

*community through conversation*

# SPECTRUM



*The Role of Union  
Conferences in Relation  
to Higher Authorities*

**The Dangers of Unity**

*From “Ekklesia” to  
Something Else*

**The Judicial Dilemma:  
How the Church  
Works—and How it  
Gets Worked**

*An Open Letter to  
Any Parent of  
an LGBT+ Child*

**The Perfect Storm**

*Cosmology and  
Morality: The Scientific  
Captivity of  
Creation and Beyond*

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#### About the Cover Art:

*Tamara, the Woman at the Well*, bronze.

Re-imagining themes from Christianity, and the underlying themes for living life in "the way," are what matter most to artist Tom Emmer-son. His friend, Beverly Beem, has called the *Woman at the Well* "Tama-ra," inspiring the name for the sculpture and adding meaning to the story for the artist. From the idea in his head, he made a clay model, which then was cast in bronze and given a patina. The work is life size. There is a subtle decoration on the amphora of crocus flowers that have many ancient references to purity, health, honor, worthiness, and ritual. The artist did not want to spell things out too much since he is more interested in viewers bringing their own thoughts and feelings to the story.

#### About the Artist:

Thomas Emmer-son chairs the Walla Walla University Art Department, a position he has held since 1982. In 2015, he received the WWU President's Award for Excellence in Teaching. He is continually creating new bronze, clay, and paper works for personal, public, and campus/church spaces. His most recent exhibition, with Steve Miller in the Harris Gallery, was in the spring of 2015.

**Editor** Bonnie Dwyer

**Editorial Assistants** Wendy Trim, Linda Terry

**Design** Laura Lamar

**Spectrum Web Team** Hallie Anderson, Alita Byrd, Pam Dietrich, Bonnie Dwyer, Rich Hannon, Steve Hergert, Wendy Trim, Alisa Williams; Jared Wright, *managing editor*

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SPECTRUM is published by Adventist Forum, a nonsubsidized, nonprofit organization for which gifts are deductible in the report of income for purposes of taxation. The publishing of SPECTRUM depends on subscriptions, gifts from individuals, and the voluntary efforts of the contributors.

SPECTRUM can be accessed on the World Wide Web at [www.spectrummagazine.org](http://www.spectrummagazine.org).

#### **Editorial Correspondence**

Direct all correspondence and letters to the editor to:

SPECTRUM  
P. O. Box 619047  
Roseville, CA 95661-9047

tel: (916) 774-1080  
fax: (916) 791-4938  
[editor@spectrummagazine.org](mailto:editor@spectrummagazine.org)

Letters to the editor may be edited for publication.

ISSN: 0890-0264

#### **Subscriptions and Advertising**

[subscriptions@spectrummagazine.org](mailto:subscriptions@spectrummagazine.org)  
(916) 774-1080



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# Statements, Surprises, and Sunshine | BY BONNIE DWYER

**He initiated a process, totally independent of the procedures already spelled out in *Working Policy*, to take over the unions whose constituencies have voted to ordain women.**

In the flurry of statements about church unity that emanated from the General Conference this past fall, beginning with the fifty-page document entitled “A Study of Church Governance and Unity,” a blanket of words obscured the divisive intent of the General Conference President. He initiated a process, totally independent of the procedures already spelled out in *Working Policy*, to take over the unions whose constituencies have voted to ordain women. His action took most people by surprise, and is explored more fully in this issue with papers by historian George Knight, pastor/administrator Gary Patterson, and theologian Dave Thomas.

On our web site, we reported the actions leading up to Annual Council, and that surprised many people, too, particularly at the General Conference, where the plan appears to have been to have key committees quietly vote the action against the unions and then simply have that ratified at Annual Council without fuss or bother. The timeline of actions is included in the Note-worthy section of this issue, for reference, also.

By passing over *Working Policy* and creating his own documents, President Ted Wilson reinforced the growing sense of “kingly power” his administration is building in the way that it handles issues in the church. It seems the only votes that carry meaning for him are those that take place at the General Conference. But the votes of constituencies—church members—matter, too.

Frustration at the local level with being ignored at the General Conference has led some to consider withholding tithe dollars in protest, thinking that offerings are the votes that carry the most weight. However, doing so would sig-

nificantly hurt the local efforts of the church, perhaps more than it would impair the General Conference. Portions of the tithe dollar come back to the local church in the form of salaries for pastors, they also significantly fund activities at the conference and union level. Only sixteen cents on the dollar make it to the General Conference and some of that comes back, too. To send a message to the General Conference, perhaps the best thing to do is to sit down and write it out and send it on its way.

Staying engaged with the process, supporting the local church, conference, and union are significant, too. We pledge to follow the committees that will be tasked with carrying out the voted actions. Recently, I wrote to communication officials at the Division and General Conference, asking for the names of those who would be on the committee voted by the North American Division, and involved at the General Conference. In one reply that I received, I was told that the North American Division Administrative Committee had not yet (at that time in late November) voted the names of committee members, but they might not be sharing the names anyway. That response took me by surprise. As a journalist I expect the church to be open and transparent in committee work, as well as in the way that it handles money. The church members in whose name these actions are being taken deserve to know who and what is being done.

We need more sunshine—openness—and fewer surprises and statements to build the trust that is at the heart of unity. ■

**Bonnie Dwyer** is editor of *Spectrum* magazine.



## Leadership from Elsewhere | BY CHARLES SCRIVEN

**A**dventist Christianity is *not* the same as the General Conference hierarchy. As always, we can look elsewhere, not just there, for leadership. And living memory can recall no time when this point has been more important, more worth celebrating.

A few weekends ago I heard a children's choir—sixth-to-eighth graders—sing before a Spanish-speaking congregation in Tennessee. The sound was elegant, the words uplifting, and every listener seemed alive with Sabbath joy. The effort that had gone into that moment was paying off, and I marveled at how local passion persists despite troubles in Silver Spring.

This fall I witnessed at close hand how a tiny congregation in Arizona responded when a childless and deeply vulnerable older couple seemed no longer able to manage in their own place: how key members arranged and followed through on a delicate intervention; how the man and his wife ended up for several weeks in separate and widely distant places of care; how amazing members took turns bringing them each week to Sabbath worship, and making sure they had Sabbath afternoon time together; and how the initiative of members helped unite them again under a single roof. The effort that went into all of this was both difficult and humane—a small wonder of the world. Efforts like it occur again and again where groups of as few as two or three band together in shared devotion to Christ. Local passion still shows the way.

A congregation I often visit—the Church of the Advent Hope in New York City—inspires me for its energy, diversity and ready welcome to

Holy Spirit innovation. Brook Pierce, the church's Communications Coordinator, recently wrote, on the Spectrum website, about its response to *Hacksaw Ridge*, the feature film about Desmond Doss. In preparation for its release, members got in touch with Terry Benedict, one of the film's producers and the maker, earlier, of a documentary about Doss. Benedict visited the church for a screening of the documentary and discussion afterward. His hope for both films, Brook Pierce reported, was that viewers would come away reflecting on "where they are (and are not) willing to compromise themselves"; and on how they might (or might not) consider changing. The congregation thinks of itself as an "Adventist Peace Church," and the theme carried through to November 5 when Ron Osborn, the Adventist author and peace advocate, preached the morning sermon. Members met that evening to see *Hacksaw Ridge* together, and further discussion took place on November 12.

If I were a member of the Church of the Advent Hope I would be acquainted with its flaws. Communities, like individuals, fall short. But this church is still a place to look for leadership. Only one of Jesus' Beatitudes addresses church mission, and it is the blessing pronounced upon "peacemakers." This theme, this call to redemptive action, occupies no place at all in the conventional account of who we are and what we're for, but local passion offers the reminder that it should. It's another example of leadership from elsewhere.

So far I've said nothing of pastors, but good stories about local churches often, or even usually, reflect the good work of local pastors. It's

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too often assumed that success for a pastor is escape to a desk job and a travel schedule. But the sharpening of the church's cutting edge occurs locally, so if the pastor's work is enhancement of the local congregation by preaching, caring, and organizing, no other job in the church can matter more.

One man who lost his entire family during the Rwandan genocide was Pastor Isaac Ndwaniye. The church's *Mission Quarterly* reported that immediately afterward he sought to reestablish Adventist communities, first in a refugee camp, then back in Kigali, and then elsewhere in Rwanda. Eventually he was called into service among people who had actually participated in the killing of his wife, children, and other relatives. Sometimes, it turns out, pastors lead by the character they display. We know that they also lead by pooling their insight and energy, as when pastors from several large congregations in the United States dreamed up the Jesus-focused One Project and gave it what appears to be long life. One Project "gatherings," on several continents, continue to inspire many Adventists.

Pastors know members—know their interactions with one another, know their dreams and their discouragements. And that is why pastors, when they are good, just *get* more than the rest of us. That's why their leadership matters so much. When the church's most visible leaders seem more obsessed with themselves and their power than with women and scientists and others who suffer under their regime, leadership from elsewhere matters the way breath matters.

We have a unity problem, a discord that puts many of us at odds with leaders who, in other circles of our community, seem deeply revered. This discord is alarming. According to John 17:21, Jesus prayed that those who believe in him "may all be one," just as he and the Father are one. In just this spirit, Ephesians 4:3 challenges us "to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." If, as Reformer John Calvin said, the "only true knowledge of God is that born of obedience,"<sup>1</sup> then effort, right now, toward a renewal of unity is an urgent task.

But how can we renew unity? How, by God's grace, can we make ourselves whole again? One stream of Radical Reformation thought—thought that belongs precisely to our Adventist heritage—puts the stress, in fact, on local congregations. When there is discord in the larger community, you don't try to sweep away differences through overarching bureaucracy or lockstep uniformity.

Bureaucratic shortcuts can only mislead and fall short. The better approach, as James McClendon puts it, is this: "Let us all, congregation by congregation, local church by local church, Christian group by Christian group, seek to embody the completeness that is found in Christ Jesus. . . . When we do that we shall of necessity come closer to one another."<sup>2</sup>

We share a commitment to being international, a church, that is, of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. So, when discord happens on a worldwide level, and officials at the top seem baffled and inept in addressing it, we may be grateful for leadership from elsewhere. Local churches and their pastors sharpen the church's cutting edge.

Two things I am *not* saying. I'm not saying local congregations are all healthy. Many are not, and some pastors fall short of the passion and imagination necessary for good preaching, caring, and organizing. Nor am I saying that Adventist administrators have all let us down. Many are innovative; many are resisting our drift into prejudice and corrosive control.

On Sabbath, November 19, I heard David Weigley, the president of the Columbia Union, preach the sermon. His theme was "Embracing Grace, Empowering All." All listeners knew that the Union he leads has defied higher-level authority by continuing to support full gender-equality in pastoral ministry; everyone knew that recent Annual Council discussion involved the threat of reprisal against him and his Union. Still, appealing both to Scripture and to Adventist stories such as the burgeoning of woman-led congregations in China, Weigley declared that "the Columbia Union will not turn back." It was bracing to hear.

But as Weigley, I am sure, would be first to acknowledge, when administrators take courageous or innovative stands, usually it's because local congregations, with their pastors, stand behind them. So, let me say again: local churches and their pastors sharpen the church's cutting edge. That means our denomination must become irrelevant except as local churches and local pastors receive our support and appreciation. ■

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**Charles Scriven** chairs Adventist Forum.

## References

1. John Calvin, *Institutes*, I.6.2
2. James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Witness*, 336.



# 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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—Kristen Falch  
Jakobsen

Slowly the  
idea that church  
policy should  
interpret  
Scripture  
creeps in.

—Lonnie  
Wibberding

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

**Letters** ➔ **continued** on page 80





# The Importance of the Backstory

## Following the Unity Documents through Annual Council and Year End Meetings

BY BONNIE DWYER AND JARED WRIGHT

**A**fter the vote in San Antonio, at the 2015 General Conference Session, on whether or not to allow divisions to ordain women, there was a dramatic moment the next day when a woman delegate asked the General Conference President to clarify what had taken place. She had friends, she said, women in pastoral positions, who were being told that they could no longer hold their jobs. President Wilson reassured her that nothing had changed. Women would still hold the same positions that they did previously. And women have been serving in significant-growing numbers of pastoral positions ever since approval for women pastoral associates to perform baptisms and marriages was voted at the 1990 General Conference Session. While women had received approval to assume pastoral responsibilities, they had been denied the ordination title.

Then, at the 2015 Annual Council, there was an action voted which reiterated what Elder Wilson had said in San Antonio. In the document “An Appeal and Appreciation to All Church Entities and Members from the General Conference and Division Officers Regarding the 2015 General Conference Session Vote on Ordination” the role of women in the church was reaffirmed. “The vote taken in San Antonio does not change the church’s understanding of the role of women in the life, mission and practice of the

church as supported by the *Church Manual* and outlined in General Conference and division working policies,” it read.

The following paragraphs in the document addressed “Moving Ahead Together in Mission.” There, in hindsight, is an indication that the changes envisioned by the Office of the President were with church entities, rather than dealing with individual women pastors. “We appeal to all entities to respect the decision by the world body in session since any unilateral and independent action contrary to the voted action paves the way for fracture and fragmentation. We urge all entities to work closely with world division administrations to ensure that all actions harmonize with voted policy to foster worldwide unity and our heavenly-entrusted mission.” What specifically that meant, however, was not discussed until this year when the General Conference President’s office began to draft documents and seek agreement from the various representatives of the General Conference and its divisions to discipline the unions that had voted to ordain women.

**Summer 2016** – According to an *Adventist Review* story (posted October 11), Mike Ryan, assistant to the General Conference president, met with the Division Presidents in the summer and shared an early draft of the ideas that would later be spelled out in the “Unity in Mission: Procedures in Church Reconciliation” document.

**August/September 2016** – The Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research did the research and drafting of the fifty-page paper titled “A Study of Church Governance and Unity” as well as the seventeen-page “Summary

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Document: A Study of Church Governance and Unity.”

**Sunday, September 25** – An *Adventist Review* story announced “Church Governance and Unity to be Discussed at Annual Council.” General Conference Secretariat asked church leaders to consider two documents on the issue. The story said the two documents were posted on the Archives website, also on September 25. The story quoted GT Ng; “During Annual Council this year we plan to discuss how best to address divergence from the current policy.” Ng sent out the documents to delegates via email.

**Tuesday, September 27** – In a meeting with the Division Presidents, General Conference President, Ted Wilson, handed out the document that Ryan had been writing. This draft “action” document was seven pages long and titled “Unity in Mission: Procedures in Church Reconciliation.” It outlined a way for the General Conference leadership to take over the unions that voted to ordain women. The Division Presidents approved the document to be taken to the next committee level—to the GCDO, a seventy-plus-member group of all the General Conference and Division Officers.

**Thursday, September 29** – “General Conference Leadership Considers Takeover of Unions that Ordain Women” was the headline on *Spectrum’s* website, with a short report of the meeting earlier in the week (Tuesday) when Division presidents voted to recommend disciplining unions. It also noted that the GCDO vote was to take place the 29th.

**Friday, September 30** – When the *Spectrum* story was updated, it was to note that the GCDO asked for a rewrite of the proposal to disci-

pline unions.

While, at the General Conference, work was focused on the procedures document from the President’s office, Adventists elsewhere were examining the lengthier documents on the Archives website and asking questions.

