea. We still can't!

Jesus had revealed a love that went as far as hell and out the other side, redeeming lost humanity. God Himself was seeking man—not vice versa—and the price He was willing to pay was infinitely individualized. That is, each human being was individually the object of that divine love.

END OF TIME MARKED BY LOSS OF TWO ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

And Jesus predicted that the end of time would be marked by the loss of two essential ingredients: faith and love. He foresaw our time as a predominantly post-Christian culture when He said, "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love (agape) of most will grow cold" (Matthew 24: 12). Christ's word for wickedness (anomia in Greek) literally means lawlessness in the sense of rebellion against the holy Law of God. It is a lighthearted irreverence for God's will, an open avowal of selfishness, an arrogant flaunting of ultimate judgment. As lawlessness rises above our ankles, a haunting cry echoes around the earth "Has anybody seen my love?"

As the end nears, we rise to discover that life is distilled down to two choices. We can drift towards the finish, bobbing on a river of lawlessness disguised as love. Or, we can open our hearts to the richness and purity of true love—a stream flowing from God to humanity. As true love is exalted, counterfeit love is exposed for what it is. That which lures Demas away from Paul stands condemned alongside the clamor of public wrath at a convenient store. Yet, there is still hope. For now.

"He that endures till the end shall be saved." Each of us is created with the unique ability to give and receive love. The enemy knows this, and he is working to deadbolt our hearts in order to block our ability to give and receive true love. Thus blocked, we cannot fulfill the purpose for which we are created. Locked to love, a heart grows cold, impenetrable and irredeemable.

So, how do we unlock a padlocked heart to receive God's love, so we can love again? Simple—we repent of spiritual or emotional issues that we have allowed to enchain our hearts. To the Demas' among us, we repent of our temporal desires. For example, the angry abusive person repents of bitterness and forgives people who have wounded them. We need help for this. Jesus is the great heavenly Counselor, able to both reveal the padlocks and break them apart. If you sense that something is holding you back, use that awareness to call to God. "God, what is there in my life that you would like me to resolve? What is it that You would like to heal?" The Spirit of God will then put His finger on unresolved issues in our hearts (1 John 3:20). Sometimes we are hanging on to bitterness, fear, envy, pain or lust. We wrongly believe that these sins define us, not realizing these sins are lies waiting to be
confronted with Truth. Truth plus humility leads us to repentance. “Except you become as little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

HOW TO BE FOUND BY THE GENUINE THING

Repentance? That’s about as popular as trimming ear hair with a cheese grater! Yet repentance is absolutely essential. Said Jesus “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” and “Unless you repent, you will all perish” (Matthew 4:17; Luke 13:5). In the past, God overlooked much of our ignorance, but now commands all of us to repent (Acts 17:30).

Our lawless culture responds with “But Jesus hung out with sinners, man!” Take heed, friend. Jesus hung out with sinners who wanted out--not with those who wanted to lead Him into evil. Has anybody seen my love? Repentance and humility will bring it back in power.

Just as surely as we repent of our counterfeits, we shall be found by the genuine. Found by a love that brings joy and obedience into our hearts.
Perceived pro-WO wording recommended for church manual, debate ensues

Rich Constantinescu

San Antonio dawned cloudy July 5, giving delegates and guests welcome relief from the searing Texas sun as they walked to the Alamodome for the General Conference Business Session. As the morning wore on and clouds dissipated, temperatures rose—not just outside.

Church Manual Committee officers were presenting amendments to the church manual, which is the guide for daily church activity, while Chairman of the General Conference business session Geoffrey Mbwana presided.

Committee officers in attendance were Chair Armando Miranda and Secretary Harald Wollan, who introduced an amendment to the church manual that sparked controversy.

“The next item" Wollan said, “to bring the harmony of the church manual in the way we use the term ‘pastor.’ Some places we use the term ‘minister,’ sometimes ‘pastor,’ and we are actually suggesting throughout the manual, to use the word ‘pastor’ instead of ‘minister’ . . . I so move.”

The motion received a second from the delegates, and soon Mbwana opened the floor for discussion.

Before recognizing delegate speakers, based on a previous item’s quick referral back to the committee, Mbwana asked delegates to postpone immediately referring items to the committee.

“I would advise that you be sensitive to those who are on a microphone,” Mbwana said. “Delay your desire that the item be referred back just to give a little time to others . . .”

Delegate representative from the General Conference Mario Veloso, the first speaker on the floor, spoke against the committee’s motion.

“This change that we have here is much more than just changing the word ‘ministers’ to ‘pastors,’” Veloso said. “It actually changes the language too, and the language is becoming now a gender-inclusive reading, and eliminating entirely the phrase ‘to give men’ be changed for ‘to give individuals.’”

Veloso went on to describe two problems with the proposed changes to the church manual.

“It is a little bit too fast,” Veloso said. “We have the item to be discussed on Wednesday. We should wait until after Wednesday, if we will go into the inclusive language or not.”

The second problem with the motion, according to Veloso, was that replacing “pastors” for “ministers” confused “the clear difference between the office of minister and the gift of pastor” in the writings of Ellen White. Veloso warned against “creating some other offices.”

However, in harmony with Mbwana’s request to not refer the item back to committee immediately, Veloso postponed his motion.

“So I would not make a motion at this point, Brother Chairman,” he said, “but if you needed one anytime, I would be willing to do it.”

Afterwards, delegate and GC representative Clinton Wahlen spoke.
“I think the language that is present now in the church manual is far clearer based on the study of ordination that we have done over the last several years,” Wahlen said in agreement with Veloso. “. . . Our pioneers . . . including James White did not prefer the term ‘pastor.’ They understood that to refer to more the idea of a settled pastor who is exercising gifts of pastoring, and they preferred the term ‘minister’.

Wahlen advised that if consistency is desired, we should make the manual consistent by retaining the word ‘minister’ when we refer to an office, and ‘pastor’ when we refer to the gift of pastoring. Wahlen then directed delegates to a book he had co-authored with his wife “Women’s Ordination: Does it Matter?” where they discussed this issue, as well as to the Council of Adventist Pastors’ website OrdinationTruth.com.

The next speaker, South Africa-Indian Division representative Qedumusa Mathonsi reiterated the concern noted by the first two delegates that the motion was “preemptive . . . in the light of the discussions on Wednesday.” So Mathonsi suggested, "let's wait [to see] whether we want to be inclusive in language."

General Conference representative Gerard Damsteegt added his concerns.

“Mr. Chairman, the TOSC (Theology of Ordination Study Committee) papers have been recommended to be studied by every delegate,” Damsteegt said. “In those TOSC papers we discovered that there are clear distinctions between ministers and pastors. If you study the book of Ephesians, you'll find that pastoring is a gift, teaching is a gift, apostleship is a gift, prophecy is a gift, but minister is an elected office, right from the very, very beginning. In fact, our people, our pioneers make a distinction between two types of elders. One is the local elder, the next one was the one who had oversight over a number of churches, basically called now ‘minister.’ So when Ellen White talks about the thing she doesn’t have in mind the office of pastor, but a function, a gift . . . At the same time if you eliminate this, if you accept this motion, there is nothing anymore in the church manual that refers to ministers as men. So this is a very, very important change that many, many understand, but if you keep it in mind in the light of the Bible, and the Bible only, you see that pastoring is a gift. Ministers need to have this gift, but at the same time they have the gift of overseeing, and so keep in mind that this is a very important point.”

A point of order was called by North American Division representative Israel Leito.

He requested Mbwana prevent “the group from non-official commercials,” which was followed by applause from some of the delegates.

Mbwana then advised “all the speakers not to indulge in any commercial promotions or items during the business of the session,” and reminded all present to abstain from applause.

