

A New Statement of Fundamental Beliefs

by Lawrence Geraty

Other organs of communication within the Adventist community have provided excellent reporting of the 53rd General Conference session, held in Dallas, Texas, April 17-26, 1980. The Adventist Review General Conference Bulletins (numbers 1-10) delivered prompt and extensive coverage of actions and debate at the session. Complete sets of the Bulletins are available from the Adventist Review for \$3.90. The Adventist Radio Network produced seven lively half-hour reports full of features, interviews and commentary regarding each day's activities. The entire sequence of professional quality broadcasts has been recorded and is available. Send \$12 to the Adventist Radio Network, G.C. Tapes, c/o KSGN, 1700 Pierce Street, Riverside, CA 92515.

SPECTRUM is pleased to provide an in-depth account and analysis of one central activity of the session – the adoption of a new Statement of Fundamental Beliefs for Seventh-day Adventism. Three particularly qualified participant-observers also more briefly interpret actions of the General Conference in their areas of special knowledge – the policy concerning suits, the concern with the local church, and the growing participation of Third World Adventists in church administration. The editors welcome succinct comments and analysis from participants regarding still other aspects of the General Conference session.

Friday afternoon, April 25, while the platform was literally being dismantled behind the president of the General Conference presiding over the final business meeting of the 1980 session, the delegates voted to replace a 50-year-old document with a new

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Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. None of the 27 beliefs were new, of course, but the re-statement was. Apart from election of new General Conference and Division officers, the adoption of the statement was the most significant event of the General Conference session. An account of the statement's formulation and acceptance from the perspective of a person who was privileged to be able to participate in drafting the document, before and during the General Conference session, may be helpful.

Although Uriah Smith's "Fundamental Principles" had appeared in various denominational publications after 1872, a request came to the General Conference in 1930 from Africa, asking for further clarification of Adventist fundamental beliefs.¹ On December 29 of that year, the General Conference Committee "voted, that the chair [C. H. Watson, the president of the General Conference] appoint a committee of which he shall be a member, to prepare such a statement for publication in the Year Book."² Watson appointed M. E. Kern, associate secretary of the General Conference, E. R. Palmer, general manager of the Review and Herald Publishing Association, and F. M. Wilcox, editor of the *Review and Herald*. Wilcox was assigned the task of drafting the statement. The 22 fundamental beliefs that the committee reported were never officially discussed, ap-

proved, voted, or formally adopted. According to Gottfried Oosterwal:

Their publication in the *Yearbook* of 1931, and two years later in the *Church Manual*, was a personal accomplishment of Elder Wilcox and his group of four. Realizing that the General Conference Committee — or any other church body — would never accept the document in the form in which it was written, Elder Wilcox, with full knowledge of the group, handed the Statement directly to Edson Rogers, the General Conference statistician, who published it in the 1931 edition of the *Yearbook*, where it has appeared ever since. It was without the official approval of the General Conference Committee, therefore, and without any formal denominational adoption, that Elder Wilcox's statement became the accepted declaration of our faith.³

At the 1946 General Conference session, it was voted that the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, as well as any other portion of the *Church Manual*, should be revised only at a General Conference session. The 1931 document, therefore, with minor revisions, continued to represent the fundamental statement of denominational belief.

The 1931 statement was apparently designed to articulate the basic tenets of Adventism for non-Adventists. A strong motive for revising that statement was a desire for an official response to issues increasingly debated within Adventism. In the light of recent controversies, some, particularly in the General Conference, felt the statement suffered from glaring omissions. Others, particularly Bernard Seton, an associate secretary of the General Conference, persistently reminded his colleagues that the statement also had literary inadequacies.

Finally, in late 1978, the officers of the General Conference appointed an *ad hoc* committee referred to as “X-1535 *Church Manual* Revision — ‘Fundamental Beliefs,’” and less than two years later the church would have a new Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. The members of the *ad hoc* committee were all located at the General Conference

headquarters in Washington, D.C., with W. Duncan Eva, a General Conference vice president, as chairman.⁴

On August 10, 1979, Duncan Eva distributed the committee's preliminary draft to the General Conference officers, division presidents and union presidents in North America. In an accompanying letter, Eva noted that formal and substantive changes in the 1931 statement had been made. Formally, the sequence of topics had been altered and paragraph headings had been inserted. Substantively, the sections on the Trinity had been expanded from two paragraphs to four, and sections had been added concerning angels, creation and the fall, the church, unity in the body of Christ, the Lord's Supper, Christian marriage, and the Christian home and education. He also said that before the new statement would be submitted to the full *Church Manual* committee, it would be presented to “certain professors at the Seminary with whom we will meet in September.” After the *Church Manual* committee gave its approval, the statement would proceed to the home and overseas officers, the union presidents, the Annual Council, and finally to the General Conference session in Dallas.

