



Resolving Conflicts

Battle of the Bible

THE PARALLELS BETWEEN the controversy over slavery and various “hot-button” issues today, such as female clergy, science vs. Genesis, and homosexuality, are not infrequently alluded to in “liberal” criticisms of “conservative” arguments. However, what is often not apparent is the shockingly parallel insistence, based 100 percent on a very particular method of interpreting the Bible, with which pro-slavery forces prosecuted this Battle of the Bible.

The following gives you a brief flavor:

In fact, Reverend Iveson L. Brookes, S. Carolina, 1850, would say: “Next to the gift of his Son to redeem the human race, God never displayed in more lofty sublimity his attributes, than in the institution of slavery.” Ferdinand Jacobs, 1850, in *The Committing Our Cause to God* would say: “If the scriptures do not justify slavery, I know not what they do justify. If we err in maintaining this relation, I know not when we are right—truth then has parted her usual moorings and floated off into an ocean of uncertainty.” The Confederate Army religious newspaper, *Messenger*, April 15, 1864, proclaimed: “We are fighting not only for our country but our God. . . . *It has become for us a holy war*, and each fearful and bloody battle an act of awful and solemn worship.”

Thank you!

DONALD E. CASEBOLT

Faith based on experience

IN THE ONGOING DEBATE on Women’s Ordination, policy and power in the SDA organization, and interpretation of the first chapters in

the Bible, I hope you will publish a testimony from an elderly SDA who believes that he has undergone a substantial development in understanding, faith, and personal maturity. Maybe my belief is a delusion, I hope not.

From a period when I tried to defend the literal reading of the Creation Story, until I was able to accept established modern science, and understand our right and duty to defend human rights, viz. gender equality, I am now approaching a conclusion. After having given up the traditional Adventist literal interpretation, and the futile trench war against schools, universities, and legal authorities on the creation question, I now realize that the common assertion from almost all Christians, that they base their faith on the Bible, is not true. The fact is that all base their belief on experience, regardless of how they have been reared, educated, born again or not, etc. Our belief in God is a personal experience, even if it be based on false premises. Our image of God exists in our own minds. Our answers to prayers are our own, and the same regards our doubts. Our knowledge of the Bible is also an essentially personal experience.

Please do not misunderstand me, I believe today, better than before, and feeling safer than when I was a fundamentalist and was proud of that.

The ongoing debate on Women’s Ordination gives me the intuition that the most strident defenders of Biblical literalism and the fight against teaching evolution, at the same time are defending a principle from the animal life, where the strongest rule and fight, develops

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Jakobsen

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horns, claws and teeth—in order to defend something which is opposite to human thinking, equality, human rights, and intellectual honesty, qualities reserved for human beings.

Looking at the history, we see how this inherited characteristic from animal life has ruled in almost all cultures, and even in our own, for it is only a few years since women obtained the right to vote, since the abolition of slavery, criminalization of child abuse, etc., etc. Why do not our Christian leaders see that even the secular society is working to getting rid of this animal-related behavior? This mindset and behavior and policy is quite opposite from what we should expect from men, sometimes also from women, who profess to believe the Creation Story, and the teachings and examples of Jesus.

Some say that modern Christians pick and choose from the Bible what they feel convenient. But who does not do that? Everybody, fundamentalists, conservatives, and moderns, choose and pick exactly what suits their own faith experience. There is no other way to read the Bible. The Bible is not a law book; it may be a casebook (Thompson), but most of all it is a collection of testimonies from believers about their experiences with God, their failures, their blessings, their falls, and their victories.

My hope and prayer is that the SDA church someday will reach maturity, but we may have to wait for a new leadership. Meanwhile I continue to support my church like before, celebrate Sabbath, and love my brethren and sisters in spite of my shortcomings, and most of all I feel that they love me.