Faculty at the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary at Andrews University voted a statement saying, “We have serious concerns about the recent document ‘A Study of Church Governance and Unity’ released by the General Conference and its portrayal of the nature and authority of the church. Further discussion by the church at large on this important ecclesiological issue is needed before such a document is adopted.” (*Spectrum*).

**Sunday, October 2** – The GC Secretariat Department staff, who prepare and compile all the documents for Annual Council, discussed with each other the document that was being revised. When they realized that they were unanimous in their non-support of the nuclear option being recommended, they asked for a meeting with their boss, G.T. Ng, who listened, agreed, and recommended the next step—sharing their concerns with General Conference President, Ted Wilson.

**Monday, October 3** – Work began on revising the “Unity in Mission” document (according to October 11 *Adventist Review* story on the vote).

**Tuesday, October 4** – The Adventist Church in Norway formally responded to the General Conference Unity Document with a document on their website. In their statement, the Norwegian Union Conference leaders said the GC document had a number of weaknesses

and would likely contribute to a splitting of the church. “An attempt to coerce unions to comply with the General Conference Working Policy is likely to set in motion a series of uncontrollable and unpredictable events.” Further, the leaders said, considering only policy compliance is “a dangerous oversimplification based on pragmatic rather than moral and spiritual considerations. Those unions which have ordained female pastors or stopped ordaining altogether do so because they are convinced that the Bible tells them to treat men and women equally. Their decisions are not grounded in policy but in spiritual and moral obligation.”

The Loma Linda University School of Religion Faculty voted and announced their support for the Seminary Response to the Unity Document (*Spectrum*).

**Wednesday, October 5** – “GC Proposes Year of Grace for Unions” (*Spectrum*). In their reworking of the procedural document at the General Conference, a more pastoral approach was being suggested. The GCDO was scheduled to meet the following day to consider a “pastoral action” that would propose giving the unions a year of grace and appeal to them to repent of their actions. If approved, the procedural document would go to Annual Council for consideration on Tuesday, October 11.

**Wednesday, October 5** – The LEAD Conference opening marked the start of the Annual Council Meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee. This is the group that holds the power to initiate action between General Conference Sessions. It is a group of over 300 people,

including all division officers, union conference presidents, lay and pastoral representatives from all divisions, and many of the General Conference staff. Adventist education was the focus of the LEAD conference this year, and it was declared worthy of becoming Fundamental Belief No. 29 (*Adventist Review*).

**Thursday, October 6** – The *Adventist Review* provided clarification to their earlier story on the documents about “A Study of Governance and Unity”: “The first paragraph of this story has been updated to clarify that the two documents were not discussed by church leadership at the Annual Council but were meant to act as resource materials for an agenda topic to be considered by church leadership. The original paragraph said, ‘General Conference Secretariat has released two documents about church governance and unity that are to be considered by church leadership at the Annual Council business meeting in October.’ It now reads: ‘General Conference Secretariat has released two documents about church governance and unity that are resource materials for an agenda topic to be considered by church leadership at the Annual Council business meeting in October.’” This clarification helps explain why the study documents were never discussed during the coming days. Only the “procedures” came to the Annual Council for consideration.

**Friday, October 7** – “GC Outlines Proposed Plan of Action for Unions that Ordain Women” (*Spectrum*). The GC released the revised document on “Unity in Mission: Procedures in Church Reconciliation,” approved by the seventy-eight-member GCDO, on the evening of October 6. The revised

document was now three pages, rather than the seven of the original action. It no longer included the “nuclear” action of taking over the unions. Instead it now recommended a two-step process of reconciliation. It called for “personal visits, open consultations, meetings, and forums for dialogue.” Pastoral letters, listening, and praying were key components. Then, its second recommendation was “To request the General Conference Administrative Committee to recommend to the 2017 Annual Council, procedural steps to be followed in the event that a resolution of conflict is not achieved under procedures identified in recommendation 1. above.” It closed with the surprising statement, considering what the first two pages had listed, “Upon the approval of this document, even though the full process has not yet been fully identified and approved, entities are authorized to implement the process where there are matters of non-adherence regarding biblical principles as expressed in the Fundamental Beliefs, voted actions, or working policies of the Church and provide a report through the division, or in the case of a General Conference institution through the General Conference Administrative Committee, at the next Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee.”

Another document that gained significant attention that day was one written by Adventist historian George Knight on “The Role of Union Conferences in Relation to Higher Authorities.” It appeared on the *Spectrum* web site, and is included in this issue on page 32.

**Monday, October 10** – Walla Walla University School of Theology joined the other academic institutions in issuing a Statement on Church

Governance and Unity (*Spectrum*).

**Tuesday, October 11** – “Annual Council Approves Measure to Encourage Adherence to Church Policies: The vote took place after fifty delegates share their viewpoints.” (*Adventist Review*). The body voted the revised three-page document, “Unity in Mission: Procedures in Church Reconciliation,” by a vote of 169–122. The document “details steps on how to deal with SDA entities not adhering to voted actions of the Adventist world church.”

Delegates received copies of the revised document as they filed into their seats. At the bottom it carried a 10/9/16 revision date even though the GCDO vote was on October 6. “The document calls for the GC Administrative Committee to draft a proposal on the next course of action and submit it to the 2017 Annual Council for approval.” Other details noted in the story include the count on delegates: 315 delegates to Annual Council, but a total of 291 delegates participated in the vote.

Mike Ryan, who the *Review* article said was involved in the development of the document, suggested at the beginning of the discussion that the “Unity in Mission document was not about women’s ordination. Instead, he said, it was about making sure that all church entities followed world church policy. This, in turn, would keep the church united and help it fulfill its mission of spreading the gospel to the world.”

Jiří Moskala, dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary at Andrews University, called for a theological study of how policy relates to the church’s core doctrinal beliefs during the discussion.

**Wednesday, October 12** –

Response Statements were posted (*Spectrum*) from NAD, TED, and the Pacific Union.

Dan Jackson sent an open letter to female pastors in NAD, saying that the GC “Unity in Mission” document “did not affect your status as a pastor.” Jackson reiterated that “the North American Division remains committed to empower[ing] and establish[ing] our women in pastoral ministry. We will not give up on this ideal and goal.”

**Friday, October 14** – “Washington Adventist University Religion Department Responds to the Governance and Unity Document” (*Spectrum* story, October 25).

**Wednesday, October 19** – Dan Jackson responded to the “Unity in Mission” vote in a video message released by NAD.

**Thursday, October 27** – The Year End Meeting of NAD Executive Committee opened. In his president’s report, “Collaboration 2.0,” Dan Jackson focused on the mission of the division saying, “all are needed; all are wanted.” He made a point to congratulate Andrews University’s president Andrea Luxton, inaugurated on October 25. He noted NAD’s plan to bring many more women pastors into employment, calling it “well within” GC and NAD policies.

**Friday, October 28** – The NAD Executive Committee spent over three hours discussing the GC “Unity in Mission” document. Jackson stated that the NAD will comply with GC directives and noted that despite what some GC leaders have said to the contrary, the issue in the document is clearly women’s ordination. Jackson noted that the GC will determine punishment for policy noncompliance by the 2017

Annual Council. He suggests that if another iteration of the document is drafted, distinction should be made between theology/ Scripture and policy. Jackson says he will not defend the document, but will appeal to the two unions that ordain women as he has been directed. Apologizing to union leaders, he stated that he would ask unions to revoke ordination of forty-four women and predicted “they will refuse.” He said he would vote against the “Unity in Mission” document “300 more times” if he could. The Adventist Church “is in a crisis” and because of the issue, the church “is hemorrhaging young people,” he said. NAD Secretary, G. Alexander Bryant, made the point that policy is “not on the same level as doctrine.” The majority of delegates spoke against the “Unity in Mission” document and in favor of ordaining women. Two delegates, both from Canada, voiced dissent. La Sierra University Student Association President, Nicqelle Godfrey, noting that La Sierra has a female provost, senior church pastor, and conference president, said, “You’re not going to convince my community that women should not be ordained.”

**Friday, October 28** – La Sierra University President, Randal Wisbey, ended the NAD discussion of the “Unity in Mission” document with a motion requesting that the General Conference recognize the Southeastern California Conference President, Dr. Sandra Roberts:

*The attendees of the NAD Year-end Meeting respectfully request that the General Conference provide Elder Sandra Roberts, president of Southeastern California Conference, the same respect, rights and privileges of office as any other con-*

*ference president in the North American Division who has been duly elected by an official and legal constituency meeting of that conference. This will include inclusion in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook as president of SECC and being provided with regular and official credentials at General Conference meetings, such as Annual Council, etc., the same as any other NAD conference president.*

The motion passed 141 yes, 32 no, 5 in abstention. With the vote, business ended for the day.

**Sunday, October 30** – After the NAD’s Undertreasurer’s financial report, Douglas Pereira, a pastor in the Manitoba-Saskatchewan Conference, who emigrated from Brazil, introduced a motion to lower the tithe sent by the NAD to the GC. He proposed that by 2020, the NAD reduce remittances to the GC to 2 percent of tithe income, as is the case for other divisions. He stated that the current remittance rate of 5.8 percent hampers the mission of the NAD in places like his district in Canada and asked delegates to “send a clear signal” to the GC. NAD President Jackson responded sympathetically to the motion, and citing “culture wars,” noted that other division presidents inappropriately fundraising for their projects within NAD “must stop.” Jackson then discouraged delegates from voting the motion, saying the removal of approximately \$45–\$50M from the GC budget would “severely damage” the mission of the world church. Alex Bryant pointed out that an incremental reduction of the rate is already underway, but stated that it is not enough—it must be re-negotiated. Pereira’s motion was tabled, pending



a report of the NAD Governance Committee.

**Monday, October 31** – With less than ten minutes before lunch break, NAD YEM reconsidered Pereira’s motion. Several delegates spoke in favor of the spirit of the motion (parity with other divisions regarding tithe remittances to GC), but against the motion’s specific goal of 2 percent by 2020. The motion was voted down, 64 yes, 121 no.

**Monday, October 31** – With fifty minutes remaining during the scheduled business session, discussion of the “Unity in Mission” document resumed. While other business sessions had been broadcast via live internet streaming, this session was not. A delegate expressed fear for the church, worrying that this issue will fracture the denomination. Randy Roberts, senior pastor of the Loma Linda University Church, introduced a motion expressing “grave concern” with the “Unity in Mission” document and registering “our vigorous disagreement with the intent of the document.” Roberts’ motion authorized “NADCOM to appoint a subcommittee to craft a thoughtful path forward,” and reiterated “our unwavering support and steadfast intent to realize the full equality of women in ministry, in fulfillment of biblical principles, in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

AU Seminary Dean, Jiří Moskala, stated that the “Unity in Mission” document references “biblical principles” four times. He suggested that NAD dialogue with other divisions to

point out that ordaining women violates no biblical principles, as the GC Theology of Ordination Study Committee found.

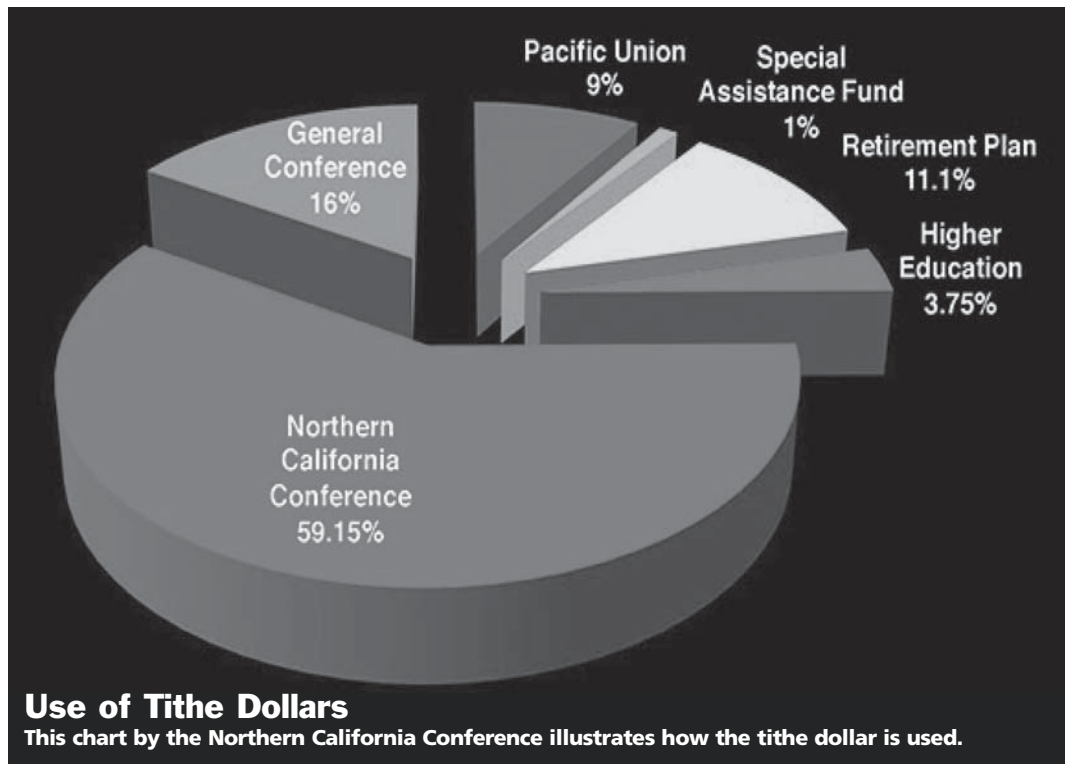
The motion was voted by a wide margin: 163 yes, 35 no, 1 in abstention.

**October 31, 2016** – TEAM (Time for Equality in Ministry) hosted the premiere of “Called,” a documentary featuring four women who minister. Many NAD leaders attended the screening, and the documentary was released online.

**November 1, 2016** – In the NAD Ministerial Department report, another video was presented depicting women pastors who serve around the world. The video introduced the hashtag #WhatAPastorLooksLike. Secretary Alex Bryant stated that there are some 4,500 licensed pastors in NAD. He said that when the “Women in Ministry” building block was introduced a few years ago, there were 107 women pastors (2 percent). Within seven years, he continued, 50 percent

of the pastoral workforce will be eligible to retire. He described this as an opportunity to add more women pastors. He called for doing all that can be done to assist women currently studying at the Adventist Theological Seminary. Another member of the NAD Ministerial Department, Brenda Billings, said there are currently 148 women pastors (thirty-eight hired in last two years; the goal was twenty). Billings thanked conference leaders who helped make it possible. The report was received by a vote of 165 yes, 4 no, and 4 in abstention.

Jackson brought the meeting to a close, noting that it was the last NAD YEM in the General Conference building. By next year, the NAD will have completed renovation of new headquarters. He said, “we owe a debt of gratitude to the GC for hosting us all these years.” A motion to that effect was made and the vote carried. ■



### Use of Tithe Dollars

This chart by the Northern California Conference illustrates how the tithe dollar is used.

# THE BIBLE:



"THE 2ND DAY OF THE CREATION," BY M.C. ESCHER, 1925.

## NEW READINGS

Graphic works  
by Dutch artist  
M. C. Escher  
(1898–1972)  
are featured in  
this section.