Two weeks later, Andrews University President Joseph G. Smoot informed nine members of the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary faculty⁵ and the university's vice president for academic affairs that Elder Eva had requested a special meeting with them approximately a month later, September 19. It would precede a much larger meeting the next day called by several General Conference officers to discuss with science and religion faculty of the university the often-revised Statements on Creation and on Revelation and Inspiration.⁶

In general, the statement prepared by the *ad hoc* committee in Washington and sent to the Seminary professors was a genuine improvement over the 1931 statement. I did have some questions: for example, Christ “was born of the Virgin Mary” (virgin with a capital “V”?); or “the book of Genesis contains the only inspired, reliable chronicle of

the creation of the world.” (What’s wrong with the account in Psalms? Obviously, the document’s authors were more interested in the interpretation of Genesis than in the doctrine of creation.) Indeed, the document as a whole was uneven in its organization and style. It was obviously a patchwork job with mixed terminology, a lack of balance with regard to length of individual sections, differences in the way documentation was handled, and a general administrative concern with events and behavior rather than meaning (e.g., the Lord’s Supper “is customarily observed once each quarter of the year,” “the educational system of the Church is designed for partnership with the home for the salvation of the children,” “God’s unchangeable law requires the observance of the seventh-

day Sabbath from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday,” etc.).

A further problem was procedural. The document came with a covering letter saying that “at this stage this document is confidential and intended only for those to whom it is sent. It may not be copied or duplicated in any way.” At first blush, it seemed to be a secret committee hoping to “railroad through” its statement. After that, the rank and file could decide whether or not they wanted to be Seventh-day Adventists.

Although it became apparent as we worked with the brethren from Washington, D.C., that that was not their intent and although I was pleased to be among a group of seminary teachers with whom the General Conference leaders consulted, I could not

Internationalization of the Church

by Russell Staples

Future Adventist historians will probably look back on Dallas as the turning point in the internationalization of the church. They will doubtless refer to the shift in the demographic center of gravity of the church. In 1950, the western church comprised 52 percent of the Adventist world membership; in 1970, it was 30 percent; at present it is about 24 percent; and it will be about 16.5 percent by 1990. Right now, the Third World church constitutes about 76 percent of the Adventist world membership.

The changing composition of the church’s membership was reflected in those appointed to leadership at Dallas. For probably the first time in the history of Adventism, persons whose homelands are outside of North America occupy the positions of secretary (G. Ralph Thompson, from Inter-America) and treasurer (L. L.

Butler from Australasia). Along with the president, they comprise the three principal officers of the General Conference. In addition, four of the Third World divisions are now led by local workers. For the first time, an African is president of a division, and an Asian is the president of the Southern Asia Division. It should be remembered that presidents of divisions are simultaneously vice presidents of the General Conference.

While the internationalization of the church was evident in some ways at Dallas, it was strangely ignored in others. The session was so occupied with the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs and certain basic changes in the *Church Manual* and *Working Policy* that virtually no attention could be given the implication of the new patterns of relationships now developing in the Adventist Church in different countries. For example, no time was devoted to exploring the significance for the future of the fact that already almost half of the missionaries now serving the church around the world are from the Third World.

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help but think of my colleagues in institutions around the world who are just as qualified, just as interested, and had just “as large a stake” in the church as I did. Why didn’t the General Conference set up a representative commission to handle the revisions — one to which any interested church member could have access, and one which would be given *time* to do the job right?

But I was not in a position to make the rules, so I decided to express my concerns while working for a better document in any way I could. The first opportunity I had to express my views was at a meeting of the “committee of ten” called by Smoot September 12 to give a preliminary review of the statement. It was evident there that many of my colleagues shared my concerns. We recommended 1) that our review committee be enlarged to include those who had special expertise in the creeds of the church, 2) that the statement be completely rewritten to avoid the weaknesses exhibited by the attempt to stay with the wording and order of the 1931 statement, and 3) that the results of our effort, if acceptable to Washington, D.C., be published in the *Adventist Review* with the invitation for comment and reaction by any concerned.