Church Manual Committee Chair Miranda interjected, “In 2010, [the Church] accepted and voted the terms used in the church manual. And it is in the church manual, the difference used between the words ‘pastor’ and ‘minister.’ It's already there. The only thing we are doing or bringing to you today . . . is to align this section of the church manual with the term we already voted in 2010. Perhaps the only thing we need to perhaps review, if the group is not comfortable with that, is on line 9, 'licensed pastor,' the phrase ‘to give individuals.’”

General Conference representative Angel Rodriguez spoke next.

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General Conference representative Angel Rodriguez spoke next.

“The discussion of the ordination of women to the ministry, or not, should be left for Wednesday,” Rodriguez said. “The arguments presented by people on one side of the issue has also been answered on people on the other side of the question. So I would ask the chair to rule out any attempt to transform the discussion of this item into a discussion of the ordination of women to the ministry.”

Mbwana agreed.

North American Division President Dan Jackson spoke next.
“With all due respect,” Jackson said, “with love extended to my brethren I have two points. Item number one. This item is not referencing women’s ordination at all. This item is related as a general statement about the licensure that is extended to those who are being given the opportunity to expand the ministerial gift to grow. That’s item number one. Item number two, and I think we need to be very, very clear, that by being inclusive here, we are recognizing the policies of the General Conference, which allow for women to serve as pastors. There is no linkage in the discussion that will be undertaken on Wednesday between women’s ordination and female pastors. I think we need to understand that very clearly, and I know some would wish otherwise, but in a technical sense, that which will take place on Wednesday should not even be a discussion on women’s ordination, but rather that divisions be given the opportunity to review this matter then to either approve it, or disapprove it as is the need in their division. So with all due respect, I appreciate what has been said, but the reality is, that this discussion today really has nothing to do with anything other than licensure, as I see it.”

Representative of the Trans-European Division Samuel Davis took the floor.

“Many of us have female pastors who are working for us,” Davis said, “and regardless of the vote on Wednesday, they will continue to work for us after this session concludes.” He urged the need for gender inclusivity and stated his agreement with the proposed amendment.

NAD representative Elizabeth Talbot followed Dan Jackson at the microphone.

“Yeah, Mr. Chairman, regarding the same points as the last two comments, I want to remind the delegates that in 1985, 30 years ago, already we voted for the fact that there could be licensed women pastors,” Talbot said, “and that is not on the floor at this time. Neither will it be on Wednesday, so many of us who have been pastors, in my case for fifteen years, have been pastors within the General Conference approved position of licensed/commissioned pastors. So at this time, any discussion that takes us out of that, should not be taken by the chair, because it’s not the discussion on the floor. And actually for a movement that was to go forward, we cannot go backwards 30 years from this.”

Eight more individuals waited by microphones.

Before acknowledging any further speakers, Mbwana said, “If I see us begin to repeat ourselves, I may make a request that unless you have something different than has already been mentioned that we would like to proceed . . . .”

The chair soon acknowledged NAD delegate Mike Cauley at the microphone.

Cauley lamented that North America, Europe, and Australia have very little representation in the decisions that are made.

“In the case of female pastors please allow us to view it from our culture, as well as others’ cultures,” Cauley said.

Then a request from an Inter-American Division delegate asked for “a more vigorous explanation . . . with background information and rationale for those changes.”

Afterwards NAD delegate Shirley Chung moved to stop debate.

Louis Torres moved a point of order, noting Mbwana requested that delegates not make motions until everybody had opportunity to speak.

Torres further noted there were others who wanted to make motions before, so to stop discussion now would be out of order.

Mbwana said the motion did not allow for discussion, and the assembly would proceed to take the vote.
“Let me make an appeal to you, the person who made the motion,” Mbwana said to Chung. “In honor of a commitment I made previously, which I would like to honor and that is, Shirley, if you would allow me to entertain a motion I promised previously I would entertain, which would possibly have the same effect, if you don’t mind. Shirley Chung?”

Chung replied, that she did mind, but if that was, “what the chair want[ed] to do,” she would “back off of it.”

After thanking her for her understanding, Mbwana asked someone to make a motion to uphold what he had previously stated. So Torres said, “the chair had requested no motions until everyone had the opportunity to speak.”

Mbwana apologized for making a mistake.

General Conference representative Mario Veloso spoke next.

“When I spoke before,” Veloso said, “I said I would like to make a motion later on, after the discussion, would you allow that?”

Mbwana asked that the next person speak first and they would come back to Veloso.

The next person, Cecil Perry, then spoke.

“We may say it has nothing to do with what is coming on Wednesday,” Perry said, “but you will understand that perception is greater than reality, and whatever we may do, Wednesday is still in this room.”

There was laughter and applause.

Mbwana then asked that the body entertain a motion.

Neil Nedley was next to speak.

“If we are getting rid of the term ‘ministers’ in the church manual, which was stated this change would do, and there is no more reference to ‘ministers,’ then if we adopt this change, we can cancel Wednesday altogether,” Nedley said, “because that is talking about ordaining ministers—which we [will] no longer have in the church manual.”

Church Manual Committee Chair Miranda spoke in defense of the proposed manual revision.

“Most areas in the world church use ‘pastor’ to identify a member of the clergy,” he said, “so the term is used in these pages, rather than the ‘minister’. Regardless of the responsibilities, use of the term here is not intended to mandate the usage where the custom is to use ‘minister’ . . .”

South Pacific Division delegate Ray Roennfeldt pointed out that this change could cause difficulty with the licensing language.

“I’m happy with the change as the church manual is amended,” Roennfeldt said, “but I just wanted to point out that the licenses and credentials that we give are called ministerial licenses and ministerial credentials, and so I’m wondering whether . . . they would be called pastoral licenses and pastoral credentials?”

Manual Committee Secretary Wollan spoke to Roennfeldt’s concerns, saying the committee only deals with the manual and not with the working policy, so he couldn’t speak to that.

General Conference delegate Doug Batchelor followed, speaking against the committee’s motion.

“Friends, in light of what’s coming Wednesday, and listening to the other comments, I do believe that this is directly connected with the subject of ordination that will be addressed,” Batchelor said, “because I notice on line nine in the recommended change it says, ‘to give men,’ and the word ‘men’ is struck out, and it then supplies ‘pastors’ with
Batchelor said he agreed with what Damsteegt said.

"...There is a big biblical difference," Batchelor said. "It's not a cultural issue. There is a big biblical difference between the gifts of the spirit and ordained offices, or chosen offices. So I would recommend against these changes and I would support the motion that we question the initial motion and vote on it."

Batchelor recommended sending the proposed amendment back to the committee, at least until after Wednesday's vote, because the amendment would strike the "men" language from the manual and change "ministers" to "pastors."

Mbwana had previously asked to entertain a motion and now asked Batchelor if he wanted to move his recommendation. Batchelor said, "yes, that was intended to be a motion."

The motion to refer the proposed amendment back to the committee was seconded. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

With the motion carried, Secretary Wollan began to introduce the next item, one of credentialed speakers, but was interrupted by Elizabeth Talbot's point of order.

"Yes, I believe there is a violation of parliamentary procedure going on already three times this morning," Talbot said to Mbwana. "You said you would entertain the call to question before, and you have decided which motion you take, even though there were two previous motions and there was a call to question, so I believe there is a procedural problem going on right here."

"I'm sorry for that," Mbwana said, "and probably I missed that, and I apologize --"

"Aside from apologizing," Talbot interrupted, "it's time that we go to the previous question that had been called, so aside from your sorriness, we should do something about it."

"We had passed that and were on a new item I suppose," Mbwana said.

"No," Talbot said, "it was a call to question that you requested to delay for more comments."