KRISTEN FALCH JAKOBSEN

Conflicts with Church Policy

“GENERAL CONFERENCE VOTES to keep Sunday holy instead of Saturday.” If you read this headline what would you do? Would you stick to your convictions and defy the world church vote, or would you decide that God is guiding the Adventist Church and He must be work-

ing through the leadership?

How you answer that question reveals your view of church authority.

Questions of conflicting authority have been around since Jesus' time. The religious leaders (the General Conference of the time) were not always happy with Jesus. Not happy about how He kept the Sabbath, that He claimed a connection directly with God that bypassed them, and unhappy that He would free those oppressed by disease and demons. Finally, as the highest earthly authority of the church, they voted to crucify Him, and rid the church of His followers who declared they “must obey God rather than man.”

Time advanced and so did the conflict between Bible interpretation by conscience and church authority. Slowly the idea that church policy should interpret Scripture creeps in. Ultimately, it is decided church authority is higher, a view our Catholic sisters and brothers still openly accept.

Time goes by. Martin Luther, while trying to appease an angry god, is released by the Bible's message that “The just shall live by faith.” Championing the cry “Sola scriptura” (the Bible only) he starts a movement that shakes the Christian world. The Bible interpreted by individual conscience again takes supremacy.

We find ourselves here, in 2016, with issues of authority in front of us again. Many of us are confused because we never expected there to be a conflict between what our church decides and what we believe the Bible says. Will the world church really make decisions to punish those who have followed biblical principles according to their consciences? I hope not.

It's a nice theory to do the “Sola scriptura” thing. It's Latin, it's powerful Martin Luther “Here I stand, I can do no other” drama. It makes us feel like we are “standing for the right though the heavens fall”. It is the Adventist thing to do. But now it's getting

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practical.

Even before the [October] decision, as a pastor, I have been challenged by the conflict between church policy and the Bible.

In Acts 8, I read this incredible story of an angel directing Philip to head down the road that leads to Gaza. He ends up baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch, miraculously gets whisked away, and finds himself in another town. Great story. Blessed by God to do this. Supernatural intervention to make it happen. Problem: he's a deacon, not a pastor. He baptizes. Apparently not a problem then. But as I read the *Adventist Church Manual* (page 79), deacons cannot baptize. So, a deacon in my church wants to baptize his friend. As a pastor, what do I say? Is it my right even to say?

As a people, faithful to this church, there may be times we have to defy the church because we are faithful.

The Bible must be the first authority. I am happy to put the work of prophets second, as the Bible gives room for that. Third, I will submit to the authority of the church, as long as there is no conflict with the first two.

It's getting practical. I'm a loyal son of the church. But that means, "Here I stand. I can do no other."

LONNIE WIBBERDING,
PASTOR, OREGON CONFERENCE

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matter. However, it would seem wise not to move ahead in making an issue of things that are recognized as not being biblical, not being theological, not being clearly delineated in Ellen White comments, and not itself being a stated Fundamental Belief, while being in conflict with another Fundamental Belief as well as with GC Policy.

Summary

1. Opinions regarding issues under discussion are just that—opinions, no matter who expresses them. They are neither policies nor judicial rulings.
2. The lack of independent judicial authority and the control of legislative function by executives leads to the potential of executive overreach.
3. The development of procedures designed to bypass policy, and which violate existing policy, is not a valid route to resolution of unity issues.
4. Imposing the cultural differences of one segment of the world church on another does not resolve disunity. Rather, it exacerbates it.
5. Imposing drastic measures of censure on segments of the church over issues that are admittedly not biblical, not theological, and not Fundamental Beliefs, makes no sense. ■

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general field secretary of the General Conference. In retirement, he has served as a vice president in the Home Care division of Adventist Health System and as interim senior pastor of twelve congregations.

References

1. *GC Bulletin* (April 3, 1901), 25, 26.
2. *GC Bulletin* (April 5, 1901), 69, 70.
3. GC Session Minutes, 1990.
4. Ellen G. White, *Education*, 57.