Fritz Guy, professor of theology, and Kenneth Strand, professor of church history — both on the seminary faculty — were added to our review committee. Our new “committee of twelve” divided up the paragraphs of the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs for individual reworking with Thomas Blincoe, dean of the seminary, Ivan Blazen, professor of New Testament, Fritz Guy, professor of theology, William Johnsson, professor of New Testament and associate dean of the seminary, William Shea, professor of Old Testament, and Lawrence Geraty, getting the heaviest assignments. Within six days, we again came together to hammer out a consensus, paragraph by paragraph, on the document as a whole. We worked late into the night of September 18 in an attempt to be ready for the next day’s meeting with the brethren from Washington, D.C.

By 4 p.m. the next day, the essential structure of the document as it now stands and most of the wording were ready. Meeting

with the Andrews “committee of twelve” were Elders Duncan Eva (chairman), Richard Hammill and Willis Hackett, all vice presidents of the General Conference. The latter invited Robert Brown and Harold Coffin from the Geoscience Research Institute to sit in with us. As expected, they contributed especially to the paragraphs on Scripture, Creation and The Great Controversy (which mentions the flood).

The leaders from Washington, D.C., were faced with a dilemma. Should they insist on sticking with the document they sent (in order to save face with the original *ad hoc* committee in Washington) or should they consider the completely rewritten document prepared by the Andrews “committee of twelve”? They chose to at least “take a look” at the new document. Most of the vice presidents liked what they read. There was a lot of give and take — for the most part, in good spirit. At one point, in trying to arrive at consensus wording for creation week, Hackett gave up with the comment, “Oh, well, you can word it any way you want to here; we’ll get another crack at it back in Washington!” Understandably, the Andrews group felt it had been wasting its time if that was the way the game was going to be played. Each paragraph was modified and improved as a result of group discussion.

The Andrews contingent felt the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs was “where the action was” and preferred to concentrate its time and energies there, but the General Conference representatives felt we should interrupt our work to discuss with a larger group of Andrews University faculty the Creedal Statements on Creation and Revelation/Inspiration as scheduled.

Having dutifully aired our views on these documents for the prescribed time in the larger meeting, the “committee of twelve” returned to the more positive task of articulating our fundamental beliefs. By the time the General Conference vice presidents departed, most revisions had been made.

The next week we mailed off to Washington, D.C., our completed draft with the 27 paragraphs divided into six major sections: Revelation, God, Creation and Redemption, the Community of Faith, the Christian Life

and the Last Things. Our colleagues who attended the Convocation on Righteousness by Faith in Washington, D.C., the first week in October, delivered our last revisions to complete the job — “complete” in the sense that it was the best we could do given the pressures of time and circumstances. To the extent the statement had literary form and beauty, the credit belonged to Fritz Guy whose linguistic artistry and theological acumen were evident throughout.

On October 16, 1979, the Annual Council adopted without changes and in principle the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs that had in the meantime been passed with only slight modifications by the General Conference *Church Manual* committee. It was sent out to members of the division committees immediately as well as to unions and overseas colleges. It was given to the *Adventist Review* for immediate publication in the hope that as many reactions as possible could be received from the field prior to the General Conference quinquennial session in Dallas. Unfortunately, for reasons never disclosed, it did not appear for four months, until February 21, 1980. As a result of the statement’s distribution at Annual Council and publication in the *Adventist Review*, scores of letters came to Elder Eva — most appreciative and suggesting constructive changes.

Being the kind of statesman he is, Eva decided the fairest thing to do would be to collate all the suggestions and discuss each one with the Andrews “committee of twelve.” He and Richard Lesher, director of the Biblical Research Institute, met with us most of the day on March 9 for that purpose. Many improvements were introduced into the statement as a result of these letters from church leaders and members around the world. The quality of many of the suggestions showed that if the statement had been published in the *Adventist Review* at an earlier date, the editing committee could have had at its disposal an even more representative sampling of opinion from the world church that may have, in turn, allowed us to produce a document representing a truer consensus. Since the General Conference leaders had to

return to Washington, D.C., that day, we were left on our own to “tidy up” the document. Fritz Guy typed most of the night to have it ready to put on the plane in the morning.