"Which I did" Mbwana said, "until I found that there is a repetition and I requested that the speakers that were standing on the microphone to bear with me so that I could take the motion which was previously moved."

"Correct, and then you must take the motion before," Talbot said. "How can you choose?"

"The motion that I chose came prior to the motion you are referring to --"

"No, it did not!" Talbot interrupted again.

Mbwana thanked Talbot.

"I think that's my understanding," Mbwana said. "That's how I viewed it, and that's why I proceeded the way I did."

NAD representative Jay Gallimore called a point of order and was recognized.

"Brother Chairman," Gallimore said, "it's complicated. I think you've been working your way through it very carefully, and I want to commend you for doing it, thank you."

Applause.
Mbwana attempted to keep the assembly from applauding.

Trans-European Division representative Megen Mole moved a point of order and appealed a previous decision made by Mbwana. When asked which decision she was appealing, Mole retracted, saying, "Never mind, sorry sir."

The first speaker Mario Veloso, who initially planned to make the same motion as Batchelor, returned to the microphone.

“When I spoke” Veloso said to Mbwana, “I reserved the possibility of making a motion. . . but since you accepted a later motion, I want to support your ruling on that . . . I would to request the privilege of having the motion to remain since it is already an accepted one, I want to support this one, and the chair, which is to me, doing a good job.”

Several other points of order were lined up, and another delegate expressed sorrow at the chairman being attacked.

The motion stood, and the proposed revision to the church manual was returned to the committee for review.
Dear readers,

I have asked for my article "Accusing the brethren: an analysis of Nick Miller's 'final arguments'" to be pulled from ADvindicate's website. The reason for this is that my response, though containing many valid points, helpful concerns and an encouraging testimony from Dr. Jerry Moon, could have been written differently. It was too personal and assumed a knowledge of the situation that those involved in the in-house deliberations of TOSC held. Some have viewed this as a personal attack on Miller. This was not my intent. I do not question Bro. Miller's commitment to the church, nor do I question that he truly believes the third option he has promoted will bring unity to the church.

The accusations used against what I believe are Miller's accusations against the top leadership of the church, were also accusations, and simply put, two wrongs don't make a right! I humbly offer a sincere apology to both Nick Miller and those who have read my response for not placing the best possible construction on my brother's words.

I trust my apology will be accepted in like spirit, and whatever the future discussion and vote of this issue, I recommit myself to communicating in a Christlike, generous manner.

Sincerely,

Don Mackintosh
The overlooked mandate from TOSC

Nicholas Miller

July 5, 2015

We are heading into the final days before the discussion and vote at the General Conference on the ordination question facing the world church. There is really nothing more to be said about the substance of the underlying issues of gender and ordination. Enough articles, papers, books, sermons, and videos have been created on both sides of the question to sink a battleship, or two. I have contributed my share to this tsunami of opinion, and I do not plan to add to it here.

But what has not been discussed sufficiently, in my opinion, is the posture in which this issue is being brought before the General Conference. Can anyone else remember a time where a significant issue of church practice and belief has been brought to the floor of the GC with no recommendation from a body responsible to examine the issue? The GC in session is just not a workable forum in which to deal with an issue from the foundation up. Can you imagine a topic relating to creation, the Sabbath or the state of the dead, coming to the floor of the GC, with no recommendation from an appropriate study body or group? All the other substantive theological issues coming to the floor this time, such as creation, the authority of Scripture, and homosexuality, come as proposed changes that have been reviewed and recommended by a number of committees, including Annual Council.

But, we are told, on the issue of ordination, no consensus or mandate was achieved by any responsible group. The whole matter is being given to the delegates with no recommendation from any body or group, whether the TOSC, the BRI, or Annual Council. This itself would seem to indicate that the question being reviewed is primarily one of church policy, and not centrally a theological issue. But more than this, what we are being told simply is not true: the TOSC did provide a mandate, a super majority as to how the church should move forward on the ordination question.

As a member and active participant of the TOSC, I am particularly concerned and disturbed that the truth of this matter is being obscured. When the church prays for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, spends hundreds of thousands, and even millions of dollars, contributes thousands of man-and-woman hours of its scholars and leaders on a process, and then denies or ignores the results of that process, we are in danger of denying the leading of the Holy Spirit.

For whatever reasons, the administrators leading out in how this question is being framed for the GC are choosing to ignore the following fact about the TOSC: A super-majority of TOSC delegates, more than two-thirds, came to agreement on the following two points:

1. The world church should affirm the special role the Bible assigns to men as spiritual leaders, responsible for their homes, providing loving, self-sacrificing, servant leadership for their wives and children, and in the role of ordained minister in the church; but

2. The world church should also recognize that biblical spiritual leaders were chosen to further the mission and unity of God’s people, and that biblical examples and principles reveal that if unity and mission can be better met by female spiritual leadership, including in the office of ordained pastor, then Divisions should be allowed to do this in those Unions that deem it necessary, while protecting the religious liberty of those churches and conferences that differ.

This remarkable super-majority mandate was reached by combining the votes of group three (who agree on the ideal of male leadership, but also desired to allow a variance for female leadership) with group one (who supported male leadership) to achieve a 2/3+ support for point one. Then, the votes of group three combined with group two...
(who desired to allow for a variance) achieved a 2/3+ support for point two.

Thus, the super-majority consensus of the TOSC was that the church recognize a default position of male leadership in the office of ordained minister, but that it permit Divisions to allow Unions to ordain women ministers where it would further the unity and mission of the church.

Various groups within the church perhaps have vested interests in ignoring or overlooking these clear recommendations from TOSC. The bridge building work of group three is simply not reflected in the actual motion that is being voted on by the delegates. The irony is that all three positions will be read and described, but then the vote will come down to a choice between positions 1 (no allowance for women ordained ministers) and 2 (allow Divisions to decide to ordain women).

PRESERVING HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES RELATING TO MARRIAGE, FAMILY AND THE SABBATH

Some will argue that there is no difference between the outcome of positions 2 and 3, but this is simply not true. Position 2 allows any Division to choose to ordain women whenever they desire. Position 3, on the other hand, creates a presumption of male ministerial leadership. Unions will need to provide a clear showing of need to their Divisions to change this. It is an approach that, unlike position 2, preserves important hermeneutical principles that relate also to marriage, family, and the Sabbath.

For this reason, delegates should be allowed to vote to support either position 1, 2, or 3, and give direction to the General Conference committee to make policies consistent with the position laid down by the most widely supported position. Otherwise, church leadership is engineering a vote that does not allow the consideration of the position to which the Holy Spirit led TOSC.

To ignore the leading of the Holy Spirit is a dangerous posture for anyone, but especially for leaders of God’s church, as it will cause great harm to the body of Christ. We pray that even now steps can be taken to bring the TOSC mandate before the delegates gathered at the General Conference, and that a fair vote on all three positions be permitted.
NAD delegates display disapproval, but Wilson still wins by landslide

Rich Constantinescu

Delegates to the General Conference Session are enjoined with the task of choosing the world-church president for the next five years, a duty many of them believe is a solemn responsibility that requires much prayer and wisdom.

On July 2, the first day of the General Conference Session 2015, each division met privately to choose nominating committee members. Then division representatives selected a name for presidency to submit to the General Conference full business session, which met the next day.

At 10:45 a.m. on July 3 Chairman of the Assembly Pardon Mwansa welcomed Nominating Committee Chairman Homer Trecartin and Secretary Leslie Pollard to give their report to over 2,000 delegates.

Trecartin said they were ready to make their first report, and then introduced secretary Pollard, who reported the following:

"Delegates to the 60th convention of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the nominating committee submits for the name of president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Dr. Ted Wilson."

Prolonged applause followed.

Commenting on the enthusiastic nature of the applause, Mwansa said, "Thank you, I take that as a second to the motion made."