# Cosmology and Morality: *The Scientific Captivity of Creation and Beyond* | BY DAVID LARSON

The Biblical idea of creation languishes in scientific captivity. This is a preoccupation with how it relates to the findings of disciplines such as geology, biology, and physical anthropology. The assumption seems to be that debates about origins are the only things that matter. The results are the outcomes of all imprisonment: narrowness, darkness, and lethal boredom.

In what follows, I sketch in three main points the sort of thing that can happen when we read Genesis 1–3 from the discipline of ethics instead. Ethics is not the only way to liberate these texts. Also, it would be easy to make more than these three points. Yet I hope that they are enough to signal an important message. This is what we need to liberate the idea of creation from its scientific bondage.

It makes no difference in the discipline of ethics whether one reads these stories literally or figuratively because the moral lessons are the same either way. Ethics doesn't offer different answers. It asks different questions. So do other disciplines that we should also hear.

## Cosmologies: Stuff and Interpretation

Conversations about ethical issues range from the practical to the cosmological. This discussion is cosmological. I hasten to add that the word “cosmos” has long referred to the overall ways people interpret and organize their lives as well to the stuff scientists study. When Biblical people encourage us not to love the “cosmos,” or to be in the “cosmos” but not of it, they are not warning against studying the universe. Their concern is that we not live in harmony with interpretations that are more or less alien. Yet, although they are different, it is important not to drive a wedge between these two aspects of cosmologies which some call “empirical” and “hermeneutical.” Every society is a reading of the stars.

We can see this mix of stuff and interpretation in the claims of a cosmology that is a virtual consensus in many circles today. It includes assertions such as:

1. Our existence is sheer happenstance.
2. Our future is total oblivion.
3. There are no objective moral standards.
4. Aesthetic judgments are entirely preferential.
5. Happiness is pleasure and unhappiness is pain.
6. Societies flourish most when each citizen makes increasing his or her own wealth the overriding economic priority.
7. All human decisions are ultimately determined by factors over which those who make them have no control.



M.C. ESCHER: THE THIRD DAY OF THE CREATION



8. It is bad manners to inquire about basic things such as: Why is there something rather than nothing? What was there before the Big Bang? Are numbers real or merely convenient contrivances?
9. All claims about God are meaningless because there is no way to validate or invalidate them.
10. The meaning of a term is wholly to be found in its use rather than to what it refers.
11. Coercive power is more effective than persuasive.
12. The achievements of a society are best measured by what it affords its most advantaged citizens.

**The Bible's first two creation stories aim at the pretensions of rulers such as Babylon's Nebuchadnezzar and they hit their target.**

Although it has much going for it, this cosmology does have one drawback: it doesn't work. No cosmos in the history of humanity has ever survived, let alone thrived, with anything like it. None has even tried. It is maladaptive. It perishes before it flourishes. We are here today because our ancestors spurned it.

### **The Cosmology of Genesis: Contingency**

The cosmology of Genesis begins with the realization that no cosmos has within itself all that it takes for it to be. It knows that every cosmos, including its own, is contingent. It acknowledges that it depends upon resources it did not create.

According to the authors of the Bible's first creation story (Genesis 1:1–2:3) their cosmos did not separate light and darkness. God did. It did not separate the waters above from the waters below. God did. It did not gather the seas so that dry land would appear. God did. It did not bring forth all kinds of vegetation. God did. It did not create the stars, sun, and moon. God did. It did not begin to populate the seas, air, and land with many living things. God did. It did not create human beings with a number of divine-like characteristics that other animals do not possess to the same degree. God did. These assertions are not rivals to plate tectonics and the like. They are protests against human arrogance.



THE 1ST DAY OF THE CREATION, 1925 - M.C. ESCHER



According to those who gave us the second creation story, (Genesis 2: 3–24), before the Lord God made them there was no earth and no heavens, no plant and no herb, no rain, and no one to till the soil even if there were. There was no food, no awareness of the difference between life and death, and no understanding of good and evil. Every cosmos depends upon all of these and none can wholly create them for itself. In its own way, then, the second story is also a cosmology of contingency.

Around the time of the Babylonian exile, Biblical people gathered, polished, and pointed these stories, which had long existed, often in oral form, and thrust them as sharpened conceptual spears into the cosmologies of those who had conquered them. “You have your creation stories and they are impressive,” they asserted. “But we have ours and they will prove themselves to be superior.”

The Bible’s first two creation stories aim at the pretensions of rulers such as Babylon’s Nebuchadnezzar and they hit their target. He built a huge golden image of himself. He commanded all of his subordinates in governance and many others, to bow before it or be incinerated. He strutted on the roof of his royal palace in Babylon crowing that he was the mighty King who had built the empire and its capital for his own power and majesty.

King Nebuchadnezzar was also the one who was driven from society and forced to live with animals in the fields, eat grass like cattle, and be bathed only by dew until his hair was as long as an eagle’s feathers and his nails were like a bird’s claws. When his reason returned, he blessed the Most High’s everlasting sovereignty and unending kingdom. He praised the King of heaven for truth, justice, and the ability to humiliate the proud.

It can be helpful to read back and forth the Bible’s first two stories about creation and its stories about King Nebuchadnezzar. They illuminate each other in literally telling ways.



### The Cosmology of Genesis: Equality

Another conviction of the cosmology of Genesis is that, in a very basic sense that has to do with how we treat each other, all human beings are equal. Paul summarized this well to the philosophers of Athens when he declared that God made all the nations from one ancestor. This must have startled them at least as much as his talk about the resurrection of the dead did. Moral monogenism was as strange then as it is now.

The cosmology of Genesis undermines ethnocentrism. I once asked a graduate student from Italy whether there are any deep differences between the people of her nation and mine. “Oh yes!” she replied. “It’s a different way of thinking.” Instead of acknowledging and appreciating such differences, ethnocentrism makes one’s own ethnicity the measure of all others, even if enforcing it requires bloodshed. Although it is common, this is something that the cosmology of Genesis prohibits.

We must say the same thing even more strongly about racism, which is even more pernicious. This is so for at least three reasons. One of them is that it is easier to change or

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conceal one's ethnicity than it is to disguise one's race. Another is that the purported scientific support for racism has been discredited. A third is that racism makes all members of a racial minority extremely and often equally vulnerable, as many professional and prosperous African Americans can easily testify.

The cosmology of Genesis opposes both types of theological sexism. One of these justifies the man's power over the woman as a practical necessity in a world of sin. Whether this is the intended meaning of the text is debated; however, even if it is, the Biblical story as a whole seems to be about recollecting a lost paradise and anticipating a new one by living as far as possible in harmony with the expectations of each.

The second type of theological sexism, which sees the subordination of the woman as part of God's ideal even before there is sin, is undermined by a curious part of the Bible's second creation story. It is the report that the Lord God made the woman from one of the man's ribs. Those who included this part of the story wanted us to take it very seriously. They explained why when they portrayed the man exclaiming that the woman was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

Their point was not that the Lord God made the woman out of the man's rib so that she would stand neither above, nor below, but beside him. It is that the woman consists of the very same stuff as the man, that they are identical in being and value. This leaves room for different roles because, for instance, only the woman could give birth. But every effort to transform differences in roles into differentials of power violates the cosmology of Genesis.

Taken together, the different accounts of the creation of human beings in the Bible's first two stories about it point to their lowliness and loftiness. The second story's account emphasizes human lowliness. It pictures all human beings as divinely-animated dust, which is exactly the same way it portrays all the non-human animals. Cosmologies that talk mostly

about this become too sensual. The first story focuses on human loftiness. It says that human beings are created in God's image. Cosmologies that make too much of this become excessively spiritual. These two stories, each complementing and balancing the other, make clear that the cosmology of Genesis seeks the integration of sensuality and spirituality.

### **The Cosmology of Genesis: Mutuality**

There has long been a widespread conviction in cultures that have been most affected by Biblical thought that God made the animals for our benefit and therefore anything we do to them, whether it is in factory farms, medical experiments, or killing them just for fun, is ethically justified. The cosmology of Genesis casts a long shadow of moral doubt about such human-centered thinking.

The second story's explanation that it was not good that the man live alone and what the Lord God did about it deserves more scrutiny in this regard than it often gets. True, the Lord God eventually created the woman out of the man's rib and, as we have seen, the man at last had a partner that corresponded to him. But before doing that, the Lord God formed from the ground an astounding number of different kinds of birds and animals. While the Lord God waited to see what he would do, the man studied each kind well enough to give it a name that fit with its distinctive characteristics. Far from being a mere prelude to the solution of man's loneliness, the Lord God's creation of the birds and animals was an essential and necessary part of it. They were to be his friends and he was to be theirs. This was supposed to be a mutually beneficial and enjoyable relationship, instead of one marked by fear and ferociousness on both sides.

God's command to fill and subdue the earth and exercise dominion over every living being is also an important part of the first story. Many object that this language has been used to justify the exploitation of animals. The typical response is to agree but to

point out that in this case “dominion” actually means something like “stewardship,” or taking good care of the Creator’s creatures. Yet “dominion” is a strong word, and so is “subdue.” By themselves these terms could be taken to warrant animal exploitation; however, they aren’t by themselves.

This passage also says that for food God has given humans every seed-yielding plant and every fruit-bearing tree. Although in other places the Bible distinguishes between clean and unclean animals, permitting the eating of the first and prohibiting the eating of the second, this one doesn’t. Human beings eating other animals is not included in the cosmology of Genesis.

This touches on an aspect of our lives that reeks with hypocrisy. On the one hand, we rebuke the industries and manufacturers that pollute our air, land and water. On the other, we continue to eat vast numbers of cud-chewing animals even though we know that raising and slaughtering them is one of the greatest causes of needless animal suffering and preventable ecological destruction. It is hard to imagine anything more contrary to the cosmology of Genesis.

## Deciding How to Decide

One way to select among rival cosmologies would be to expand and apply to this different topic a way of making ethical choices that Harvard University philosopher, John Rawls, made famous in his theory of justice. Let us imagine that we have gathered at the beginning of a new cosmos and that our job is to select the most promising supporting cosmology. Let us further suppose that in our discussions we can know all the general facts about the universe but none that is specifically about any of us. I would not know my race, for example, and neither would you. None of us would know his or her gender, ethnicity, educational level, sexual orientation, geographical location, economic class, philosophical tendencies, political loyalties, or religious



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commitments. Going well beyond Rawls, none of us would even know whether he or she is a human or non-human animal.

Because we all possess a will-to-flourish, what Rawls called the “maximin principle” would function. This means that in this situation of the greatest possible objectivity, we would all choose the option that to our eyes offers the maximum opportunities to prosper, even if we are minimally fortunate when our cosmos actually begins and we finally learn who we are. If I didn’t know whether I am a comfortably situated male in America or an impoverished female in Guatemala whose family was pressed out of subsistence farming by the agricultural interests of globalization, what would I choose? What would be my selection if I didn’t even know whether I am a human or non-human animal? Wouldn’t I choose the cosmology of Genesis? Wouldn’t you? ■

**David Larson** teaches in the School of Religion at Loma



Loma Linda University.



## “The Perfect Storm” | BY KENDRA HALOVIK VALENTINE



“THE 2ND DAY OF THE CREATION,” BY M.C. ESCHER, 1925.

Tradition calls it “Mark’s Gospel.” But consider for whom and just when Mark wrote his account of the life of Jesus: Christians living around 70 A.D./C.E., during a war and its aftermath. Mark wrote for Christians whose forty-year-old faith tradition was based on the life of a Jewish man who had been executed by Rome. The followers of this insurrectionist now experienced yet another time of chaos and uncertainty. And Jesus hadn’t returned.

Yet another war threatened to completely wipe out the Jews, including the Jewish Christians. The temple in Jerusalem had been leveled. The refugees were the lucky ones—people just trying to keep what was left of their families together through another day; through another night.

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This article is an adaptation of a presentation delivered at the Women & the Word Conference held at La Sierra University, Riverside, California, October 20, 2016. It retains many features of oral delivery.



In this context, Mark writes a gospel—probably the first of its kind. Certainly, this was the first time “Gospel” told the story of a peasant preacher. The word “Gospel” had military overtones. When a runner from the front lines of a battle ran through sympathetic villages shouting “gospell” mothers and wives and children breathed a sigh of relief. Perhaps they would see their son or husband or father again, for the runner’s message meant: “Good news! The battle is going our way!”

Mark starts his story of Jesus’ life: “The beginning of the gospel...” Seriously, Mark? How can you say that to hungry refugees, watching the smoke still going up from their burned homes and from their holy place? “Good news”? The battle is going our way? Notice how he begins and then continues his gospel:

<sup>1</sup>*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

<sup>2</sup>*As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,*

*“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;*

<sup>3</sup>*the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:*

*‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”*

<sup>4</sup>*John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*

<sup>5</sup>*And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.* <sup>6</sup>*Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.* <sup>7</sup>*He proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.’* <sup>8</sup>*I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’*

<sup>9</sup>*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.* <sup>10</sup>*And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on*

*him.* <sup>11</sup>*And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’*

<sup>12</sup>*And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.* <sup>13</sup>*He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.*

<sup>14</sup>*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,* <sup>15</sup>*and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’* (NRSV)

Mark says he is quoting from Isaiah (1:2). But look carefully and you will notice he is actually quoting from Exodus 23:20. Did he not know? Was he not reading carefully, or perhaps not reading at all? Was it all in his memory and he just misquoted? Or was he profoundly aware of Isaiah’s own theological and prophetic reworking of the book of Exodus?

What story from Israel’s past is brought into this introduction to Jesus’ story? Notice the repetition of the word “wilderness.” Notice the Jordan and water images. Notice the number forty, the “crying out” and the people “going out.” Mark sets up his story of Jesus’ life by reminding his readers of another story. Mark’s gospel, clearly, is written as the story of a “New Exodus.”

In this gospel, Jesus will be releasing people from bondage. And it all starts with a voice crying out. Whether the cries are of slaves in Egypt, or the cries of John the Baptist, or those of refugees in Mark’s own day, God hears people’s cries. In this gospel, wherever Jesus goes, people are freed. A man with an unclean spirit enters into the synagogue and Jesus releases him from the demon’s bondage (1:21–28). It is Jesus’ first miracle in Mark, and there are many more to come! A mother-in-law has a fever that keeps her in bed, and Jesus releases her from the bondage of sickness (1:29–31), raises her up in anticipation of the resurrection and she begins “serving” that is, being a disciple (what disciples are to do); in that sense, she is Jesus’ first disciple! All kinds

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of sick people and demon-possessed people come to Jesus and he releases all of them from bondage to sickness and Satan (1:32–34)! A leper comes to Jesus begging for release from a disease which kept him from family. Making him clean, Jesus restores him to community, releasing him from the bondage of isolation (1:40–45). All this and Mark has just finished chapter one of his Gospel—Good News indeed! The battle is going our way! Mark sees that *Jesus* is the New Exodus!

Mark tells his readers: remember the Exodus! It's happening again! To underscore the point, Mark's first chapter portrays Jesus going into the Jordan River as the children of Israel did after the Exodus as they prepared to enter the promise land. Later in this gospel, a huge multitude in the wilderness will be fed by "bread from heaven." It is "manna" again, only this time, provided by Jesus, with more than enough for sharing. Jesus will also frequently go "up a mountain" like Moses did, teaching his disciples about the kingdom of God that has come.