By March 10, the revised version with 28 paragraphs (Lord’s Supper and Baptism were divided) was in Eva’s hands. He called back to say the new paragraph on the sanctuary would not be acceptable. Therefore, Blincoe, Guy and Johnsson redid it along the lines of the original September-October, 1979, version.

Eva felt he had to get *some* version out immediately to the delegates who would be coming to Dallas. So on March 11, he mailed to the delegates the document received from Andrews University the previous day (with the substitution of the September-October sanctuary paragraph) accompanied by a covering letter. It indicated that before the General Conference session the *Church Manual* committee at the General Conference office and the officers at Dallas prior to the session would review the statement before it reached the floor.

As a delegate, I received my copy of Eva’s March 11 letter on March 24. Obviously, many delegates may not have received their copies of the Statement in advance of the session in Dallas, especially if they were from overseas and left home early to travel in the United States as many did.⁷

In the meantime, Fritz Guy was called to Washington, D.C., to help evaluate further correspondence on the statement that had come in from the field and to meet with the *Church Manual* committee when it considered the completed statement. On March 14, under the chairmanship of G. Ralph Thompson, the *Church Manual* committee approved the proposed Statement of Fundamental Beliefs that had been sent out to the delegates with only minor revisions.

But more letters from the field continued to flood Eva’s desk. For instance, one came from Fred Veltman, chairman of Pacific Union College’s Religion Department, who was writing after his faculty had spent two department meetings going through the statement and planned at least one more. His

letter of March 11 reflected the concern of many thoughtful Adventists:

It may be that when our church was small it was possible to get an accurate representation from the world field if you mailed the recommended statement to the delegates at least six weeks before the session convenes; but it is doubtful whether these delegates have time to get their input from their local congregations prior to the session given the size of the church today and the problems of getting reactions and submitting such reactions back to headquarters in time to make any changes before the session is held. In order for delegates to function legitimately they must not only be informed by the General Conference leadership on the issues which they will be asked to vote upon, but these same

delegates need to be informed by the people they represent so that they will know how to perform as delegates in such a way as to honestly represent the field from which they come.

Later, Veltman forwarded to Eva a series of recommendations for changes in the statement that had been unanimously approved by his departmental faculty. The work of the scholars at Pacific Union College was not in vain. Many of their suggestions were incorporated in the Statement voted at Dallas.

Those involved in the process of drafting the statement up to that point were under the definite impression that the version of the statement adopted by the *Church Manual* committee would go before the delegates in

The Local Church

by Louis Venden

Elder Neal Wilson's keynote address at the opening session of the General Conference called for "certain organizational changes" which must "be done now, not at some future date," and which keep in focus that "our primary objective must be to help the pastor and his associate in leadership to bring our members together in a concerned, coordinated, effective relationship, so as to develop a dynamic soul-winning thrust equal to an invasion force!" With surprising and refreshing frankness, Wilson proceeded to ask for "the elimination of our attitude of departmental protectionism" so that denomination leaders would have the "ability to deliver coordinated 'packages' that make sense to our members and pastors in the local church where the work is actually done."

The implication of Elder Wilson's

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comments is right. The administrative and departmental structure of the entire denomination rests like a great inverted pyramid upon the local congregation and its leadership. There are instances where the local church finds itself trying to please several insistent taskmasters with disparate goals. At the Tuesday morning business session, Elder Wilson brought a specific proposal to reduce the pyramid by merging four General Conference departments into two: Health and Temperance would combine, as would Stewardship and the Ministerial Association. The changes were voted by the delegates.

The 1980 General Conference also brought a needed balance in emphasis between church growth and pastoral nurture and care. In addition to his call for "placing unquestioned priority on evangelism and soul-winning," Elder Wilson's keynote address admitted that "our homes constitute the greatest mission field that exists today."

Dallas one month later. But, perhaps on the basis of letters to Washington received even later than those mentioned above, further changes were made in Washington, D.C., without consulting the “committee of twelve” before Dallas.