Immediately after the second, Raymond Hartwell of the North American Division (NAD) appeared at a microphone to speak. Hartwell briefly stated his respect for the church, the leaders, and the process and immediately requested that the report of Wilson's name be referred back to the committee.

Mwansa questioned if Hartwell's objection to the nominee warranted return of the report to the committee.

"In most cases the nominating committee looks and examines quite a lot before they bring a report," Mwansa said, who also questioned that the objection was of a substantial nature.

Hartwell responded by citing General Conference Rules of Order, which says that usually a chair accepts a request for a referral.

"It is the usual procedure," Mwansa said, "but I would still like to test it with the group if you can, if you are willing to, make it into a motion. I would rather get the sense of the body as to where they would be."

"I'm respectfully requesting that we follow the written part that says it is the usual procedure to accept the referral," Hartwell replied. "Mr. Chairman, it's your session, and you can guide the body . . . ."

A point of order was called by another delegate who noted to the chair that, "if there is a request for a referral, you [should] honor it at all times."

Mwansa responded to this point of order, showing that he was within the rules of order as the chairman.

"With due respect to the observations you are making," Mwansa said, "I will go ahead and follow the rule of order by, first of all, doing something which is within our rules of order. That is asking the person . . . quoting page C5, number
7, ‘when referrers are granted, all objections must then be made to the nominating committee chair and secretary.’

So at this time I would like to say that the person that has raised this referral, if you could come to the side of the room, the chairman of the nominating committee and the secretary will listen to you to see if the objection you have raised was not raised in the nominating committee, and they will give me a signal as to whether they would like this to be taken back, or is something that has been looked after.”

Hartwell went to the side of the room to meet with the officers of the nominating committee to share his concerns while the delegation waited and the appropriate hymns, “Lead On O King Eternal,” “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” and “He Leadeth Me” were played.

Nine minutes later the nominating committee officers returned from their meeting. Again Trecartin addressed Mwansa, "Mr. Chairman, the nominating committee officers have listened to the concern, and feel that it’s one that has already been dealt with, and so our motion still stands.”

The statement was greeted by more applause.

Mwansa attempted to proceed, but was stopped by a point of order requesting a secret ballot. However, it was pointed out that the request was not a true point of order. A question on the motion was then requested by NAD delegate Neil Nedley, but was not allowed.

NAD delegate Sadrail Saint-Ulysse took the floor and requested to speak to the nominating committee.

Mwansa advised him that, “what we might end up with is people going back, and coming and back, and going back, and coming back. So I would like to see by voting, that the vote consensus is to refer back.”

Saint-Ulysse insisted, “I’d like to follow the same guidelines earlier, and in keeping with the manual, I’d like to be given the same privilege.”

Mwansa responded, “I realize that this is unusual, that this is putting the house in a hard situation, but I would like, for the sake of being able to respect your observation and ours, I would really like if this was in the form of a motion so that it would be voted up or down. The nominating committee chair and secretary informed me that they have objections that were placed, but those have been looked at, and there is a sense that most of the things fall within that.”

After Saint-Ulysse insisted again, Mwansa consented and the delegate went to share his concerns about the nominee with the nominating committee officers. Just five minutes later, Saint-Ulysse returned and the nominating committee officers reported back again.

“Mr. Chairman, we have listened to the concerns,” said Trecartin, “and appreciate those concerns being shared. The feeling of the officers is that these have already been dealt with. So, our motion still stands.”

Again, loud applause from the delegates.

“If we have any more requests for referrals, I will prove them by vote,” Mwansa said. “That way we don’t keep going to and fro.”

The delegation had shown it was anxious to continue on with the motion, further reflected in the next delegate who took the floor:

“Mr. Chairman, I recommend that if there is any other objection today, motion being on the floor, that those who are objecting may have one more opportunity to go to the committee, and anyone with an objection will voice it at that time, rather than going back and forth through this exercise.”

Mwansa thanked the delegate.
"I appreciate your comment," Mwansa said. "Nobody has requested for further referrals, so I will take that as a comment."

There were two more points of order brought by delegates, which failed.

Mwansa reiterated after the second, "I will not take that as a point of order again. Going back to the main motion. I just have to respect our rules of order and take a point of order when it is a point of order. I really appreciate your comments, the things you may want to say, but unless it's a point of order, I'll not give you the opportunity where it's not a point of order. Ok, that brings us back to points of order. We do have people that need to speak. We have them on several microphones. May I encourage you, that if it is again a concern that you have on anything, be prepared that I will put it to a test of this house, and if it is any other comments, you can express them by the way you will vote."

Elizabeth Talbot, an NAD delegate, eventually moved to have a secret ballot, "due to the magnitude of this decision," whose motion was seconded.

"We will put that to test," said Mwansa. "The motion on the floor is to use the secret ballot as we vote on this."

Before they voted on Talbot's motion, a point of order requested the chair to ask the delegates, "not to applaud after comments and motions made as that can affect the outcome of the vote."

Mwansa responded to this point of order by saying, "Thank you, we will do that. May I request the house please, to avoid applauding after comments. I appreciate your observation."

Mwansa returned to the motion.

"Motion is that we have a secret vote on this particular item. Are you ready to vote? All those in favor of voting by secret ballot please raise the green ballot."

Very few raised their colored cards.

"Those opposed by the same," said Mwansa.

Many cards were raised, showing the delegates were not interested in a secret ballot.

"Thank you," said Mwansa. "The motion fails."

Larry Boggess, NAD delegate, said delegates used to pray in situations like this and then said he would like to call a question on the previous question.

"The call to the previous question simply indicates that we cease to discuss and test if we are ready to vote," Mwansa said. "Is the motion seconded? It's seconded. Ok. So we will vote on that . . . what that means if it passes, is the people that are standing at the microphones to speak will not be respected to speak. We will go straight to consider voting the main motion."

Mwansa then called for a vote on the motion to cease discussion, which passed.

The delegation was ready to move on to the main motion.

"At this point" Mwansa said, "we are now going to vote for the main motion, which is going to be read by the secretary of the nominating committee."

Secretary Pollard again read the motion: "The recommendation of the nominating committee for the position of president of the general conference, is the name of Dr. Ted Wilson."
Mwansa called for a vote.

"Those in favor of the motion, us on the floor, as read, from the nominating committee, please show by raising your yellow cards."

The air filled with cards above an overwhelming majority of delegates.

"Thank you. Those opposed by the same," said Mwansa.

A localized smattering went up with the same sign.

The motion was carried by a landslide.
The recent ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court regarding “gay marriage” brings great cause for celebration, if you are not a Christian. And if you are a Christian and celebrating a union that God’s Holy Word describes as an abomination, it is unlikely you see God’s Word as His love letter to us for all time.

A slippery slope beckons Christians who view God’s Word as an antiquated piece of literature, irrelevant to today. Those without a wholesome belief in God’s Word begin to let their feelings dictate their beliefs and actually place their human knowledge on par with God’s.

In seeking to cast contempt upon the divine statutes, Satan has perverted the doctrines of the Bible, and errors have thus become incorporated into the faith of thousands who profess to believe the Scriptures. The last great conflict between truth and error is but the final struggle of the long-standing controversy concerning the law of God. Upon this battle we are now entering—a battle between the laws of men and the precepts of Jehovah, between the religion of the Bible and the religion of fable and tradition” (White, Great Controversy, 582).

Sadly, though the Bible is available to all, “there are few who really accept it as the guide of life. Infidelity prevails to an alarming extent, not in the world merely, but in the church. Many have come to deny doctrines which are the very pillars of the Christian faith” (White, 582). While people reject the truth, they also reject its Author, and “in trampling upon the law of God, they deny the authority of the Law-giver” (White, 583).