Mark's gospel presents Jesus' life as an embodiment of the Exodus. People are freed from bondage. People experience salvation. Suddenly the silence is broken. And the broken find their voices:

- Crowds proclaim: "we have never seen anything like this!" (2:12);
- Fishermen ask; "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" (4:41);
- A trembling, but healed woman tells Jesus the whole truth of her long illness and her decision to reach out and touch the hem of his robe (5:33);
- A Syrophenician mother responds back: "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (7:28);
- Gentiles who witness a miracle exclaim: "He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak" (7:37);
- A blind man says: "I can see people—they look like trees" (8:24);

- A worried father confesses: "I believe; help my unbelief!" (9:24);
- A beggar at the side of the road yells out: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (10:47, 48);
- A centurion overseeing Jesus' crucifixion proclaims: "Truly this man was God's son!" (15:39).

The silence is broken. And the broken find their voices. It's good news—the battle is going our way, Mark says to wandering refugees. God hears the cries of the broken.

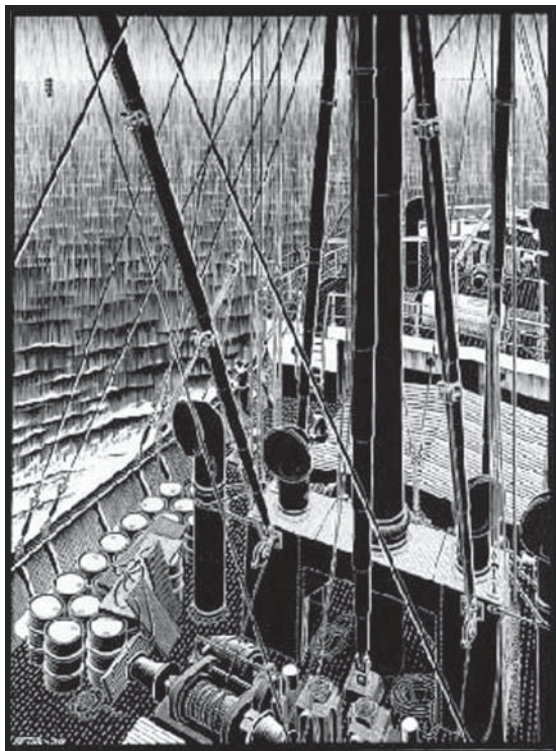
### **Reading Mark at the End of 2016**

How did we go from this "good news," spoken to the broken refugees of Mark's community, down to a church in 2016 that is trying to silence the broken all over again? To silence women before some of them have even had a chance to break their silence? The events unfolding at Annual Council in October 2016 have been unprecedented in Adventist history.

Those who followed the discussion will know that a document developed in-house by administration at the General Conference headquarters put together a proposal to directly challenge and punish Union Conference constituency decisions in 2012 (affirmed again at the recent 2016 session) to authorize and credential pastors without regard to gender. A supporting position paper was also developed. After widespread protest a modified document was prepared in alarmed haste and then voted last week in Silver Spring, Maryland: 169–122 (58% of the vote).

Last year religion teachers at all Adventist colleges and universities were told to prepare to receive online documents from IBMTE (International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education) that they would be asked to sign should they want to continue teaching in Adventist schools of higher education.

There is much shaking of heads in disbelief at the sharp chasm between those who understand our church's heritage and structure to be



mission-oriented and committed to the preaching of a present truth, and those who seem to desire a centralized hierarchical power structure of control. Above the din, some sense they hear a cry—is it Ellen White weeping?

For decades, the church has said (even at GC Sessions) that Adventists who love the church and the Bible can—with good conscience—come to differing views on the topic of the equal participation of women in ministry and thus their ordination. Believers therefore need to be patient and flexible with each other. Now, suddenly, those union constituencies who followed their moral convictions born of prayer and Bible study, and who also considered they were properly following policy and processes of the church, are considered rebellious unions. And “rebellious” is one of the kinder descriptions being used.

Perhaps, today, you are feeling overwhelmed by it all. Perhaps you too are not sure where to turn; or perhaps tempted to turn away altogether. It is a stormy time, with rumors in the winds. Chilled hope. Light going out. Perhaps it feels like “the perfect storm.” (If you saw the film, you know it does-

n’t go well for George Clooney and company.) Should one jump ship while one still can?

Recently in a Sabbath sermon reflection on the gathering storm, the senior pastor at La Sierra University Church, Chris Oberg, suggested that “a crisis is a terrible thing to waste.” She then invited us to respond to these happenings in our church with renewed Bible study. This was good pastoral counsel. Crises should drive us to scripture.

I took up her challenge and spent that Sabbath afternoon and much of Sunday in thoughtful reflection and study. Let me share what Mark had to say to me that Sabbath afternoon. Mark 6:45–52 reads:

<sup>45</sup>Immediately he made (forced, compelled) his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>46</sup>After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

<sup>47</sup>When evening came, the boat was out in the middle of the sea, and he was alone on the land. <sup>48</sup>When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended (wanted) to pass them by. <sup>49</sup>But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; <sup>50</sup>for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke with them and said to them, ‘Take heart, I AM; do not be afraid.’ <sup>51</sup>Then he rose up into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they themselves were utterly astounded, <sup>52</sup>for they did not understand about the loaves, but their heart was hardened.’

This is not the first storm that Mark relates (3:35–41). But it is the first one the disciples encounter without Jesus. Notice that Jesus made (the Greek can mean “forced” or “compelled”) the disciples to get into the boat and head out to the “other” place. This was the “beyond” place—Gentile space: Bethsaida. While this is the first time “Bethsaida” is mentioned in Mark, the Greek word for “other” or “beyond” was used when Jesus went to the land of the Gerasenes—his first sojourn into Gentile territory (5:1). Now Jesus compels his

**How did we  
go from this  
“good news,”  
spoken to the  
broken refugees  
of Mark’s  
community,  
down to a  
church in 2016  
that is trying  
to silence the  
broken all  
over again?**



Mark's  
gospel  
presents  
Jesus' life  
as an  
embodiment  
of the  
Exodus.



M. C. ESCHER - "BOATS" - 1936, WOODCUT

disciples to go to Gentile territory, but without him. He *made* them go, while he heads up the mountain to pray. Like Moses, Jesus goes alone. To be with God. To pray.

Earlier in this same chapter, Jesus had sent the disciples to cast out unclean spirits and they did so while preaching and healing (6:7–13). But that was a ministry among their own people. They visited familiar fishing towns and nearby villages. Why wouldn't Jesus now go with them to this other, strange, Gentile land?

At evening, the disciples are in the middle of the Sea of Galilee and Jesus is alone on the land. It is a starkly described contrast. Even before we know the disciples are in danger, we sense the separation. As pastors, we tell people, when you're going through the difficulties of life—the storms of life—know that Jesus is right there with you. But in this part of this story, Jesus wasn't with them. The language is very clear: Jesus "was alone on the land."

Then Jesus sees their situation. He sees them "straining in anguish, for the wind was

against them" (6:48). In the gospel of Mark, Jesus is described as *seeing* a lot of people. Jesus sees Simon and Andrew (1:16). He sees James and John (1:19). He sees the faith of the four friends bringing the paralytic (2:5). Jesus sees Levi at the tax booth (2:14). He sees the people around him calling them his new family (3:34). Jesus sees the woman who reached out to him (5:32). Jesus sees a crowd looking like sheep without a shepherd (6:34).

After this story of the storm, Jesus also *sees* his disciples as he begins telling him about the crucifixion (8:33). He will see little children being kept from him (10:14). He will see the rich man who will walk away (10:21). He will see his disciples, who had given up so much to follow him (10:23). He will see a scribe who answers wisely (12:34). Jesus *sees* people in the gospel, much like God saw the afflictions of Joseph's descendants in Egypt (Exodus 3:7).

Even though Jesus is not with them, he sees them. He sees them "straining in anguish." The Greek word here can mean "torture" or to "expe-

rience anguish," to "experience pain." It is a word that makes us think of the physical struggle they were going through. Were they finding it difficult to breathe with the water washing over them—in their faces—the intense winds and intense work taking their breath away?

Recently, I had a cycling accident. Everything is fine now, for which I'm very grateful. But that terrible time after I hit the ground (having gone over the handlebars) was a very frightening experience. I couldn't breathe for what seemed the longest time. My entire focus was on breathing. Get the helmet strap off my neck, pull down the high neck on my shirt. Breathe. I needed air. Had my ribs or part of the bike punctured my lungs? No. I had just had the wind knocked out of me. And, though I would spend two days in ICU with a liver laceration, I never needed supplemental oxygen. Since it wasn't a major accident, the injuries all seemed minor once I could breathe again.

What were Jesus' disciples going through, thinking of, during that storm? Was it hard to breathe? That's terrifying. And was the storm a powerful way for Mark to reflect what his first readers, (actually, his first hearers) were going through?

It was "a perfect storm." Jewish rebels had taken the temple mount in Jerusalem, and the Romans had marched to reclaim it—destroying whole villages along the way. And when they came through your village they didn't ask if you were Jewish or Jewish Christian. They didn't ask if you were Jewish or part of a Jewish sect whose leader had been crucified by Rome. You were done. No more breath left in your body. Jews were betraying Jews; Christians betraying Christians. And there was no Jesus in sight.

Followers of Jesus were experiencing the delay of the Advent. Where was Jesus? He said he would return "soon"! The cry from Jesus on the cross was probably echoed a thousand times by his followers: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (15:34). My God, my God, why have you forsaken us? Mark's

first hearers would have known the desperation of the disciples rowing against a strong, life-threatening storm—on a sea of terror.

And then Jesus comes to them. At the fourth watch, which was sometime between 3 and 6 am, Jesus comes to them. Jesus comes to them as the light begins to shine in the darkness. He comes walking on the sea!

Echoes of the Exodus come together here in a powerful way. There's already been a miraculous feeding in the wilderness (6:30–44). Manna again for a multitude. Jesus had been up the mountain in prayer (6:46). Jesus had seen the disciples' affliction on the sea, much as God had told Moses that the all-seeing one saw the afflictions of the people in bondage. Now Jesus walks on the sea. It isn't the Red Sea this time, but the Sea of Galilee. And Mark says that Jesus "wanted to pass them by" (6:48). The expression echoes the time when God revealed the divine presence to Moses by "passing by" him. In the Septuagint, "passing by" is code for a divine epiphany! A theophany!

Jesus wanted to "pass them by," that is, he wanted to reveal his divine glory to them. But they were too afraid. Then, with yet another echo of the Exodus, Jesus says, "Take courage, I AM, do not be afraid."

They are frightened. Too frightened. They think they are seeing a ghost. It is a "phantasma" and they cry out in terror. Fear keeps us from a full disclosure of Jesus' identity. But the story also reassures us. Jesus can walk on water—on the chaos of the deep—a deep including death. Death cannot threaten, cannot contain Jesus!

At the end of Luke's gospel, Jesus' disciples think they are seeing a ghost (Luke 24:37). Luke notes that they experienced fear and astonishment. But Jesus had conquered death! He was not part of the underworld, or the spirit world of the dead. He was alive! If Jesus has conquered the greatest enemy what storm is there to fear?

One of my friends, Kevin Kakazu, said to me last week about the disturbing events occurring in our church: "it feels like a type of

**Mark says**  
**he is quoting**  
**from Isaiah**  
**(1:2). But look**  
**carefully and**  
**you will notice**  
**he is actually**  
**quoting from**  
**Exodus 23:20.**

**Above the  
din, some sense  
they hear  
a cry—is it  
Ellen White  
weeping?**

death." Then, with a twinkle in his eye, Kevin continued: "but since when have Christians been afraid of death?"

Jesus said to the disciples drowning in their fear of dying from the storm, unable to catch their breath against the heavy winds, in their terror even of him: "Take heart, I AM, do not be afraid."

Some who read Mark's gospel suggest that the opposite of faith in this story is not doubt, since those two sometimes go together ("I believe, help my unbelief," 9:24). But in this gospel, it is striking that the opposite of faith is fear.<sup>2</sup> Jesus said: "Do not be afraid."

I wonder if it is because we are afraid, we do horrible things to each other. For example, if you're in Mark's community, you turned people in. If you're in our community, do we become overwhelmed with cynicism? Despair? Anger?

Jesus said: "Take heart, I AM, do not be afraid."

And then Jesus got into the boat. And the wind ceased. But even when Jesus was with them again, they didn't understand. Their heart was hardened. Furthermore, they are no longer heading to the territory for mission Jesus longed for them to begin—connecting with people who had not yet heard the gospel over in Bethsaida.

Instead, their boat lands on another shore. They are back in Jewish territory. Where, instead of spreading the gospel to new lands, they will argue about eating without first properly washing one's hands (7:2), fret about the degree to which one should wash cups and pots and bronze vessels (7:4), discuss clean versus unclean foods (7:19), argue over how to treat the elderly (7:9–13), and debate whether a Syrophenician woman should be allowed any crumbs (7:24–30).

Jesus sits with them in the boat—going back yet again to all those questions, when he really wanted to share the gospel in Bethsaida, with the unchurched.

Even though his mission to Bethsaida is delayed until chapter 8:22, back in the Jewish lands, Jesus will nevertheless bless many people. Sick people are brought to him and he went through market places healing people

(6:55–56). Everyone who touched Jesus was made well (6:56). Jesus does amazing things, even given the failure of the disciples. But their fear delayed Jesus' mission. Fear has its costs—something we must realize in 2016.

I imagine that most of us reading the story just now, placed ourselves with the disciples in the boat. We are in the boat during difficult times. And, even with our failures, Jesus is with us. We are safe.

Now let's re-read the story. But this time let us imagine not ourselves, but our General Conference leaders in the boat. They, too, must have a sense of being battered about in the boat. Perhaps they are fearful of a boat that can't withstand the current storm. Perhaps they fear what will happen if people aren't rowing together. Perhaps they, too, can't breathe and that's frightening. Whatever the cause, they are afraid. And, in the gospel of Mark, fear is the opposite of faith. Fear causes people to do horrible things to each other.

At the beginning of the account, the disciples were sent by Jesus to Bethsaida. They set out and Jesus wasn't with them. Then, when Jesus comes to them on the water, they think it's a ghost. This is one of the most dangerous moments for the disciples. They are labeling divinity as part of the underworld. They are calling the divine one, a ghost. They are accrediting evil as good and good as evil.

A similar thing happened back in Capernaum (in Mark 3) and Jesus used some of the strongest language he ever uses anywhere in the gospels (he calls it an unforgivable sin, an eternal sin, a sin with eternal consequences, 3:28–30). This moment in the boat should cause all of us to pause. It is a very dangerous thing to look at the Spirit of God working and say it is of Satan's realm. When we do that, Jesus cannot reveal his full identity to us. When we do that, we are unable to fulfill the mission Jesus gave us.

Unable to reveal himself to them, Jesus says, "do not be afraid" and gets into the boat. He is Jesus again, not the Spirit of God hovering over the waters at creation. He is Jesus again because



that's what his disciples needed him to be.

But they are no longer headed to Bethsaida. The work of the Gospel is held back. The "I AM" is with them, but they don't understand who he is. They will return to Jewish territories and return to questions about washing one's hands and unclean foods and who gets crumbs. And Mark tells us that it was because their heart (singular) was hardened. Collectively their heart was hardened. This is yet another echo of the Exodus—of Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh was the oppressor of God's people. He was the one who saw himself as the owner of human bodies; the master of his slaves.