At the first business session at Dallas, delegates expressed shock that the version of the statement to which they had prepared responses had been substantially changed and that, therefore, they were now suddenly unprepared to discuss so crucial a document as a Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. Those who had been involved in formulating the earlier draft felt that the new version was disastrous in form, if not content. Gone was the balance, the beauty and the sensitivity to words. Clumsy rhetoric prevailed. By the time the home and overseas officers had made additional changes during their April 14 meeting in Dallas, just prior to the opening of the General Conference session, three of the sections had been completely rewritten — one to more than twice its original length. Twenty-one other paragraphs were significantly altered, either in meaning or style. For instance, the newer version referred to the Scriptures as “infallible.” The paragraph on God was titled “Godhead or Trinity.” To the sensitive phrase that Christ “perfectly

exemplified the righteousness and love of God,” the officers added “as our example.” The sentence declaring that God has revealed in Scripture “the only authentic account of His creative activity” was changed to read the “Scriptures provide the only authoritative account of origins.” The adjectives “complete and perfect” were omitted as descriptions of the atonement. The Lord’s Supper was called “this blessed ordinance” instead of “this experience of communion.” Added were phrases saying that the writings of Ellen White are “a continuing source of truth,” and elsewhere that we are “to take no part in sinful pleasures and follies.” Many other significant changes had been made. By combining the paragraphs on Spiritual Gifts and the Ministries of the Church, the total number of paragraphs within the Statement was again reduced to 27.⁸

When the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs was brought to the floor for discussion in Dallas on April 21, Willis Hackett turned the chair over to Neal Wilson who assured the delegates:

We are not suggesting changing any belief or doctrine that this church has held. We have no interest in tearing up any of the foundations of historical Adventism. This document is not designed to do that, nor to

Suing the Church

by Elvin Benton

The *Church Manual* provision that almost unqualifiedly authorized church discipline against members who sue the church or one another is now a dead letter. The 1975 General Conference session at Vienna included among the “grievous sins for which church members shall be subject to church discipline” the “instigating or continuing legal action against another

church member or against the church or any of its organization or institutions, contrary to Biblical and Ellen G. White counsels.”

Protests from many concerned Adventists, including attorneys, emphasized that certain civil rights were involved and that numerous legal problems could not be settled by a church procedure. The Annual Council following the Vienna General Conference, while recognizing that only at a General Conference session could the *Church Manual* itself be changed, neverthe-

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open the way so that it can be done. It should be clear that we are not adding anything nor are we deleting anything in terms of historical Adventist theology. We are trying to express our beliefs in a way that will be understood today.

He also made it clear that, though he hoped to vote the document in Dallas, he was in no rush. The Church was not adrift. “We have a clear statement of fundamental beliefs, and we will hold to it until together we decide to refine, reword, and restate it in today’s language.” To those who were afraid of a creed, Wilson said, “the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have a creed as such. Nothing is set in concrete in terms of human words. The time never comes when any human document cannot be improved upon.”

In terms of procedure, the newly reelected president of the General Conference asked the delegates to speak only to substantive theological content, allowing details in wording to be handled by a “competent editorial committee of scholars and theologians.” Most of the business sessions the rest of the week were taken up with a paragraph-by-paragraph discussion of the proposed document. Its importance was highlighted by the fact that Neal Wilson

chaired each discussion period. He provided very fair and effective leadership. No one felt rushed (till the last session), though he kept things moving right along. Delegates stood to speak at a dozen microphones scattered strategically throughout the arena. The chairman recognized each speaker in turn, as often as not, calling the speaker by name. (It took courage for a delegate whose mother tongue was not English to ask for the floor; a few requested translators. Another time it might be well to plan in advance for adequate translation to encourage foreign delegates to participate.)

Since the *Adventist Review General Conference Bulletin* (numbers 5-8) carried an edited account of the floor debate on the statement, it is not necessary to review every detail. Some interesting exchanges do not appear fully, however, and one long dispute was completely stricken from the official General Conference minutes (by vote of the delegates). Ralph Larson, pastor of the Loma Linda Hill Church, made a 12-minute statement that decried the whole process as premature and ill-advised during this time of theological crisis and uncertainty. He ended his remarks by moving to table the entire Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. Upon questioning by the chairman, it turned out

less voted to insert a cautionary caveat in the form of a footnote to provision seven of the manual.

The following spring, in 1976, a committee was appointed by the General Conference to prepare a different statement on litigation. After several committee and subcommittee polishing sessions, the 1978 Annual Council approved the language that was later adopted during the closing minutes of the last business session of the 1980 General Conference session in Dallas. Entitled “Safeguarding Unity of the Church — *Church Manual* addition,” the provision now includes the key statement that if “the member has exhausted the possibilities of the Biblically outlined procedure for the settlement of difference,” then

“what he or she should do beyond that point is a matter for his or her conscience.”