At the age of eight or nine years, I fantasized about marrying a guy. As a child, because I was daily teased and harassed for my feminine characteristics, I identified with Cinderella’s lowly position and the treatment she received from her haughty stepsisters. And as I grew up, my desires only intensified.

WHAT WAS MISSING? WHAT WAS WRONG WITH SUCH FANTASIES?

Thankfully, my parents taught me to honor and respect God’s Holy word and years later, though I had explored many dead-end roads, God was able to reach me because of this early training. Though I had been well grounded in God’s word, there was no Biblical discussion at home, school or church, about what to do when our “feelings” didn’t match up with God’s Word.

THERE IS HOPE WHEN WE RECOGNIZE OUR NEED

In fact, when I read God’s word, I recognized that the references to homosexuality were describing me and I asked myself, “Why and how can this be?” After all, I didn’t ask to be this way. Later, after studying God’s word, I came to understand that in His word we recognize that we come to Him, stained with sin, and that Satan competes with Jesus, to gain control of our mind. Therefore, unless we are keenly aware that our natural inclinations are sinful, we are sitting ducks for the wiles of the enemy.

Sadly, many will do anything that will help justify the sin they so desperately love and are therefore superficially satisfied with a “God connection” while rejecting a “thus says the Lord.” Such thinking has distorted two holy institutions: marriage and the Sabbath. Such thinking now ushers in the close of earth’s history. In fact, it will be precious little time before “Sunday laws” rule.

However, Jesus has not given up on you or me. Our God, our King, our Creator, our lover of human lives, seeks intimacy with us. Sadly, all too many are in love with self and are blind to the abundant, life-giving love that Jesus holds out to us. They don’t allow Jesus to court them and therefore, the heavenly Groom is being separated from
His bride, who insists on embracing a counterfeit lover.

God’s messenger wrote how God “ordained that men and women should be united in holy wedlock to rear families whose members, crowned with honor, should be recognized as members of the family above” (White, Adventist Home, 99). Take note that God never ordains two men or two women for such a union. This would be a counterfeit plan, not God’s plan. Every day we see Satan’s counterfeit plan unfolding.

**SO WHAT’S NEXT? WHERE DOES ALL THIS LEAD?**

The gay community has long denied that the ushering in of gay marriage would lay the ground-work for yet another tragedy. Yet, as gays have become “loud and proud,” another entity has in fact, long been at work.

Using the same tactics of gay rights activists, pedophiles have begun to seek similar status, arguing that their desire for children is a sexual orientation, no different than that of heterosexuals or homosexuals.

Critics of the homosexual lifestyle have long claimed that once it became acceptable to define homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle or sexual orientation, nothing would be off limits. However, gay advocates have taken offense at such a position, insisting this would never happen. But, psychiatrists are now beginning to advocate redefining pedophilia in the same way homosexuality was redefined in 1973 when the American Psychiatric Association (APA) declassified homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. Recently, a group of psychiatrists with B4U-Act held a symposium proposing a new definition of pedophilia in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders of the APA.

I recognize it is likely that I will come under fire for writing words that don't convey a feel good message and it is also very possible that my words will be twisted into a hate message. No one likes having his or her toes stepped on. I know I don’t. But friends, God is tenderly and compassionately trying to shake and wake us. If only we would come humbly before Him and take Him at His Word, and believe that only He can know what is best for us and recognize that what is best for us will always agree with His Word.

Recently, an earthly supreme court has sought to over-rule God’s heavenly court. Shocked and stunned by such a ruling, many have woken up to the reality that this world is not our home. Today it may appear that Satan is winning. But only for a time.

While sympathy for the precious lives of gays has paved the way for gay rights, many do not recognize that God has given all of us the right to choose whether we will act on our temptations or surrender them to Him. In fact, He taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

I believe we are going to see an escalation of hate toward Christians. After experiencing ridicule and bullying in and outside the church, the gay community has developed a thin armor coat, as well as a united front that reeks with arrogance.

**PERSECUTION FOR THOSE WHO SPEAK OUT**

Gays have long desired power, equality and retribution for those who held them down for so many years. Because I have spoken out, I frequently experience their wrath, both in and outside the church. Gays have falsely accused me of delivering a “change” message that insists on “heterosexuality,” when what I actually share is God’s message of love, hope and redemption that focuses on surrender and intimacy with Jesus while seeking to do His will, rather than living by personal feelings.

In light of the advancement of equal rights, lawsuits are likely to be rampant at the first sight of what a gay person deems discrimination. Through all this, I believe God’s heart is breaking because His creation, like children defying their parents and insisting on their independence, has turned against Him.
THE GREATEST DANGER

The danger is when Christians acclimatize, rather than develop a shield of faith and trust in God as the world spins out of control. “For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,... (KJV, 1 Timothy 3:2).

I remember a childhood song from Sabbath School. “Jesus loves me this I know. For the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong, they are weak, but He is strong.” This sweet song teaches us to come back to Jesus when we fall or cave into temptation. Lean on Jesus. Trust in His strength and in His power. Be faithful to the end.

HELPING ONE ANOTHER ALONG THE WAY

From experience, I know Satan’s temptations and attractions! Though I live with them today, even as a converted Christian, they don’t constitute my identity. I desperately know that I want assurance that I will live with my Creator and lover of life forever and ever. The only way I can honestly have this assurance is by living in agreement with my Savior, denying self and choosing Him.

Humility does not come easily, but it is possible. Humbly come before God with your requests… with your pain and your aching heart, no matter what troubles you. He is our compassionate, loving Father who knows the fall of a sparrow. He desires the very best for you. Christians who place our complete faith in Him are going to experience rough times. But He is the rewarder of such faith. He is not forceful, only invitational. He asks us to come apart from the world.

Do you see the revision of marriage as a victory? For who? Does it honor and glorify our God? Which “high court” will you honor?

Genesis 2:18 tells us that it is “not good for man to be alone.” I can certainly attest to that. Because of sin, God’s perfect plan has not been accomplished as He originally designed. But He does not ordain something that dishonors Him. Many are suffering from loneliness. Widows, widowers, gays and single heterosexuals all need to come together in our church communities to share our hurts with one another. We need to lift each other up in prayer for the healing that is promised. We need to be the family of believers that God intended us to be, helping each other to remain focused on Jesus until He returns to take us home.

“If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:10-11).

Wayne Blakely is Co-Director/Co-Founder of ‘Coming Out’ Ministries and Director of Know His Love Ministries.
The present crisis and the North American Division leadership

Larry Kirkpatrick

In 1990 and 1995, delegates of the Seventh-day Adventist Church met in General Conference Session. On both occasions the church voted not to proceed with women's ordination. Even in 2010, the GC president polled leaders of the various world divisions, afterwards reporting a clear consensus that the church could not proceed with women's ordination at that time.

How is it then that only five years later, in 2015, there are multiple Unions acting unilaterally to ordain women? What happened?

In 2009 through 2012 we saw the leadership of the North American Division (NAD) continue attempts to bypass the will of the world church. General Conference Working Policy includes a section named E-60. In harmony with Scripture, E-60 designates which persons may serve as conference president. It clearly states that only an ordained minister may fill this role. The very language of E-60 makes it clear that the position of president has long been considered a headship role. In fact, the policy presents the president as one standing “at the head of the ministry . . . [and] chief elder, or overseer of all the churches” of that unit (GC Working Policy E-60). Thus, long ago, the church limited the responsibility of president to spiritually qualified males.

And yes, E-60 stood in the way of many in NAD leadership who desired to place women in executive roles. Therefore, the NAD made a request to the GC Annual Council to vote the Division a variance. Annual Council refused. This should have been the end of the matter.