Up to this point in Mark's gospel, only Pharisees had been referred to as having hardness of heart (3:15). Now the disciples are described in this way. They have become like Pharaoh. The disciples are capable of oppressing their own people even as they move away from their mission to the unchurched back home.

R. Alan Culpepper, in a commentary on Mark's gospel, defines "hardness of heart" using three words or phrases: (1) it is stubbornness; (2) it is the inability to see signs of God's redemptive activity; and, (3) it is opposition to God's redeeming work.<sup>3</sup>

If the disciples had understood about the loaves, they wouldn't have been afraid. The loaves, that is, the feeding of the 5,000 earlier in this chapter. This act in their own territory foreshadowed the Lord's Supper. If they had understood the loaves, that once again God was in the wilderness feeding miraculous bread to a multitude. If they had understood the loaves, that once again God was freeing people from bondage—a new Exodus in Jesus. If they had understood the loaves, that once again God was walking on water—across the sea, and that this was the same God who had made the sea. If they had understood the loaves, that once again God wanted to "pass by" and reveal God's glory, then they wouldn't have been afraid, and they wouldn't act like Pharaoh.

Because fear causes us to do horrible things to each other. It is fear that makes us miss the

miracles before us. It is fear that makes us miss the theophany of Jesus as God passing by. Fear is the opposite of faith.

Our General Conference leaders are in the boat. We are in the boat. We are all in the same boat. How can we row in the boat together? Jesus is wanting to "pass by" us. How can we respond in such a way that we see the wonder of his divinity? How can we respond in such a way that we are able to embrace the mission that Jesus longs for us to do? How many Bethsaidas are waiting for us? How often will we return to the tired old arguments and debates?

How can we respond in such a way that we will not have hearts that are hard; Pharaoh-like. But instead, understand that the loaves, Jesus' body, is for all—a community of all believers?

We are all in the same boat. How can we live and labor in the boat together? ■

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**Kendra Haloviak Valentine** PhD, is an associate professor of New Testament studies and chair of the Department of Biblical Studies at the H. M. S. Richards Divinity School at La Sierra University. Haloviak Valentine holds a doctorate in New Testament studies and ethics from The Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, a master's in New Testament studies from Andrews University, and a baccalaureate degree in theology and English from



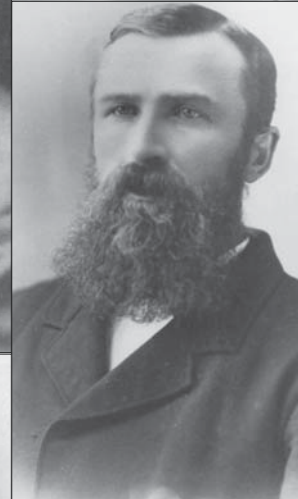
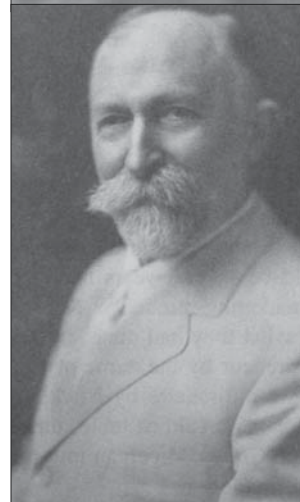
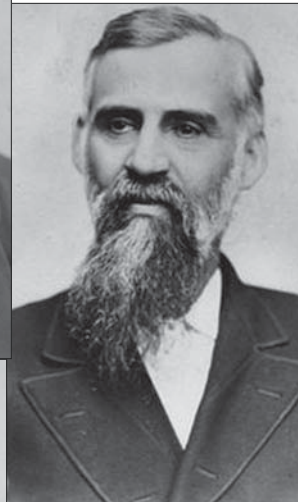
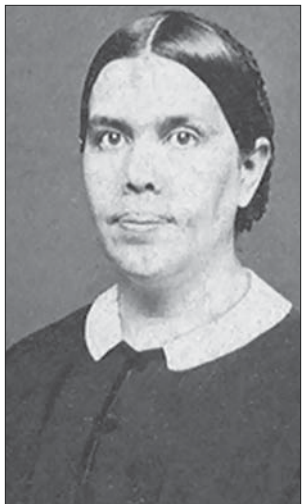
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# PROCESS, UNITY, AND THE CHURCH



## From “Ekklesia”<sup>1</sup> to Something Else | BY DAVID E. THOMAS

In 2014, this paper was presented to the Adventist Society of Religious Studies discussion of ecclesiology.

In this paper, I wish to reflect on the church as organization. In particular, I wish to reflect on how church as organization may, for reasons that will be explained here, experience an unconsidered or non-deliberate change in its own ecclesiology, effectively moving it away from the concept of church-as-a-community-of-believers to something else. For those whose view of church is formed by the scriptural idea of a community of called-out believers, this would be an unhappy eventuality indeed.

I was first alerted to this prospect of an unconsidered ecclesiological change by a comment made by Katie Funk Wiebe in *The Christian Leader*. She wrote, “I sense that we are allowing business terms to creep into our language . . . I am convinced that because language shapes our thinking and actions, we change the nature of the church and its leadership if we substitute business language for ‘body’ language. An organism quickly becomes an organization if it is thought about that way.”<sup>2</sup> This statement struck me with force. Could it really be that a change in language use could result in a change in theological perception; that, because language shapes our thinking and actions, the use of “business language” rather than “body language” could actually result in a shift in ecclesiological self-perception, effectively changing a living organism into a mere organization? This disturbance of thought equilibrium sent me on a search, the reflective results of which I share with you today.

It turns out that the process that opens the prospect of an unconsidered ecclesiological concept change is embedded within the nature of organizational structure itself. One of the best ways to understand this is to look through the eyes of organizational theorists, people “out

there” who are fascinated with and study organizations, how they are born, grow, function, and finally die. One of the better-known postulations of organizational theorists is the existence of a prevailing and all but inevitable and inexorable organizational life cycle—called the “Organizational Life Cycle”<sup>3</sup>—which all organizations pass through. Depending on which school of organizational theory you read, this life cycle is said to have four or five stages beginning with a Start-up or Entrepreneurial Stage, moving on through a Growth Stage that is often broken into two sub-stages—Early Growth which is often quite rapid, and Middle Growth where growth slows—followed by a Mature Stage,<sup>4</sup> where growth becomes very slow or stops altogether. The Mature Stage is followed by a Decline Stage which leads to the most critical stage, the Crisis Stage.<sup>5</sup> The Crisis Stage may be followed by either renewal, or demise.

In this life cycle there are two critical elements that play a very big role in determining organizational trajectories. The first and most obvious one is the Crisis Stage, where the way leaders approach and handle crises can lead to either organizational renewal or organizational decline and death. Organizations that have leaders who foresee crises and manage them well may renew themselves, while those that have leaders who do not foresee or handle crises well go much more quickly toward demise.<sup>6</sup>

The second primary factor has to do with what we call infrastructure. Though more hidden than the effects of crisis, the effects of the development and abiding presence of infrastructure as an organization ages, become major factors in determining what the future for an organization will be. We will look at this first.

It is not hard to figure out why and how infrastructure develops. As a movement catches on in the mind of the public, it grows. Early growth is often quite rapid with volunteers and informal conversation being the primary



purveyors of mission.<sup>7</sup> At some point, the movement becomes too large for the early, charismatic leaders to manage by themselves and the need to create some kind of structure becomes obvious and urgent.<sup>8</sup> The path to organization is easy to trace—the prosecution of mission requires vision, which is broken down into strategy, which is reduced to plans that get embedded in policy, which then creates organizational structure and practice. And organizational practice pursued over time creates organizational culture and identity. By this process, organizations stabilize themselves to become predictable and efficient, and they gain the real prospect of projecting themselves from a successful past through a successful present all the way (as long as the future ends up being similar to the past) to a successful future.

In the midst of all the exciting growth that makes the creation of structure necessary, something happens that goes largely unnoticed. Just as surely as the creation of infrastructure brings stability, it also initiates what theorists call “organizational entropy,” the technical name for the process that brings on the aging and disordering and subsequent possible death of a movement or organization.<sup>9</sup> Speaking of infrastructure, theorist Jeffrey Saltzman says, “The purpose of these rules is to allow the organization to make decisions using standard operating procedures as a guideline and hence remove from the organization the need to think about the decisions being made.”<sup>10</sup> But, “removing the need to think about some decisions (this is what infrastructure does) carries with it an inherent risk, the risk of mediocrity or worse, the risk of extinction.”<sup>11</sup> What is being alluded to here is that the early stages of organization are usually very beneficial to mission-producing benefits out of proportion to the resources invested but, in later stages of organization life, infrastructure itself becomes problematic.

Specifically, the establishment of infrastructure has three effects. First, it sets itself up in competition for resources that would otherwise have gone to frontline mission. Secondly, it places employees in among the volunteers, who then tend to dilute their volunteerism because there are now paid people to do the work. And, thirdly, and most importantly to this paper, the appearance and growth of infrastructure produces and makes available managerial or administrative power<sup>12</sup> to those who have charge of the infrastructure. These three things—competition for resources, the appearance of paid personnel, and the rise of

managerial/administrative power—become the elements that affect or determine the future of an organization. While the first two items are important and quite interesting, this paper is going to look only at the third one, the rise of administrative power, for it bears most directly on the subject of unconsidered ecclesiological change.

Probably the best way to delve into this is to observe that, in the early stages of an organization, the leaders who originally articulate the vision have no administrative power. They have only the power of persuasion, exhortation, encouragement, prayer, personal appeal, and personal example, all of which depend on the voluntary compliance of adherents to achieve their desired ends. Early leaders have to win the goodwill of the people. They have to bring followers to the point of willing consent. But the appearance of infrastructure brings with it a very different dynamic for it introduces, and very quickly brings to bear, a new kind of power that is of a different sort. Administrative power is very efficient, it is immediately available to leaders and leaders only, and it operates by something other than persuasion. Administrative power does not necessarily have to concern itself with the voluntary nature of the commitments of those who come under its jurisdiction. It has the power of policy and is able to use the prospect of penalty as motivation.<sup>13</sup>

This difference between persuasive power and coercive power is very important to explore. When a charismatic leader encounters a problem, it is time for visitation, persuasion, exhortation, appeal, invitation, prayer, even tears. Early leaders have to rely on this kind of power, even though it is not very efficient and may require time and muddling along to achieve its purposes. Its primary strength is that it elicits the willing compliance of adherents. But the emergence of managerial power makes for a very different scenario. Rather than having to expend time and effort trying to persuade, a manager may go directly to policy by way of which compliance or non-compliance can then be determined. After that, decision making can be rather straightforward, willing compliance considered or not.

The temptation to use administrative power can be considerable because it offers the prospect of very quick resolution, it is “fair” in that it applies “across the board,” and it usually requires relatively little deliberation so can be applied quickly which means the “problem” is resolved and the organization can get on to other things. When a reli-

gious organization is careful to limit the use of managerial power to issues of infrastructure, life can be very good. But when it allows for a generous expansion of the use of managerial power to include also matters that pertain to belief and faith and a vision for the future, it likely enters a whole new arena. History shows that the temptation to broaden managerial power expansively is a temptation that is very difficult to resist. In far too many cases, leaders have succumbed quite readily to the temptation to use managerial power to deal with ideological and belief issues. Discrepancies over doctrine, belief, and commitment can be very challenging and messy and prolonged in resolution, so administratively powerful leaders face the great temptation of looking at belief issues as management issues that could be settled not by argumentation, discussion, or persuasion but by appealing to policy, after which compliance and non-compliance can be readily measured. After that, the path to resolution can be very short.

When a religious movement accepts or allows this shift to take place broadly, when it allows for matters of faith and belief to be treated as matters of policy and management, at its heart it transitions away from invitation to coercion, replacing the power of persuasion with that of requirement. Instead of calling for assent, it calls for compliance and in so doing, overlays voluntary commitment, which is the essence of religion, with an involuntary mandate, something that is inimical to faith. Administrative power does not work by persuasion and invitation but by coercion. It does not work on the inside but from the outside. It works by mandate, able to administer a penalty of some kind for non-compliance. It is the power of statecraft and so is inappropriate at the level of belief. While administrative power is important and useful, it should not, indeed cannot, effectively be used to manage religious commitments and ideas. Being elected to a position of power does not make a person right. It only makes them powerful. Efforts to enforce compliance easily lead on to duplicity rather than genuine faith.

Any essentially voluntary organization that makes the shift from invitation to mandate in matters of faith brings about a subtle but substantial change in its own nature. Put in theological terms, it unthinkingly changes its ecclesiology.<sup>14</sup> It moves in an unconsidered way away from the idea of church as a community of believers where coercive power is viewed as inimical to life and so is pushed away from the center, toward a hierarchical concept of church as a sanctified organization where centralized power is seen to be essential. In a community of believers, a “problem” is an occasion for fellowship and exhortation and discussion and invitation, for messy interactions. In an organization, it is time to find a policy by way of which compliance or non-compliance can be measured and action taken. And once that kind of shift takes place in a religious movement, it is not very long before “orthodoxy” and “heresy” get defined and life becomes very difficult for those who dissent. In so many cases, this is the very dynamic that brought death to those who dissented at the hands of those who persuaded themselves that by destroying the dissenters, they were only doing the work of God.

While researching this topic some time ago, I happened upon mention of a fascinating study, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, written by Walter Bauer back in 1934. According to Alistair McGrath, who cites this study, the conclusion Bauer came to is that, at least in the early Christian Church, “basic unity did not seem to be located at the level of doctrines, but at the level of relationship with the same Lord. Christian unity lay in the worship of the same Lord, rather than in the formal statement of doctrine (which is how ‘orthodox’ tends to be divined).”<sup>15</sup> Bauer goes on to claim that, “a variety of views which were tolerated in the early church gradually began to be regarded with suspicion by the later church. An orthodox consensus began to emerge, in which opinions that had once been tolerated were discarded as inadequate.”<sup>16</sup> The operative question immediately becomes one of how this orthodox consensus developed. Bauer’s

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answer is quite striking: that “‘orthodoxy’ was the result of the growing power of Rome, which increasingly came to impose its own views upon others, using the term ‘heresy’ to refer to views it rejected.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, as the Bishop of Rome’s infrastructure-driven power increased, he was able to transition from invitation to mandate. He was able to take more and more initiative to himself and his office and he was able to apply greater and more substantial penalties to those who dissented. This is what brought Bauer to his conclusion, that “the difference between orthodoxy and heresy often seems arbitrary.”<sup>18</sup> It appears to be more a derivation of the opinions of those in power than anything else. It is by this process that the Church of Rome grew to such prominence.