The 1975 Annual Council’s “unofficial” footnote to that year’s General Conference action in Vienna was apparently effective in averting confrontation. As far as General Conference leaders are aware, no Adventist anywhere was brought up for church discipline under provision seven during the five years of its life. Evidently, while the church believes that the General Conference in session is its highest authority, responsible administrators can sometimes exercise practical authority to temper the actions taken by that authoritative body, and the General Conference in session can reverse the actions of a previous session.

that he was not even a delegate, whereupon Neal Wilson declared him out of order.

Throughout the week, the nearly 2,000 delegates debated the entire range of doctrines and principles discussed in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. Important differences arose concerning the nature of revelation in Scripture — is the Bible *infallible* and *inerrant*? Is it *all-sufficient* in matters of history (as Robert Brown advocated) and science (as suggested by Russell Standish, medical director of the Bangkok Adventist Hospital)? During discussions of the paragraphs on Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it seemed, at times, as though we were going one-by-one through the entire sequence of heresies that had confronted the early church. With regard to creation, LeRoy Moore, General Conference coordinator of Native American Affairs, and Ariel Roth, of the Geoscience Research Institute, suggested striking the word “only” from the phrase “the Holy Scriptures provide the only authoritative account of origins,” in order to leave room for Ellen White and nature to be distinctly authoritative sources of revelation on this point. Several advocated inserting the word “literal” before the days of creation week, although others thought it would be redundant in the context. Some delegates recommended including something on a short chronology for the earth and still others argued that the statement should make it clear that all “inanimate” things were created during the six days of creation week.

The nature of man received much comment. Is it holistic, fallen, distorted, marred? In the paragraph on the life, death and resurrection of Christ, most of the debate centered on whether His atonement (on the cross) was complete, perfect and all-sufficient, or whether the term “atonement” should include His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary as well.

Lawrence Maxwell, editor of the *Signs of the Times*, introduced quite a debate on whether or not communion should be limited to those who have been baptized. The question was debated by several people.

The paragraph on the Gift of Prophecy led

to a discussion of the authority of Ellen White’s writings for the church. The geographical limitations of expressions like “sunset Friday to sunset Saturday” were pointed out, as compared with the biblical principle “from evening to evening” for Sabbath observance.

Some delegates urged inclusion of specific wording in a Statement of Fundamental Beliefs proscribing card-playing, theatergoing, dancing, etc. Several speeches advocated making remembering the church’s needs through wills and trusts a fundamental belief. In response, there were those, including some General Conference leaders, who advised against a statement weighed down with nonbiblical terminology.

Predictably, many asked for the privilege of speaking to the paragraph on the sanctuary teaching. Edward Zinke, assistant director of the Biblical Research Institute, Reginald Dower, retiring secretary of the Ministerial Association, William Murdoch, dean emeritus of the SDA Theological Seminary, C. H. Carey, delegate from Pacific Union, and James McKinney, physician from Greenville, Tenn., all spoke in favor of specifying the *place* (i.e., the apartment) in heaven where Christ ministers, as well as affirming a cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven. Duncan Eva explained that the paragraph was a Bible-based one and no different in this respect from the previous (1931) statement. Ted Wilson, director of Metro Ministry in New York City, affirmed the writings of Ellen White to be an authoritative commentary on Scripture.

When discussing the section on death and resurrection, delegates questioned the meaning of several terms, such as “inherently immortal,” God “will grant immortality to His redeemed,” “death is a state of unconsciousness,” and not even death can “separate” the dead in Christ from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

The members of the editorial committee appointed by President Wilson at the General Conference session listened carefully to each comment made on the floor and then between business sessions met for many hours to hammer out a statement that was theologically accurate as well as balanced in form.

The committee combined administrators and academics: Richard Hammill (chairman); Maurice Battle (secretary), an associate secretary of the General Conference; Thomas Blincoe; Duncan Eva; Richard Leshner, the recently appointed director of the Biblical Research Institute; G. Ralph Thompson, now secretary of the General Conference; Lawrence Geraty; James Londis, pastor of the Sligo Church in Washington, D.C.; Robert Olson, secretary of the White Estate; Jan Paulsen, president of Newbold College in England; and Mario Veloso, Temperance and Youth Director of the South American Division. At the suggestion of Willis Hackett, Robert Brown, of the Geoscience Research Institute, was added to the committee.