It was not.

A month later, the NAD response to the denial of their request was to vote the removal of this limitation. They voted to modify the wording of the Division's own Working Policy. Under the new wording, such positions could be filled by an "ordained/commissioned minister." Therefore, the NAD granted its own variance.

Had the GC not intervened in the matter, the NAD would have gained what the world church had refused in two prior General Conference session votes. By ignoring the NAD's change of wording, the GC would have been derelict in duty and they would have been unfaithful to the remaining 12 divisions of the world church. And so, General Conference leadership patiently but firmly refused the NAD request.

NAD SEEKS LEGAL ADVICE AND THE GC RESPONDS

At this point, the NAD sought legal counsel and closely investigated the NAD standing on the basis of the Church Manual and Working Policy of the church. In due course the report came back: the NAD had exceeded its authority. Why? Because the NAD is part of the General Conference. Unlike its own Conferences and Unions, as the NAD president would point out, “Divisions do not have constituencies.” Therefore, the General Conference must vote changes at the Division level or no such change can be accomplished.

On January 31 of 2012, the president of the NAD sent a five-page letter to the 311 members of the North American Division Executive Committee. In this letter he outlined why the NAD was forced to abandon its self-voted E-60 variance. The NAD president said it was “a huge understatement” (p. 2), to say that the NAD leadership was perplexed about this outcome. With unflagging energy, he reminded readers that the “clear commitment of the members of the NADCOM to strengthen the role of women in ministry [had] not changed”. He went on to say, “It is of vital importance that we affirm the women clergy presently serving in our Division, and that we encourage women who may be called to gospel ministry in the future and that we enhance the understanding and unity of our
A NEW PLAN IS DEVELOPED

In his letter, the president reaffirmed that the Holy Spirit had led the committee and that the committee should not abandon their conviction. Then, interestingly, he suggested “the E-60 matter was allowed to make the progress it did” in order that “we can now develop our thinking with far more clarity and power than ever before”. In other words, here comes a new plan!

Part of the plan, as already stated, was to re-educate the members of the church. The president called for:

... the development of a theology that demonstrates the basic biblical and Spirit of Prophecy foundations that emphasize not only the necessity of women in ministerial and leadership roles but also the theological mandate that they be active in specific roles. At the same time we must study the biblical and Spirit of Prophecy understandings of related issues such as the calling of God, justice, and equity” (NAD President, p. 3).

This is why the North American Division Report to TOSC, several months later, presented an extensive 240-page report. That document contained the root material planned for the re-education of North American church members, including you and me.

And yet, this was not enough. According to the NAD president, “the time has now come for us to become practical in our application of philosophy and belief” (NAD President, p. 3) How so? Remember, the fundamental point that prevented NAD leadership from carrying out its plan? “Divisions do not have constituencies.”

And so, the individual then standing at the head of the work in the North American Division, told the hundreds of members of his Division committee:

“The North American Division and its Unions and Conferences (as local circumstances permit) must become more intentional in the development of pathways to ministry for female pastors. We must also develop intentional methods of mentoring women who can take on executive leadership positions within our conferences” (NAD President, P.3).

Notice, the NAD president here calls for exactly what E-60 prohibits - namely, it calls for the premeditated development of a group of women who can take on executive leadership positions. This would include the position of conference president. The point for our special interest is that while the Division president pointed out on page 2, that Divisions do not have direct constituencies, on page 4 he calls for Unions and Conferences of the North American Division to be “intentional.” Indeed, pages 3-5 repeatedly urge that these matters be moved forward via new approaches. As the President says, “we must fully enable, recognize and utilize all who are called by God to serve as pastors and leaders” (NAD President, p. 5).

A NEW APPROACH CAUSES UNIONS TO SPRING INTO ACTION

What was the result of this official letter? Unions sprang into action.

Only 36 days later the Mid-America Union Executive Committee voted to ordain women. Similar attempts came as winter turned to spring in the North Pacific Union. However, that attempt was side tracked in a committee for a time. In the eastern part of the country the Columbia Union held a special constituency meeting on July 29 to approve “ordination without regard to gender.” Then, back to the west, and the Pacific Union repeated the show in Special Session August 19. With the onset of autumn, North Pacific Union announced it would educate its members and afterward hold a special session as Columbia and Pacific Unions had. Approximately one year following the
President's letter to the Division Executive Committee members, in October 2013, the Southeastern California Conference elected Ms. Sandy Roberts conference president.

Incited by the President's letter, Union and Conference leaders in the NAD had bypassed and contravened the repeated decisions of the General Conference in session and ignored the earnest pleas of current General Conference leadership.

The current NAD president and his associates pleaded for NAD Unions and Conferences to act, and NAD Unions and Conferences acted. In short order, these leaders have destabilized not only their own Division, but have sidetracked the whole world body.

While there is much more to say about the theological foundations of women's ordination and kindred issues, in a nutshell, this is basically how the present crisis developed from 2009-2015. Please continue to pray that God will give the General Conference leaders of His church wisdom and discernment in the weeks ahead.

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Facing the reality of Daniel 3:16-18

Owusu-Banahene Francis

In writing to the Philippians, Paul explains that “evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse” (NASB, 2 Timothy 3:13) and “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). To gain victory, we are to “continue in the things [we] have learned” (2 Timothy 3:14). Peter also understood that God’s people will be persecuted and he told the scattered Christians that they were not to be surprised at the “fiery ordeal among [them]” (1 Peter 4:12) and that if “anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name” (1 Peter 4:16). Indeed, it is clear biblical teaching that all who follow the Lord Jesus will suffer persecution and that the experience will glorify God. Sadly, accounts throughout the scriptures, beginning in Genesis with the account of the murder of Abel and ending in Revelation, with the persecution of God’s people, all testify that His people cannot escape from misunderstanding and even hatred by non-believers, even including family members.

TWO SIDES TO THE COIN

Though every coin has two sides, it has the same monetary value whether you present one side or the other to the person at the cash register. In the same way, there are two sides or fates to the Christian’s persecution, and either experience will ultimately glorify God.

One Side of the Coin: Misfortune Fate

Often people go through hard times and unsupported, they may even come to believe that God has forsaken them. In fact, because God seems to be silent, some may be tempted to doubt God’s goodness and even whether He cares or not.

A thick cloud of darkness gathers round, blocking the face of our loving God. One feels alone. God’s apparent silence, coupled with a deep sense of aloneness, can sometimes break the Christian’s heart and cause discouragement. As a result, it is extremely important to trust in God’s providence, to count one’s blessings, and to diligently study and meditate upon His words. When we experience this aspect of persecution, we must claim God’s promises to be able to endure and be faithful till death. Though it is not easy, strength will come from above if we continue to trust God.

A Christian writer says, “at times a deep sense of our unworthiness will send a thrill of terror through the soul, but this is no evidence that God has changed towards us, or we toward God. No effort should be made to rein the mind up to a certain intensity of emotion. We may not feel today the peace and joy which we felt yesterday; but we should by faith grasp the hand of Christ, and trust Him as fully in the darkness as in the light” (Ellen White, The Sanctified Life 90).

There are several biblical examples of those who faced the “misfortune fate”. As an illustration, let us consider Uriah (2 Sam. 11), a man unwaveringly faithful to king and country, whose wife was taken in adultery by his king, and then he himself murdered in the king’s attempt to cover up the horror of his sin.

Uriah’s faithful character

Uriah’s high regard for the reputation of his nation thwarted David’s initial attempt to cover his sin of adultery. When David endeavoured to cover his sins by proposing Uriah rest from the hardships of army life and spend time with his wife at home, Uriah could have accepted the royal privilege, without knowing David’s real intent. Like many of us, he could have considered it to be a scholarship from the king and an opportunity to rise high, yet he decided to be...
faithful to God. And in spite of Uriah’s faithfulness, God kept silent and watched him go through his painful ordeal, apparently alone at the hottest point of the battlefield, and finally dying in battle.