Clearly, the rise and role of infrastructure, how it functions and what power it grants to a few, is something that needs very careful thought in believing communities. While necessary, infrastructure in church cannot be left to function like infrastructure in for-profit companies. Is infrastructure using up too many resources? Is it limiting growth by being too fixed? Is it in harmony with an appropriate ecclesiology? Is it giving too much power to too few people? And is the power produced by infrastructure being used for management issues or is it broadly being called upon to also settle matters of belief and commitment? More pertinent to our setting, where is the SDA Church in all of this? How far along in the Organizational Life Cycle are we? And what kind of language are we using to describe ourselves? How is managerial power being used? And how do we perceive organizational structure: as some kind of missional necessity, or as something quasi-sacred in and of itself? All of these things warrant careful thought and reflection. They warrant our best and collective attentions lest we thoughtlessly transition away from being a mission-driven “community of believers” to something else that probably ought not even to be named among the faithful. ■

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After twenty-four years in pastoral ministry, **David Thomas** became a member of the Walla Walla University faculty, in 2001.



## References

1. The word “ekklesia” is understood here in its common sense of designating those who have been called out of the world by the Gospel to form themselves into communities of believers.
2. Katie Funk Wiebe in “The Christian Leader,” *Christianity Today* Vol. 33, No. 17 (Aug. 1989).
3. Organizational Theory is quite well known and understood in the business world but is virtually unknown outside of it. Sadly, knowledge of this theory and how it works and what it postulates, seems to be particularly absent in church organizations.
4. Some features typical of organizations in the Mature Stage are: infrastructure is of enormous size to the point there is “a policy for everything;” there are many employees whose entire focus is on tending infrastructure rather than front-line mission; the treatment of employees is highly standardized with more interest in “fairness” than in “merit;” operations become regulated by policies more than by opportunities; new hires are evaluated more on loyalty than on entrepreneurial spirit; employees gain more control over mission than volunteers; a large proportion of resources are allocated to infrastructure in the place of mission; there comes to be little, if any, new initiative money. Growth slows, then stops. By this time in the life cycle, all the infrastructure will have created such a great amount of inertia, it will be almost impossible for it to change, which sets things up for a likely crisis if change does indeed come to the marketplace.
5. The New York Institute of Technology has an article with a clear and concise history of the developments that brought to life what is today called Organizational Theory, located on the web at <http://iris.nyit.edu/~shartman/mba0120/chapter2.htm>. A very interesting and informative article on Organizational Life Cycles by Carter McNamara can be found at [http://managementhelp.org/org\\_thry/org\\_cycl.htm](http://managementhelp.org/org_thry/org_cycl.htm). In this case, four stages are described. A representative description of a five-stage organizational life cycle that is typical of this arena of thought can be found at <http://www.legacee.com/FastGrowth/OrgLifeCycle.html>.
6. Points of crisis are significant in the Organizational Life Cycle because, since they threaten organizational well-being or existence, they become the only times when any real prospect of significant change exists. It is simply the case that the larger and more complex its infrastructure, the more fixed to the past an organization will be, particularly if that past is characterized by success. Another way of saying this is that the more complex the infrastructure becomes, and the most success that can be looked back upon, the more difficult it is for an organization to adjust and change. This is because the stabilization brought about by the creation of infrastructure creates organizational inertia. And complex organizations develop so much inertia that has to be overcome if change is to occur, the kind of change necessary to deal with an unanticipated future is simply too great. This has elicited the observation that many



companies fail not because the future was unpredictable but because it was unpalatable. So, crisis is a dangerous opportunity that, if handled well, may lead on to organizational rejuvenation but, if handled poorly, may lead to organizational demise. It is worth noting that in the for-profit world, there are two elements that affect how crisis is dealt with: the existence of shareholders who may take precipitous action if they become unhappy, and the existence of outside predators looking for the chance to take over. Pressure from these two entities makes the prospect of change quite high. By contrast, in church organizations, similar elements are missing. There are no predatory entities looking to take over and, especially in churches with big infrastructures, the members who are the rough equivalent to shareholders are usually so remote from organizational power that they cannot force change. In consequence, change in churches can only be brought about by those who are in leadership positions. The prospect of such people making significant change is very small indeed because organizations tend to promote those who are most loyal to organization, churches easily sanctify their structures if they have been successful, and those in power tend to be the ones who benefit most from the status quo. For these reasons, churches have been known to simply disappear before agreeing to change, Methodism in England being a relatively recent and prime example.

7. We downplay the power of informal communication far too much. It is one of the most effective means of communication available to humans. What we hear informally almost always trumps official word. This is one reason conspiracies and urban legends become so prevalent and powerful and resilient.

8. Those who are acquainted with Adventist history no doubt know of the great struggles the Adventist pioneers went through on this issue. Many strident speeches were made to the effect that any kind of organization would constitute “Babylon.” But something as simple as the need to own property legally made resistance futile.

9. Organizational entropy is a very expansive and challenging subject that cannot be covered here. There are many articles to be found discussing it. One place is an article by Jeffrey Saltzman at <http://jeffreysaltzman.wordpress.com/2009/11/19/organization-entropy-2/>. There is also a very interesting book by Imre Lövey, Manohar S. Nadkarni, and Eszter Erdélyi dealing with organizational entropy titled *How Healthy is your Organization?* (Santa Barbara: Green-

wood Publishing, 1999-2010).

10. <http://jeffreysaltzman.wordpress.com/2009/11/19/organization-entropy-2/>.

11. Ibid.

12. The terms “managerial power” and “administrative power” are used interchangeably in this paper.

13. Very interestingly, this tension was debated among Seventh-day Adventists in the 1890s with two different ecclesiological models being debated, one wanting to place primary focus in the local church as a community of believers, the other wanting to give priority to the universal nature of the church. Barry D. Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure: Past, Present and Future* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1989), 136–140, 219–221.

14. Titled “What Really Kills Great Companies: Inertia,” management guru Gary Hamel said, “If organized religion has become less relevant, it’s not because churches have held fast to their creedal beliefs—it’s because they’ve held fast to their conventional structures, programs, roles and routines. The problem with organized religion isn’t religion, but organization. In the first and second centuries, the Christian church was communal, organic and unstructured—a lot like the Web is today. It commanded little power (it couldn’t raise an army or depose a monarch), but had enormous influence. (The Christian church grew from a handful of believers in AD 40 to 31 million adherents by AD 350, roughly half the population of the Roman empire) Today many mainline denominations are institutionally powerful, but spiritually moribund—at least in the US.” This blog can be found at <http://blogs.wsj.com/management/2009/09/29>.

15. Alistair McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 113.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

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voluntary  
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# The Role of Union Conferences in Relation to Higher Authorities\*

| BY GEORGE R. KNIGHT

In March 2016, I presented two papers to a group of influential Adventist administrative and lay leaders. These papers, until now, have not been released. But, given the current discussion in Silver Spring, the time has come. The most pertinent of the papers is “The Role of Union Conferences in Relation to Higher Authorities.” Although written months before the recent paper by the General Conference, it addresses many of the same issues from a very different perspective. The other paper sets the stage for the one on Unions. Its title is “The Anti-Organizational People Organize in Spite of Themselves.”

## The Role of Union Conferences in Relation to Higher Authorities<sup>1</sup>

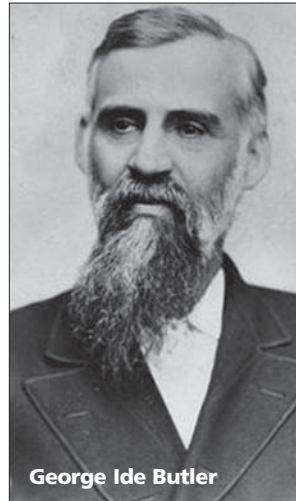
There are only two truly Catholic churches in the world today: the Roman Catholic and the Adventist catholic. Now that I have your attention, I trust that you realize that the primary meaning of the word “catholic” is “universal.”

Adventism is catholic in the sense that it has a worldwide commission to fulfill—the mission of the three angels of Revelation 14 to take the end-time message to every nation, tongue, and people.

Perhaps the major difference between the Roman brand of catholicism and the Adventist variety is the issue of authority. For Rome, it is a top-down proposition. For Adventism, it has traditionally been from the bottom up. I say traditionally because some Adventists seem to be in the valley of decision on this most important of all ecclesiastical issues. The real question facing the denomination is this: How catholic do we really want to be?

### Expanded Mission Demands a Reorganization

In my first presentation, I highlighted how the anti-organizational people finally managed to organize in the face of the needs of mission. But in order to do that, they had to see that Babylon not only meant oppression but also



George Ide Butler

confusion. And, more importantly, they had to move from a literalistic hermeneutic, which held that the only things permissible were those specifically spelled out in scripture, to one in which everything was permissible that did not contradict the Bible and was in harmony with common sense. In the end, they organized churches, local conferences, and a general conference in

1861/1863, for the purpose of mission but with a cautious eye on higher ecclesiastical authorities removing their freedom in Christ. That potential problem would be highlighted in 1888 when a powerful General Conference president sought to block the preaching of righteousness by faith by Jones and Waggoner.

The 1860s organization worked well, and Adventism and its institutions by the end of the 1890s had spread around the world. In fact, the church of 1863, with its 3,500 members (all in North America), one institution, eight conferences, and about thirty ministers, could hardly be compared to the denomination of 1900, which was not only worldwide but had dozens of health care facilities, more than 200 schools, and other institutions.

But growth had brought its own pains and problems to the ever-expanding movement. By the 1890s, two major problems in the 1860s organization had surfaced: (1) too much control by the General Conference over the local conferences, and (2) too little control over the auxiliary organizations, such as those that supervised the medical and educational work of the denomination.

The first of those issues related most clearly to the geographical spread of the denomination. That problem was



Ole Andres Olsen

aggravated by the stand taken by the General Conference presidents. G. I. Butler, for example, in the late 1880s noted, in connection with the formation of the General Conference Association, that General Conference “supervision embraces all its interests in every part of the world. There is not an institution among us, not a periodical issued, not a conference or society, not a mission field connected with our work, that it has not a right to advise and counsel and investigate. *It is the highest authority of an earthly character among Seventh-day Adventists.*”<sup>2</sup>

O. A. Olsen took the same position in 1894 when he wrote that,

*it is the province of the General Conference carefully to watch over, and have a care for, the work in every part of the field. The General Conference, therefore, is not only acquainted with the needs and conditions of every Conference, but it understands these needs and conditions as they stand related to every other Conference and mission field. . . . It may also be thought that those in charge of local interests have a deeper interest in, and carry a greater responsibility for, the local work, than the General Conference can possibly do. Such can hardly be the case if the General Conference does its duty. The General Conference stands as it were in the place of the parent to the local conference.*<sup>3</sup>

That mentality, in essence, held that the General Conference needed to be consulted on all issues of importance. It may have sounded like a nice idea, but in practice it didn’t work. That problem is nicely illustrated by A. G. Daniells speaking to the issue from the perspective of 1913. Before the adoption of the union conferences, he noted, every decision that transcended the decision-making responsibility of a local con-

ference had to be referred to headquarters in Battle Creek. The problem was that at its best the mail took four weeks each direction from Australia and often arrived to find the members of the General Conference Executive Committee away from their offices. “I remember,” Daniels noted, “that we have waited three or four months before we could get any reply to our questions.” And even then it might be a five- or six-line inquiry saying that the General Conference officers really didn’t understand the issue and needed further information. And so it went until “after six or nine months, perhaps, we would get the matter settled.”<sup>4</sup>

Ellen White took the lead in combatting the centralization of authority in the General Conference. In 1883, for example, she wrote that the leading administrators had made a mistake in “each one” thinking “that he was the very one who must bear all the responsibilities” and give others “no chance” to develop their God-given skills.<sup>5</sup> During the 1880s and 1890s, she repeatedly advocated localized decision making on the grounds that the leaders in Battle Creek could not possibly understand the situation as well as people on site. As she put it in 1896, “the men at Battle Creek are no more inspired to give unerring advice than are the men in other places, to whom the Lord has entrusted the work in their locality.”<sup>6</sup> A year earlier she had written that the “work of God” had been “retarded by criminal unbelief in [God’s] power to use the common people to carry forward His work successfully.”<sup>7</sup>



Arthur Grosvenor Daniells

By the end of the nineties, Ellen White would be thundering against the “kingly power” which the leaders in Battle Creek had taken to themselves. In one fascinating testimony in 1895, she wrote that “the high-handed power that has been developed, as

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and the  
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and the  
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issue of  
authority.



Ellen G. White

though position has made men gods, makes me afraid, and ought to cause fear. It is a curse wherever and by whomsoever it is exercised. This lording it over God's heritage will create such a disgust of man's jurisdiction that a state of insubordination will

result." She went on to state that the "only safe course is to remove" such leaders since "all ye are brethren," lest "great harm be done."<sup>8</sup>

Erich Baumgartner, in his study of the issues surrounding reorganization, summed up the problem by noting that "the most urgent of the many problems were connected to an ever-widening discrepancy between worldwide church growth during the 1880s and 1890s and the narrow, inflexible, central organizational base of the Seventh-day Adventist church located in Battle Creek."<sup>9</sup> That inflexible, centralized authority prevented adaptation to local needs. As Ellen White put it, "the place, the circumstances, the interest, the moral sentiment of the people, will have to decide in many cases the course of action to be pursued" and that "those who are right on the ground are to decide what shall be done."<sup>10</sup>

The denomination struggled throughout the 1890s to find a solution to the problem. The first attempt began in November 1888, with the creation of four districts in North America. By 1893, there would be six in North America and one each in Australasia and Europe. But the district system essentially operated as divisions of the General Conference with each district leader being a member of the General Conference Committee. Beyond that, the districts had no constituency or legislative authority.<sup>11</sup> In short, they were not effective.

A more helpful solution was the development of a union conference by W. C. White in Aus-

tralia in 1894. That act was resisted by O. A. Olsen, the General Conference president, who told the General Conference Executive Committee that "he thought nothing should be planned so as to interfere with the general supervision and work legitimately belonging to the General Conference, as that is the highest organized authority under God on the earth."<sup>12</sup>

But White, the leader for the Australasian district, and his colleague, Arthur G. Daniells, were in a tight spot and needed to do something. That led to the appointment of a committee that developed the first union conference constitution, which was approved on January 19, 1894, appointing White and Daniells president and secretary, respectively.

That move was not accomplished with the help of the General Conference but in spite of its counsel. Years later Daniells reported that not everyone was happy with the union conference idea. "Some of our brethren thought then that the work was going to be wrecked, that we were going to tear the organization all to pieces, and get up secession out there in the South Sea islands." But in actuality, he observed, the result was quite the opposite. The new organizational approach greatly facilitated the mission of the church in the South Pacific, while the new Australasian Union Conference remained a loyal and integral part of the General Conference system.<sup>13</sup>

That move was revolutionary. Barry Oliver, in his massive study of the 1901/1903 reorganization, notes that "the Australasian experi-



William Clarence White

ment represented the first time that a level of organization other than a local conference or the General Conference had a constituency—that is, it had executive powers which were granted by the levels of organization 'below' it, and not by the

General Conference."<sup>14</sup>

The second issue troubling the church during the 1890s was the legally independent auxiliary organizations that had developed in Battle Creek, including the Publishing Association, the General Tract and Missionary Society, the Educational Society, the General Sabbath School Association, the Health and Temperance Association, the General Conference Association, the Religious Liberty Association, and the Foreign Mission Board. Legally, each was independent and there was no effective way to coordinate their work.