Because of the press of other duties, the three "sons" (Olson, Paulsen, and Thompson) could not often meet with us, but the other committee members, repre-

senting a healthy spectrum of Adventist thought, worked well together and came to a consensus each time, under the effective chairmanship of Richard Hammill. Two delegates visited the editorial committee. Halvard B. Thomsen, pastor of the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, church, submitted a written proposal to strengthen the paragraph on Spiritual Gifts and Ministries. Edward Zinke not only presented his case on a number of points but also presented extensive arguments for them.

The final results of the committee's editorial decisions were brought before the delegates on the final business day of the session, April 25. An edited account of the proceedings may be found in the *Adventist Review General Conference Bulletin* (number 9), along with the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs in its entirety as adopted that day and slightly edited.

Forum Panel Discussions

For the first time, the Association of Adventist Fours participated in a major way at a General Conference session by organizing five panel discussions held in a conference room of a hotel near the convention site. The topics discussed included: "Marxism and Detente: The Eastern European Experience," "Meeting the Challenge of Historical Research on Mrs. White," "Meeting the Challenge of Diversity and Pluralism Within the Adventist Church" and "Meeting the Challenge of Marxism and Nationalism in the Third World." The panel on Marxism in Eastern Europe included an introductory lecture by the secretary of the Polish Union Conference, who is also a professor at the Protestant Seminary within the University of Warsaw, and responses from the head of the delegation from the Soviet Union, the president of the union conference within the German Democratic Republic, and the president of the Czechoslovakian Union Conference. Two naturalized American

citizens also responded: Pastor Marshuk, formerly a minister in Poland, and Dr. Erwin Sicher, formerly of Austria and now chairman of the social science department at Southwestern Adventist College.

The best-attended session featured Donald McAdams, president of Southwestern Adventist College. While the conference room seating over 100 persons overflowed, he traced the progress of Ellen White studies over the last decade. Other participants on panels included Dr. Mutuku Mutinga, a professor at the University of Nairobi and educational director of the East African Union; Dr. Samuel Young, president of the Hong Kong-Macao Mission and probably the best informed person in the world on Adventist activities within the People's Republic of China; Dr. Calvin Rock, president of Oakwood College; professors Gottfried Oosterwal and Walter Douglas, of the SDA Seminary; and several others.

Several of the subjects that had elicited extended discussion throughout the week continued to produce debate concerning the statement's final wording. Whether the Scriptures are the *only* infallible revelation of God's will remained an issue. LeRoy Moore, Roland Hegstad, editor of *Liberty* magazine, and R. G. Hunter, from the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference, spoke in favor of striking the word "only" (possibly to leave room for Jesus Christ and the writings of Ellen White to be considered infallible revelations as well). Since the 1931 statement has "only," and since such a position is Ellen White's, it seemed to me that striking the word could be misunderstood. Nevertheless, the delegates voted to delete "only."

Whether to include "first" and "second apartment" terminology in the sanctuary paragraph as suggested by Harold Metcalf, ministerial secretary of the Southern Union, received further discussion. The delegates followed Richard Hammill's urging not to include such specific language.

Robert Spangler, the newly elected secretary of the Ministerial Association, advocated strengthening the paragraph on the Gift of Prophecy by substituting "and" for "which" in the sentence that said "her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction and correction." Though the delegates voted *not* to make the change, the *Adventist Review*, in its final printed version, *made* the change.

Persistent arguments were made that the statement that God is "known through His self-revelation" was inadequate. Robert Spangler, prompted by Edward Zinke, recommended that it be replaced by "known authoritatively through Jesus Christ and the Scriptures." The first vote was not decisive, but after Richard Hammill pointed out that He reveals Himself in nature, too, the delegates voted to leave the paragraph as it was. Zinke came back to the same question again, protesting in strong terms the inadequacy of that expression of how we arrive at a knowledge of God. Though time had run out and many others were still waiting to speak, he requested another vote. When Neal Wilson

responded that we had already voted, Zinke insisted that we vote again. Though the assistance of associate secretaries was necessary to determine the outcome of the vote, the delegates turned down his wording for the third time. (The *Adventist Review* does not fully record the dialogue between Wilson and Zinke).