Did God care about Uriah? The answer is yes. God is alive and ever vigilant for His people, ever watching. However, it is just as true that His thoughts are not ours and that He allowed Uriah’s experience to happen.

The faithfulness and ultimate fate of John the Baptist is another example. Though he preached of the coming Messiah, he never had opportunity to personally witness Jesus’ ministry. He learned of Jesus’ work, only through the account of others. In fact, this same man called by God to declare the Saviour as the Lamb of God, in the gloom and inaction of his prison cell, exposed to the doubts and questioning of his disciples, himself began to experience despondency and doubt (White, Desire of Ages, 214). He was deeply troubled to see that his own disciples were cherishing unbelief in Jesus because of their deep love and loyalty for him. But John would not discuss his doubts and anxieties with his companions and he did not surrender his faith in Christ. Hoping that his disciples’ faith would be confirmed after an interview with Jesus, He sent two of them to Jesus to ask, “Are you the one we’ve been waiting for or should we look for another?” In his discouraged state, John also longed to hear some word from Christ spoken directly for himself (White, 216).

When the disciples returned to John and described what they had seen and what Jesus had said, John readily understood their evidence and he had a fuller understanding of the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1,2. Without his knowledge of the scripture, John would have imagined cause to doubt and perhaps even questioned why Jesus did not perform a miracle to release him from his prison experience. Because he understood Jesus’ words in the light of Isaiah’s prophecy, John “yielded himself to God for life or for death, as should best serve the interests of the cause he loved” (White, 218). In the end, John experienced freedom from prison when he was beheaded for his faith.

The other side of the coin: fortune fate

On the other side of the persecution coin, there are those who live faithfully and though having suffered for the sake of the gospel; their earthly end is glorious as well as their heavenly end. Though they go through a fiery ordeal, they experience a miracle of God and finally emerge victorious. Biblical examples are Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, and the three Hebrew men.

Because this side of the persecution coin (fortune fate) seems to dominate the Christian story, many Christians forget the “misfortune fate” and come to God with the expectation that yes, we may suffer for Christ’s sake, but just as God did for Daniel in the lions’ den or for Joseph in the pit of slavery, God will work a miracle and ultimately relieve us from the suffering we experience today. It is indeed true that God said, “them that honour me I will honour,” (KJV, 1 Sam. 2:30), but how and when this will come about is not our business, but solely His.

Many may be led to give up their faith, believing God has failed them. For this reason, it is imperative to remember that God is still on our behalf, whatever side of the persecution coin we experience. This is why Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego could say with certainty, “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire...but even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up (NASB, Daniel 3:17,18).

In fact, no matter which side of the persecution coin we may fall on, all Christians, like the three Hebrew boys, experience persecution identically. While in the throes of persecution, neither one knows their fate on earth. They walk with no assurance of earthly rescue or glorification, but the victorious trust God’s ultimate will. For this reason it is imperative that we trust implicitly in God’s holy word to uplift and encourage us through our dark days of persecution.
The Pope's encyclical and the mark of the beast

Steve Wohlberg

On June 18, 2015, Vatican PR officially released in multiple languages Pope Francis’s much-anticipated 183-page encyclical addressing climate change titled “Praised Be”—a title based on an ancient song called “Canticle of the Sun” attributed to St. Francis of Assisi written in 1224 A.D. Significantly, the Pope’s encyclical includes a strong appeal to keep Sunday.

There are many points that could be considered, but this article will only examine a few key points based on the prophecy of Revelation 13. First, most papal encyclicals (“circulating letters”) are sent to Roman Catholics only. Not this one. A June 14, 2015 Associated Press report was entitled, "Pope says upcoming environment encyclical meant to be read by everyone, not just Catholics." Sure enough. In "Praised Be," Pope Francis addresses the world.

At the beginning of his document, Pope Francis wrote that Planet Earth itself “cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she ‘groans in travail’ (Rom 8:22).”

Here, the Pope is correct. Indeed, Planet Earth is in trouble, due to man’s sin. Whether or not you accept the climate science that Pope Francis relies on, the reality is that our world is suffering because of Adam’s sin, our ongoing sinfulness, God’s curse (see Genesis 3:17), and satanic fury. Of this, there is no doubt. Environmental disasters are clearly increasing. Notice carefully:

In accidents and calamities by sea and by land in great conflagrations, in fierce tornadoes and terrific hail-storms, in tempests, floods, cyclones, tidal waves, and earthquakes, in every place and in a thousand forms, Satan is exercising his power. He sweeps away the ripening harvest, and famine and distress follow. He imparts to the air a deadly taint, and thousands perish by the pestilence. These visitations are to become more and more frequent and disastrous. Destruction will be upon both man and beast. (Ellen White, The Great Controversy, 589).

Don’t be fooled. Things will get worse before they get better. In “Praised Be,” Pope Francis recognizes the escalating crisis, its effects on the earth, man, and beast, and then quotes the Bible as he advances toward solutions. Read his words carefully, taken directly from his encyclical:

68. This responsibility for God’s earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibrium existing between the creatures of this world, for “he commanded and they were created; and he established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds and he set a law which cannot pass away” (Ps 148:5b-6). The laws found in the Bible dwell on relationships, not only among individuals but also with other living beings. “You shall not see your brother’s donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and withhold your help … If you chance to come upon a bird’s nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting upon the young or upon the eggs; you shall not take the mother with the young” (Dt 22:4, 6). Along these same lines, rest on the seventh day is meant not only for human beings, but also so “that your ox and your donkey may have rest” (Ex 23:12). Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures.

Here the Pope states that we humans must realize that we are living on God’s earth, “must re-spect the laws of nature,” and should even realize that “rest on the seventh day” is good for both humans and animals. Sounds a bit Adventist, doesn’t it? Delving deeper into the Sabbath issue itself, Pope Francis continues:
71. ... The biblical tradition clearly shows that this renewal entails recovering and respecting the rhythms inscribed in nature by the hand of the Creator. We see this, for example, in the law of the Sabbath. On the seventh day, God rested from all his work. He commanded Israel to set aside each seventh day as a day of rest, a Sabbath, (cf. Gen 2:2-3; Ex 16:23; 20:10).

Now watch carefully:

206. A change in lifestyle could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power. This is what consumer movements accomplish by boycotting certain products.

And finally,

237. ... Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world. Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, the “first day” of the new creation…

Let’s summarize some key points. Planet Earth is in crisis. Our environment is falling apart. The pope says we must return to God, and respect the earth, which includes “the law of the Sabbath,” which he states now applies to “Sunday … meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world.” In other words, if enough greedy, selfish, capitalistic, and environmentally exploitive humans return to God, become more environmentally responsible, and start keeping Sunday holy, life would improve. This would be one giant step closer to “the Resurrection,” and “the new creation.” Pope Francis even wrote that ‘we the peo-ple’ can put “healthy pressure” on “those who wield political” power to make it happen.

Over 100 years ago, Ellen White saw it coming. Like an inspired news reporter commenting on the Pope’s encyclical and pending events, she wrote:

It will [finally] be declared that men are offending God by the violation of the Sunday-sabbath, that this sin has brought calamities which will not cease until Sunday observance shall be strictly enforced … Political corruption is destroying love of justice and regard for truth; and even in free America, rulers and legislators, in order to secure public favor, will yield to the popular demand for a law enforcing Sunday observance (The Great Controversy, 590-592).