That was bad enough, but A. T. Robinson, president of the newly formed South African Conference, discovered in 1892 that he did not even have enough personnel to staff all of the organizations. Out of necessity, Robinson decided that he would not create independent organizations but would develop departments under the leadership of the conference. Both Olsen and W. C. White felt concern over the suggestion, Olsen fearing that the plan contained "elements of danger in too much centralization." The General Conference leadership eventually told Robinson not to develop departments. But it was too late. Because of the large amount of time it took to communicate, Robinson had already instituted the program and found that it worked.<sup>15</sup>

In 1898, Robinson moved to Australia where he became president of the Victoria Conference. There he presented the idea to Daniells and W. C. White, who rejected it. But Robinson's local conference leaders had already accepted the idea on principle and voted it into being. Before the turn of the century, both Daniells and White had adopted the departmental concept and helped it find a place throughout the various conferences in the Australasia Union.<sup>16</sup>

With that move the stage had been set for the reorganization of the denomination at the 1901 General Conference session. But let it be remembered that both of the major innovations were developed in response to regional mission needs and both were developed in

opposition to General Conference pronouncements and procedures. But they worked. The major lesson is that without the freedom to experiment, Adventism would not have its present system of organization.

## The Reorganization of 1901

The tone for the 1901 General Conference session was set for it on April 1, the day before the conference officially began. On that date Daniells chaired a meeting of denominational leaders in the Battle Creek College library. The major presenter was Ellen White who in no uncertain terms called for "new blood" and an "entire new organization" that broadened the governing base of the organization. Opposing the centralization of power in a few individuals, she left no doubt that "kingly, ruling power" and "any administrator who had a 'little throne' would have to go." She called for a "renovation without any delay. To have this Conference pass on and close up as the conferences have done, with the same manipulating, with the very same tone and the same order—God forbid! God forbid, brethren."<sup>17</sup>

She repeated the same sentiments on the first day of the session, noting that "God has not put any kingly power in our ranks to control this or that branch of the work. *The work has been greatly restricted by the efforts to control it in every line. . . .* If the work had not been so restricted by an impediment here, and an impediment there, and on the other side an impediment, it would have gone forward in its majesty."<sup>18</sup>

The key word in seeking to understand the 1901 session is "decentralization." Some of the most important changes at the conference were the authorization to create union conferences and union missions in all parts of the world, the discontinuation of the auxiliary organizations as independent associations and their integration into the conference administrative structure, and the transfer of ownership and management of institutions that had been under General Conference jurisdiction to the respective unions and their local conferences.

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The unions, Daniells noted, were created with “large committees, and full authority and power to deal with all matters within their boundaries.”<sup>19</sup> And Ellen White pointed out that “it has been a necessity to organize union conferences, that the General Conference shall not exercise dictation over all the separate conferences.”<sup>20</sup>

On the basis of those and other statements, the late Gerry Chudleigh has argued that the unions “were created to act as firewalls between the GC and the conferences, making ‘dictation’ impossible.” He buttressed his firewall image with two major points. First, “Each union had its own constitution and bylaws and was to be governed by its own constituency.” And second, “the officers of each union were to be elected by their own union constituency, and, therefore, could not be controlled, replaced or disciplined by the G C.”<sup>21</sup>

“To put as bluntly as possible,” Chudleigh wrote,

*after 1901, the General Conference could vote whatever it wanted unions and conferences to do, or not do, but the unions and conferences were autonomous and could do what they believed would best advance the work of God in their fields. The GC executive committee, or the General Conference in business session, could vote to fire a union president or conference president, or vote to merge a union or conference with another one, but their vote would change nothing: the union or conference would still exist and the member delegates could elect whomever they wanted as president.*<sup>22</sup>

A case in point in contemporary Adventism is the Southeastern California Conference, which has an ordained female president, in spite of the wishes of the General Conference. Some in the General Conference, in the words of Ellen White, have tried to “dictate” that she be removed. But there is nothing that they have been able to do about the situation. The firewall is in place.

Ellen White was thrilled with the results of the 1901 session, with its creation of union conferences. To her, unions were “in the order of God.” Near the close of the 1901 session she

noted that “I was never more astonished in my life than at the turn things have taken in this meeting. This is not our work. God has brought it about.”<sup>23</sup> And some months later she wrote that “during the General Conference the Lord wrought mightily for His people. Every time I think of that meeting, a sweet solemnity comes over me, and sends a glow of gratitude to my soul. We have seen the stately stepping of the Lord our Redeemer.”<sup>24</sup>

She was especially gratified that freedom of action had been opened up and that the General Conference would not be in a position to “exercise dictation over all the separate conferences.” Along that line, she noted near the close of the 1901 session that “I earnestly hope that those laboring in the fields to which you are going will not think that you and they cannot labor together, unless your minds run in the same channels as theirs, unless you view things exactly as they view them.”<sup>25</sup> Early on, Daniells held the same position. While he saw *the General Conference as fostering the work in all parts of the world, “it cannot be the brains, and conscience, and mouthpiece for our brethren in these different countries.”*<sup>26</sup>

Looking back from the perspective of 1903, in his opening address to the session Daniells was gratified that major decision-making authority had been distributed to those “who are on the ground” and understood the needs of the various fields. “Many can testify that the blessing of God has attended the efforts that have been made to distribute responsibilities, and thus transfer the care, perplexity, and management that once centered in Battle Creek to all parts of the world, where they belong.”<sup>27</sup>

At the close of the 1901 session all looked good. Autonomous unions had transferred authority from the General Conference to local leaders and the creation of departments had transferred authority over the auxillary organizations to church leaders at all levels. It appeared that the denomination had captured the elusive goal of unity in diversity so that it might most effectively minister to the needs of varying cultures around the world.



## The 1903 General Conference and the Threat to Unity in Diversity

By early 1903, Ellen White's euphoria at the close of the 1901 session had disappeared. In January, she wrote that "the result of the last General Conference has been the greatest, the most terrible sorrow of my life. No change was made. *The spirit that should have been brought into the whole work as the result of that meeting, was not brought in.*" Many "carried into their work the wrong principles that had been prevailing in the work at Battle Creek."<sup>28</sup>

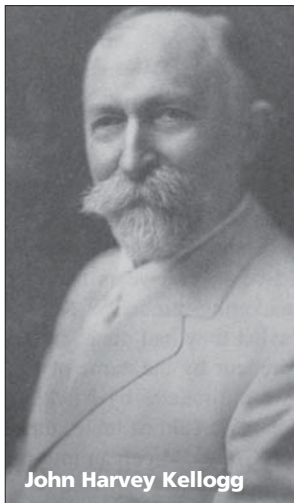
When she said that "no change was made" she was speaking on the spiritual rather than the organizational level. The major problem was that the old denominational demon of "kingly power" had reasserted its ugly head.

At this point we need to go back and take a closer look at the denomination's auxiliary organizations. In the monopolistic spirit of the times, each was seeking to control all the institutions around the world from the institutions in Battle Creek. Thus, the Review and Herald was seeking to control all other publishing houses; W. W. Prescott was not only head of the Adventist Educational Association but president of three colleges simultaneously; and John Harvey Kellogg was seeking worldwide control through the Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association and the massive Battle Creek Sanitarium. As a result, "kingly power" was not merely a problem of the General Conference president but also of the leaders of the various independent organizations.



William Warren Prescott

The reorganization in 1901 had largely taken care of the problem through its development of the departmental system and its transfer of the ownership of institutional properties to the various levels of the church.



John Harvey Kellogg

But there was one glaring exception to that success. Namely, Kellogg and his medical empire, which had more employees than all other sectors of the church combined and had been granted roughly one fourth of the positions on the General Conference Executive Committee in 1901. It didn't take long for the assertive Kellogg to run into a struggle with the equally adamant Daniells, the new president of the General Conference. The struggle itself was nothing new. The doctor had always jealously guarded his sector of the Adventist pie. He had no use for any church leaders who attempted to block the development of his program. As early as 1895, we find him referring to conference presidents as "little popes." But by 1903, as C. H. Parsons put it, Kellogg filled "the position of pope completely" in the medical program.<sup>29</sup>

That was bad enough. But, unfortunately, Daniells, in his drive to bring Kellogg and his associates into line, had, by 1903, resurrected tendencies to "kingly power" in the presidential office. That development was natural enough. After all, power generally has to be met by power. But Ellen White was distraught at the development. On April 3, in the testimony in which she noted that unions had been organized so that the General Conference could not "exercise dictation over all the separate conferences," she again raised the topic of "kingly authority" and noted that "the General Conference has fallen into strange ways, and we have reason to marvel that judgment has not fallen" on it.<sup>30</sup>

Nine days later, she wrote to Daniells himself, telling him that he needed to "be careful how we press our opinions upon those whom God has instructed. . . . Brother Daniells, God would not have you suppose that you can exercise a kingly power over your brethren."<sup>31</sup> That was not the

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Alonzo Trévier Jones

last rebuke she would have to send him. The years to come would see similar counsel to him and others in leadership.<sup>32</sup>

*One of the casualties of the struggle between Kellogg and Daniells in 1902 and 1903 was the careful balance of unity in diversity that had been achieved in 1901.*

Ellen White, back in 1894, had set forth “unity in diversity” as “God’s plan,” with unity being achieved by each aspect of the work being connected to Christ the vine.<sup>33</sup> In 1901 and early 1902, Daniells had championed that ideal, noting in 1902 to the European Union Conference that just “because a thing is done in a certain way in one place is not reason why it should be done in the same way in another place, or even in the same place at the same time.”<sup>34</sup>

But that ideal began to give way by late 1902 as the Kellogg forces sought to unseat Daniells and replace him with A. T. Jones, who was by that time in the doctor’s camp.<sup>35</sup> In that struggle the Kellogg/Jones forces were pushing for diversity. That dynamic impelled Daniells to emphasize unity as he moved toward a more authoritative stance. Thus, the delicate balance between unity in diversity lost out soon after the 1901 session. And, as Oliver points out, *unity at the expense of diversity has been the focus of the General Conference ever since the 1902 crisis.*<sup>36</sup>

Yet, Oliver notes in his very sophisticated discussion of the topic, in the long run “unity is dependent on the recognition of diversity,” and that we should see the denomination’s diversity as a tool to help the church reach an extremely diverse world. From Oliver’s perspective, Adventism in the twenty-first century is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse groups in the world. Diversity is a fact that cannot be suppressed.

*If diversity is neglected, the church will be unable to perform its task. . . . The church which subordinates the need to recognize diversity to a demand for unity is denying the very means by which it is best equipped to accomplish the task. . . . The issue for the Seventh-day Adventist Church is whether or not unity is to be regarded as that organizing principle whose importance eclipses that of all other principles. . . . A commitment to a doctrine of unity which imposes alien forms on any group, when adequate Christian forms could be derived from within the culture of the group itself, does not enhance unity.*

Oliver prods us a bit when he suggests that what Adventists need to ask themselves is whether their goal is unity or mission.<sup>37</sup>

Before moving away from the topic of unity in diversity, it should be noted that unity and uniformity are not the same thing. Some have argued that Adventism must be united in mission, its core message, and in servanthood, but not in everything. In fact, these persons suggest that many issues need to be decided by locality and even by individuals. A movement can be united without being uniform. Unfortunately, in the drive for unity, the General Conference has too often failed to note that distinction. One-size-fits-all is too often the goal. In the process, it has spawned disunity among various cultural groups.

One of the purposes of the 1901 reorganization was to foster localized decision making that could contribute to the ideal of unity in diversity through what Chudleigh called the union conference “firewall.” Chudleigh, in his thought-provoking *Who Runs the Church?*, illustrates how the General Conference has progressively sought to weaken the firewall of autonomous unions through official actions that have sought to make unions obligated to follow all policies and programs and initiatives “adopted and approved by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in its quinquennial sessions” and by taking initiatives and making pronouncements in areas that church members and even leaders have come to believe are within its rightful jurisdiction

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even if they are not. Since such actions are largely accepted without question, Chudleigh concludes that “the more well-accepted a GC initiative is, the more it contributes to members believing the Seventh-day Adventist Church is hierarchical.”<sup>38</sup>

## The General Conference as the Highest Authority on Earth

Tensions between the authority of the General Conference and that of the local conferences have existed from early in the history of organized Adventism. In August 1873, in the context of a lack of respect for General Conference officers, James White noted that “our General Conference is the highest earthly authority with our people, and is designed to take charge of the entire work in this and all other countries.”<sup>39</sup> Then in 1877, the General Conference in session voted that “the highest authority under God among Seventh-day Adventists is found in the will of the body of that people, as expressed in the decisions of the General Conference *when acting within its proper jurisdiction*; and that such decisions should be submitted to by all without exception, *unless they can be shown to conflict with the word of God and the rights of individual conscience*.”<sup>40</sup>

That vote seems clear enough and both of the Whites accepted it. Please note, however, that it did highlight limitations related to the “proper jurisdiction” of the General Conference and “the rights of individual conscience.” We will return to both of those items below.

So, the matter of the authority of the General Conference was settled. Or was it? Ellen White would make some interesting statements on the topic in the 1890s. In 1891, for example, she wrote that “I was obliged to take the position that there was not the voice of God in the General Conference management and decisions. . . . Many of the positions taken, going forth as the voice of the General Conference, have been the voice of one, two, or three men who were misleading the Conference.”<sup>41</sup> Again, in 1896, she noted that the General Conference “is no longer the voice of God.”<sup>42</sup> And in 1901, she wrote that

“the people have lost confidence in those who have management of the work. Yet we hear that the voice of the [General] Conference is the voice of God. Every time I have heard this, I have thought it was almost blasphemy. The voice of the conference ought to be the voice of God, but it is not.”<sup>43</sup>

An analysis of those negative statements indicates that they refer to occasions when the General Conference did not act as a representative body, when its decision-making authority was centralized in a person or a few people, or when the General Conference had not been following sound principles.<sup>44</sup> That conclusion lines up with Ellen White’s statements across time. In fact, she specifically spoke to the point in a manuscript read before the delegation of the 1909 General Conference session in which she responded to the schismatic activities of A. T. Jones and others. “At times,” she told the delegates,

*when a small group of men entrusted with the general management of the work have, in the name of the General Conference, sought to carry out unwise plans and to restrict God’s work, I have said that I could no longer regard the voice of the General Conference, represented by these few men, as the voice of God. But this is not saying that the decisions of a General Conference composed of an assembly of duly appointed, representative men from all parts of the field should not be respected. God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority.*<sup>45</sup>

So the matter is settled. Or is it? Has the General Conference in session evolved beyond the stage of fallibility as God’s voice? Does an official vote of a worldwide conclave have something akin to Papal infallibility? Some wonder.

Chief among the wonderers in 2016 are the church’s young adults in the developed nations, many of them well-educated professionals. In all honesty and sincerity, they are not only asking questions, but many are deeply disturbed.

How, some of them want to know, does the voice of God operate when it is widely reported

**By 1903, as  
C. H. Parsons  
put it, Kellogg  
filled “the  
position of  
pope com-  
pletely” in the  
medical  
program.**



**One of the casualties of the struggle between Kellogg and Daniells in 1902 and 1903 was the careful balance of unity in diversity that had been achieved in 1901.**



that delegates in some unions, in at least two divisions, on two continents, were told in no uncertain terms how to vote on such issues as women's ordination, knowing that they could face a grilling if the secret vote went wrong?

They wonder how Ellen White would see such maneuvering in relation to the voice of God.