Other topics that received brief comment in the final Friday afternoon business session included: baptism as a prerequisite for participation in communion, the wearing of jewelry, the nature of the Trinity, whether Genesis is "authoritative" or "authentic" with regard to creation, references to a worldwide flood, and whether the remnant is equivalent to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

As I reflect on the *process* that led up to the adoption of the Statement on Fundamental Beliefs in Dallas, I'm grateful for the opportunity to be involved. I learned a great deal. I imagine the same can be said for all who were involved. The question naturally arises, then, why weren't there *more* involved in the process? There should have been a procedure initiated early enough that would have allowed for greater participation by all interested members. More time would also have allowed members to seek out and interact with the church's theologians. They understand the theological and historical nuances of words used in such statements of belief and should have a feeling for balance and form in such declarations. It was incredible to me how few trained theologians were delegates to the General Conference session, when one of the session's most important tasks was the formulation of a Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. This was not by design, of course; it's just that the denomination's political system works to disenfranchise the teacher of religion. The lay person is similarly disenfranchised; only one percent of the delegates in Dallas were lay persons. To be selected as a delegate to a General Conference session one needs to be an administrator or a pastor. I was the only delegate from the Seminary besides the dean. And what about our colleagues in departments of religion around the world? Only a handful were in Dallas as delegates.

(Can one imagine the Presbyterians adopting the Westminster Confession of Faith without their theologians present — at least as consultants? Even Vatican II had its *periti*.)

The part of the process that made me the most uncomfortable was the voting on the floor. Obviously, truth is not established by majority vote. Are fundamental beliefs? Maybe. But consensus is far more difficult to achieve in theology than it is in policy. It is more than a management problem. It takes accurate information and it takes time. I suspect that the process undertaken in Dallas was more helpful for those who participated in it than it was for the product.

As I reflect on the *contents* of the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs adopted in Dallas, however, I am reasonably satisfied with the results, especially given the circumstances. Despite its obvious flaws, especially the extended particularity of some sections, it is certainly a more adequate document than the statement that has represented Adventism for 50 years. (Even after Dallas, it will undergo stylistic editing, including careful scrutiny of the supporting biblical references.)

However, what has allowed many who continue to see inadequacies in the statement to live with the document is its preamble. Drafted and recommended by Ronald Graybill, assistant secretary of the White Estate, the wording, as adopted, reads:

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word.

Now the challenge for us is to continue to work toward a clearer understanding of Bible truth, and to persist in the search for better language in which to express the Bible's teachings. It was perhaps the greatest of all achievements in Dallas that the Adventist church in General Conference session went on record to encourage the continuing pursuit of truth.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. For details, see the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., p. 395.

2. General Conference Minutes, December 29, 1930, p. 195.

3. "The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Mission: 1919-1979," unpublished paper.

4. The other members were B. F. Seton, associate secretary (secretary), replaced upon his retirement by M. T. Battle, also an associate secretary; C. E. Bradford, vice president for North America; N. R. Dower, secretary of the Ministerial Association; C. O. Franz, secretary of the General Conference; W. J. Hackett, vice president; Richard Hammill, vice president; G. M. Hyde, director of the Biblical Research Institute; Alf Lohne, vice president; A. L. White, secretary of the White Estate, replaced, upon his retirement, by R. W. Olson, the new secretary of the White Estate.

5. The nine faculty included: Thomas Blincoe, dean of the Seminary; Ivan Blazen, professor of New Testament; Raoul Dederen, chairman of the Theology Department; Lawrence Geraty, professor of Old Testament; Roy Graham, professor of Theology and

Provost of Andrews University; William Johnsson, professor New Testament and associate dean of the Seminary; Hans LaRondelle, professor of Theology; Gottfried Oosterwal, chairman of the Department of Mission; and William Shea, professor of Old Testament. The vice president for academic affairs of the university is Richard Schwarz, a historian.

6. See the discussion in several articles in *SPECTRUM*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (August 1977), and drafts of the statements subsequently published in the *Adventist Review* (January 17, 1980).

7. At least the attempt was made, which is more than can be said for the secretariat of the General Conference, with regard to the agenda for the General Conference. Despite repeated requests from delegates, the secretariat sent out no advance agendas or documents of any kind. Instead, at the opening meeting of the session in Dallas, along with the other delegates, I was asked to vote on a general agenda of 31 items less than a minute after I received it.

8. These changes and many others can be read in the *Adventist Review* General Conference Bulletins Nos. 5-8.