Did you catch that? “Calamities” (EGW) are increasing. In his encyclical, Pope Francis promotes “the Sunday-sabbath” (EGW) which, he states, if observed more fully, would help “heal our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world” (Pope). Humanity would thus stop “offending God” (EGW). “Healthy pressure” (Pope) should be brought to bear upon “those who wield political” power (Pope) which surely includes “rulers and legislators” (EGW), until they finally “yield to the popular demand for a law enforcing Sunday observance” (EGW) to help save the planet.

Thus Pope Francis’s 183-page encyclical entitled, “Praised Be,” lines up perfectly with the predictions written over 100 years ago in Ellen White’s book, The Great Controversy. In The Great Controversy, Ellen White also stated that this would especially occur “in free America.” Now consider this. The very same day (June 18) that “Praised Be” was released worldwide, Barack Obama issued this official statement from The White House:

I welcome His Holiness Pope Francis’s encyclical, and deeply admire the pope’s decision to make the case - clearly, powerfully, and with the full moral authority of his position - for action on global climate change.

As Pope Francis so eloquently stated this morning, we have a profound responsibility to protect our children, and our children's children, from the damming impacts of climate change. I believe the United States must be a leader in this effort, which is why I am committed to taking bold actions at home and abroad to cut carbon pollution, to increase clean energy and energy efficiency, to build resilience in vulnerable communities, and to encourage responsible stewardship of our natural resources. We must also protect the world's poor, who have done the least to
contribute to this looming crisis and stand to lose the most if we fail to avert it.

Thus the very same day that the Pope's encyclical encouraging all people everywhere to exert "healthy pressure" upon legislators, and which also promotes Sunday observance, Barack Obama, the president of free America, stated that "the United States must be a leader in this effort, which is why I (President Obama) am committed to taking bold actions at home and abroad...." With divine insight, Ellen White predicted:

As America, the land of religious liberty, shall unite with the papacy in forcing the conscience and compelling men to honor the false sabbath, the people of every country on the globe will be led to follow her example (6T, 18).

Bingo! Dear reader, I beg of you, don't be blind to these solemn facts. Open your eyes. Read Revelation 13:11-17. Correctly understood, this prophecy predicts that the lamblike beast (verse 11, the USA) will cooperate with and promote the sea beast (verse 12, Papal Rome) and finally even enforce Sunday, “the day of the sun,” which is a "mark" (verse 16) of Rome’s usurped au-thority, around the world.

Brothers and sisters, the hour is upon us to give the third angel's message with a “loud voice” (see Revelation 14:9-12). We must be respectful, yet bold. This is our calling as a people. Before the flood, God raised Noah and gave him a message. Years later, he raised Jonah, then John the Baptist, then the apostle Paul, then Martin Luther, then William Miller. At this very hour, He has raised up Seventh-day Adventists to give His last message to a dying world.

In a special sense, Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import-the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention … The world is to be warned, and God's people are to be true to the trust committed to them (9T, 19).

“If you love Me,” said Jesus to His disciples, “keep My commandments” (John 14:15, quoting Exodus 20:6). The core issue is the seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth commandment written by God Himself, or the “day of the sun,” the day of the beast. Inseparably connected to this, surely the biggest issue of all is revealing His love, because only “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Ro-mans 13:10). Do we love Jesus? Do we love His people? Do we love confused and mixed-up sinners? Do we love Roman Catholics? What about Pope Francis? Jesus died for him too. May God help us to understand our Savior’s own suffering for our sins, grace, forgiveness and love, which alone can provide sufficient spiritual power for victorious commandment-keeping (see Revelation 14:12) during earth's final crisis, to the glory of His Holy name.

This critical information is now available from White Horse Media as a 30-minute DVD titled “The Pope’s Encyclical and the Mark of the Beast.” Call 1-800-782-4253. www.whitehorsem edia.com.
There are so many ‘sects’ amongst the churches that it’s almost like living in Bible times. Though all are either labelling themselves or labelling others, almost every group is tarring the other with the proverbial feather. (However, thankfully not all!)

The one group I want to focus on today is the don’t group, or what I call the thou shalt not’s. As their name suggests, these people occupy themselves with what we should not do. Unfortunately, they are very busy pointing their fingers at others, bashing what others are doing, and proclaiming what they believe should not be done. Therefore, they forget to personally live what they should be doing. In other words, they are so full of self and what they believe is right and wrong, that they forget the many requirements God Himself has set for us. Sadly, they tend to focus only on the Ten Commandments with its prohibitions, and forget the positive commands found in both the Old and New Testaments.

For example, they’ll shout till kingdom come, “Thou shalt not covet,” in a bid to show that loving your neighbor means not wanting what they have. However, they won’t remind you that loving your neighbor also means caring for him, washing him if he’s helpless, feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. They are so busy looking at what others are wearing that is wrong, that many of them forget to look in their own closets to find items to clothe the naked and destitute.

Others criticize the rich man accusing him of being proud because he drives the latest sedan model, not knowing that he’s been singlehandedly supporting a hungry family for the past two years, while his accusers fail to give bread to a single hungry refugee. It’s all relative. (Maybe the rich man could afford even a more expensive car but he chooses not to.) When we look at life using “self” as the standard, we forget that God looks at the heart.

HEARERS TURN EVEN FURTHER AWAY

The bottom line is that when we are judgmental and focus on the negative, we are wretched and miserable. By neglecting to talk of God’s love, or to show our love for our fellow man, our words do not bring reconciliation, but in fact turn people even further away the idea of uniting with believers.

God recognizes a difference between the confused, but earnestly seeking soul and those who are purposefully disobedient and stiff-necked. We could also discern the difference, if we would have the mind of Christ, instead of using our own eyes to see. Instead, so many Christians, Adventist included, choose to lambaste others in public forums, often speaking harsh words while pointing their finger at them.

The problem with the thou shalt not’s is that they actually undo the work of Christ. Though it is true that Christ did proclaim “Thou shalt not”, He didn’t stop there, but rather, He taught us what we “shall” do to actively show His love.

The sad result of critical negativity is that when Christ’s servants try to teach, “Thou shalt not,” many of those hearing the message lump the good with the bad together, assuming they’re cut from the same cloth. They close their eyes to the truth because the truth was made odious to them. They cannot see Christ made poor that we might become rich. Often they see only someone trying to gain popularity. They do not see that the reason Christ says, “Thou shalt not” is so that they might find joy in a heaven where sin does not exist. Therefore, they do not see Christ. Instead, when truth is preached they see a Pharisee. Good is then called evil.

And once again Christ will be whipped and crucified in the person of His faithful servants who are only trying to live His life and share His word. All because someone came along before them and taught the law without living and
teaching grace and mercy.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE THOU SHALT NOT’S

The problem with the thou shalt not’s is that they give those who don’t love the truth an excuse not to seek for it as for hidden treasure. It gives them an excuse to label everyone who opens his mouth with a “Thou shalt not” as a troublemaker. In reality if they sought for Christ, He would show them that indeed, they are doing wrong. However, both groups are wrong. God’s people should not be negative and judgmental, speaking only negative words. Just as wrong are those who refuse to listen because self has risen up and they are tired of the constant rebukes.

ALL ARE HUMAN AND SUBJECT TO ERR

As hearers, there is no excuse because by God’s grace and under the impressions of the Holy Spirit we may deeply love the truth, no matter who speaks it or how. Knowing that we too are human and subject to err just like those to whom we speak, we must speak the entire truth with love as well as conviction. Truth must consist of mercy, love and acts of kindness mingled with the awful grandeur of the law.

May God help us to love truth so much that when we teach it, we do it. All of it. Christ showed the truth through His acts of love, even as He uttered that He wants us to keep every single jot of the law without compromise. A real Christian will do the same. We will be so empty of self that Christ will reign within and remind us: “Thou shalt not break the law, and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”