And these young adults wonder about the booing and heckling of Jan Paulsen, when he raised issues related to ordination, with no immediate, significant public rebuke by the denomination's highest authorities. One can only wonder how Ellen White would factor the voice of God into such dynamics, or whether she would have seen shades of Minneapolis.

Thoughtful young adults also wonder how serious the General Conference President himself is in interpreting all of the voted-in-session actions as being the voice of God. A widely publicized case in point took place on Sabbath, November 11, 2011, in Melbourne, Australia. The Victoria Conference had planned a city-wide regional meeting, which would feature the General Conference President. Part of the day's activities included the ordination of two men and the commissioning of one woman in a united service. Both the ordaining and the commissioning were in line with General Conference policy, but the General Conference President insisted at the last minute that the integrated service be divided into two separate services—one for ordination and the other for commissioning—so that he could participate only in the service for the two males without having to be associated with the commissioning.

Now young-adult thinking at its best would have to grant the president the right of conscience to not participate in the commissioning

of a female if he did not believe in it. In fact, that appears to be in line with the ruling of the 1877 General Conference session that respected "the rights of individual conscience" even in the face of a "highest authority under God" vote by the General Conference in session.<sup>46</sup> That is clear enough. But to thinking people, it has raised related questions. For example, if the General Conference president can choose not to line up with a session-voted policy, might they do the same thing on the basis of conscience? More seriously, why couldn't an entire union constituency act on the same conscience-based rationale? Many have viewed the actions of the denomination's president as having set a precedent in taking a step that put him out of harmony with the policy of the world church.

Other questions have surfaced in the minds of the denomination's young adults. One has to do with the "rumor" that some of the top denominational leadership would like to reverse the General Conference actions that have allowed for the ordination of local female elders and the commissioning of female pastors. What does that tell us about the "voice of God" votes? That some are wrong? And if some are mistakes, how do we know which ones?

And, finally, some have wondered if Adventism might have a problem in that it has developed a polity for the world church based on democratic procedures, in a population in which most of the voters come from countries that lack a truly functional democratic heritage and where top-down commands even affect secret voting. And, given the small proportion of votes in North America, Europe, and Australia, they wonder if the special needs of those fields ever will be able to be met unless they are voted on by the majority of the church, which may not understand the situations or even care about them.

It appears that in 2016, the dynamics of 1901 have been turned on their head. Then the problem was North America not being sensitive to the needs of the mission fields. Now it is the former mission fields not being sensitive to the

needs of North America. And with that issue we have returned to the role of unions and why they were created in the first place: because people on location understand their needs better than people at a distance.

## **A Contemporary Illustration of the Tension between Unions and Higher Authorities**

It should not come as a surprise to anyone that the most serious issue related to the tension between union conferences and the General Conference in 2016 is the question of the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. I do not want to spend much time on this issue, but in the context of a union conference that voted to ordain women in 2012 it would not be totally responsible for me to neglect the topic.

But before moving into the issue itself, it should be noted that the recently voted Adventist position on ordination is a problem for many evangelicals and others. For example, one Wheaton College biblical scholar recently told one of my friends that he could not understand how a denomination that had a female prophet as its most influential clergy person could take such a stand. The vote in such people's minds is either a sign of hypocrisy or a breakdown of logic or both.

Here we need to look at some basic facts. After all, female ordination:

- is not a biblical issue (years of study on the topic has not created consensus and neither will repeated votes);
- is not a Spirit of Prophecy issue; and
- is not a General Conference policy issue.

That last point has been widely misunderstood. At no time has the Seventh-day Adventist Church specified a gender qualification for ordination.<sup>47</sup> The General Conference Secretariat has recently argued otherwise on the basis of male gender language used in the Working Policy's discussion of qualifications for ordination.<sup>48</sup> But, as Gary Patterson has pointed out, "the working policy was filled with male gender language until

the 1980s when it was decided to change its wording to gender neutral. An editorial group was assigned the task, and made the changes. The fact that they changed all the rest of the document, but not the wording in the ordination section does not constitute a policy, unless it is listed in the criteria for ordination, which it notably is not."

The editorial decision, Patterson points out, was based on precedent or tradition since all ordained ministers up to that time had been male.<sup>49</sup> And while tradition in itself may be good enough for the Roman branch of catholicism, it has never held authoritative weight in Adventism. If the Secretariat's argument is viewed as conclusive, then we have editors developing binding policy for the world church rather than a vote at a General Conference session. That, needless to say, has serious implications.

At this point we need to return to the General Conference action of 1877 that stipulated that a vote of a General Conference session is the highest authority on earth "when acting within its proper jurisdiction."<sup>50</sup> Since the selection of whom to ordain was, in the 1860s, made a prerogative of the conferences and, in the early 1900s, was transferred to the unions, it does not fall into the jurisdiction of the General Conference except in the areas that the worldwide church in session has voted as policy. Thus, rulings by the General Conference on the gender issue are outside its jurisdiction until such an action is taken. From that perspective, the unions in the North American Division made a major mistake when they asked the General Conference for permission to ordain women. Rather, the unions should have followed the logic of James White who repeatedly noted that all things are lawful that do not contradict scripture and are in harmony with common sense.<sup>51</sup>

Before moving away from the topic of policy we need to listen to another point made by Gary Patterson. "There is," he wrote, "a perception existing that the General Conference cannot violate policy, that whatever it does constitutes policy, but this is not so. The General Conference

**Adventism  
in the twenty-  
first century  
is one of the  
most ethnically  
and culturally  
diverse groups  
in the world.**

**Tensions  
between the  
authority  
of the General  
Conference  
and that  
of the local  
conferences  
have existed  
from early in  
the history  
of organized  
Adventism.**

can violate policy just as well as any other level of the church, if and when it acts contrary to the provisions of policy. Unless and until the General Conference changes its policy by vote, any action contrary to that policy is a violation. Thus, the unions are not out of policy on this matter of gender inclusiveness in the ordination of ministers. The General Conference itself is out of policy by intruding where it does not have authority."<sup>52</sup>

At the 1990 General Conference session, the denomination officially voted not to ordain women to the gospel ministry because of "the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the church."<sup>53</sup> That was twenty-six years ago, and the passage of time has demonstrated that unity can be fractured from more than one direction. It is no longer a question of dividing the church and hindering mission. *The church is already divided.* And whether those inside of the moat recognize it or not, significant numbers of young adults are leaving the church over the issue even as many more, while still attending, have tuned out the authority of the church.

The denomination needs to see that this problem will not simply disappear. Somewhat like the issue of slavery in the United States from the 1820s to the 1860s, the ordination of women will stay on the agenda no matter how much money is spent in studying the topic and no matter how many votes are taken. Without adequate scriptural grounding, legislation at the worldwide level of the General Conference will not and cannot bring resolution.

And once again, we are back to the reason that unions were created in 1901. Namely, that the people on the ground are best able to decide how to facilitate mission in their areas. And here I might suggest that the real issue in 2016 is not the ordination of women but the role of union conferences. The ordination problem is only a surface issue. But it is one that cannot be avoided. And here I need to backtrack from a position I suggested to the annual leadership seminar of the North Ameri-

can Division in December 2012. At that time, I noted that the problem could be solved by just doing away with the word "ordination" (which in the sense we use is not biblical) and just commission all pastors regardless of gender. But I have come to see that as a copout and an avoidance of the real issue of the relation between unions and the General Conference.

That thought brings me to my final point.

**\*There Is an Authority Higher than that of the General Conference**

Here we need to remember the title of this paper: "The Role of Union Conferences in Relation to Higher Authorities"—plural. While the General Conference in session may be the highest authority on earth, there is yet a higher authority in *heaven*. Ellen White made that point when she wrote in 1901 that "men are not capable of ruling the church. God is our Ruler."<sup>54</sup>

With that in mind, we need to briefly mention several points:

It is God through the Holy Spirit that calls pastors and equips them with spiritual gifts (Eph. 4:11). The church does not call a pastor.

Ordination, as we know it, is not a biblical concept but one developed in the history of the early church and, notes Ellen White, was eventually "greatly abused" and "unwarrantable importance was attached to the act."<sup>55</sup>

The laying on of hands, however, is a biblical concept and served in the Bible, we read in Acts of the Apostles, as a "public recognition" that God had already called the recipients. By that ceremony, no power or qualification was added to the ordinands.<sup>56</sup> Over time, the early church began to call the ceremony of laying on of hands an ordination service. But "the English word 'ordination,' to which we have become accustomed, derives not from any Greek word used in the New Testament, but from the Latin *ordinare*."<sup>57</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes God's call of both males and females to the pastoral ministry by the laying on of hands. That is biblical, *but* it calls one ordination and the



other commissioning. That is not biblical. Rather, it is merely a word game that apparently has medieval concepts of ordination at its root, since there is certainly no grounding for it in either the Bible or Ellen White's writings.

And here we are back to the question I raised at the outset. Are we happy being catholic in the traditional Adventist sense, or do we prefer the Roman type? When any organization, including Adventism, begins to impose nonbiblical ideas contrary to such biblical ones as pastoral calling and the laying on of hands in recognition of God's call, it may be coming perilously close to replicating some of the most serious mistakes of Roman Catholicism.

Here Matthew 18:18 is informative. From the perspective of Rome, the idea is that whatever the church votes on earth is ratified in heaven. But the Greek in the verse actually says that "whatever you bind on the earth will have been bound in heaven" (cf. NASB). The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary has it correct when it notes that "even here Heaven's ratification of the decision on earth will take place only if the decision is made in harmony with the principles of heaven."<sup>58</sup> It is God who calls. All the church can do is recognize that call through the biblical act of laying on of hands.

After 115 years, Adventism is still faced with the twin Romish temptations of kingly power and top-down authority. But, unlike the church before the 1901 reorganization, the denomination now has the machinery in place to effectively reject the challenge. Yet it remains for some future historian to report on whether twenty-first century Adventism decided to use or neglect that machinery. ■

**George R. Knight** is Professor Emeritus of Church History at



Andrews University and the author of numerous books including *The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism* (2008) and *William Miller and the Rise of Adventism* (2010).

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It appears  
that in  
2016 the  
dynamics of  
1901 have  
been turned  
on their  
head.

**Does an  
official vote of  
a worldwide  
conclave have  
something  
akin to Papal  
infallibility?**

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# The Judicial Dilemma: *How the Church Works—And How It Gets Worked* | BY GARY PATTERSON

**A**t the outset of a study of church structure it is good to recall some facts as to what the church is and where it comes from. It is God who calls the church into being. It is made up of those who respond to His call, who then become the church. We neither create nor form the church. Rather, we become the church. Thus, the structures we may form around the functions in which the church engages, are not the church. Rather, they are structures and institutions which assist the church in doing what God has called it to do, and as such are human institutions.

The early Adventist believers were firmly resistant to the notion of institution and structure, seeing it as the slippery slope to “Babylon”, as they called it. They stoutly rejected the notion of creedal statements, maintaining that the Bible was their only creed. But the demands of dealing with such matters as property ownership and the proper handling of funds tended to move them to recognize the need for institutional structure and the calling of a “general conference” of all members of the church. This term and the structure it took—borrowed largely from the Methodists—became the basis of early institutional design.

Unfortunately, the multiple use of the term “church” to cover such things as buildings and services and institutions, frequently leads to confusion as to what the church really is. In this context, we recognize that only the local congregation has members, and only members have funds which support the church. No other segment of the institutions of the church have



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Rather,  
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HTTP://WWW.HISTORYLINK.ORG/CONTENT/MEDIA/PHOTOS/SMALL/WALLAWALLA\_SEVENTHDAVENTISTCHURCH-1875.JPG



**Being elected**

**to executive**

**office at**

**the General**

**Conference**

**does not**

**convey accuracy**

**to all one's**

**thoughts and**

**expressions of**

**opinion.**

either members or significant sources of funding. Thus, it follows that anything done by such segments is for the purpose of enabling the local congregation to function as the actual membership of the body. That is the reason for such structure to exist. The local church does not exist to sustain the other segments of institutional structure. Rather, the other segments exist to sustain and enable the local church.

A second, unfortunate, word usage is the term "levels of church organization," as if they exist in a line relationship of higher and lower power and authority. In actuality, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is structured as four separate constituent groups which do not have line authority over one another, but rather operate in a mutually agreed upon cooperative arrangement. Thus, the real power of the institution is in the local congregation, as it is the only group which has members and is the source of funding.

As familiar as we are with authoritative, top-down, pyramid-style leadership and governance, this is not the way the church is structured. Rather, it is designed to function cooperatively as four separate constituent groups that agree to function together. These four constituent groups have authority over specific functions of the church that belong only to them and may not be taken or countered by the other constituent groups.

The local church is the only constituent level which can take action regarding who may be a member; personnel for church officer election; appointment and ordination of elders, deacons and deaconesses; local church budgets and finance; and other such local church functions. The church in a Business Meeting serves as the constituent group of the church and it is this body that governs all membership and leadership matters of the congregation. The Church Board is appointed by the Church Business Meeting and is designated to handle matters delegated to them by the church body. The local church does not operate with a constitution, but rather is directed by the *Church Manual*.

The local conference is the only constituent

group that can take action regarding the sisterhood of churches, its employees, institutions, and finance. It also votes to recommend individuals for ministerial ordination to the union conference. The constituency of this segment of the institution is made up of representation from the local churches and meets as called for by its Constitution and Bylaws, and it elects its leadership and establishes a Conference Executive Committee to oversee its work between sessions.

The union conference also operates under the direction of its Constitutions and Bylaws and a constituency which is derived from the sisterhood of the local conferences in its territory. It has authority over the employees and institutions in its jurisdiction as well as the determination as to who may be ordained to ministry. As an exception to this ordination assignment belonging to the union, the divisions and the General Conference do not have to seek authorization from unions regarding whom they wish to ordain, but are allowed to authorize the ordination of their employees through action of their executive committees.

Divisions are not constituent groups, but rather are segments of the General Conference, assigned to direct the work in given geographic territories. The General Conference Session, which currently meets every five years, is the constituency of the world group. There are four primary documents which guide the overall cooperative relationships of the various constituent groups. These are the Twenty-Eight Fundamental Beliefs, the Constitution and Bylaws, the *Church Manual* and the General Conference *Working Policy*. The Twenty-Eight Fundamental Beliefs, the Constitution and Bylaws, and the *Church Manual* are determined and modified only by a vote of the General Conference in session. The General Conference *Working Policy* is determined and modified by vote of the General Conference Executive Committee.

These documents, which are under the jurisdiction of the General Conference, give direction to such matters as criteria for membership, leadership, finance, ordination, and institutional

operation. However, the application of these criteria is not within its jurisdiction. For example, even though the criteria for membership is provided in these documents, the General Conference may not take action regarding individual membership. This authority resides in the local church only.

## **Institutional Operation**

Generally speaking, the institutions of the church seek to operate in a democratic form of governance. But there are some glitches in this concept. As generally understood, in democratic governance there are three interrelated but independent branches of authority. These are the executive, the legislative, and the judicial functions. While the institutions of the church do have both executive and legislative branches, there is no judiciary. Furthermore, its legislative branch is weak and is not independent, given that it meets only once every five years for about ten days, and its executive committee meets only twice a year for about five days. But more significant than the infrequency and length of its meetings is the matter that at its legislative sessions, both its agenda and chair functions are controlled by the executive branch.

Given that control of the legislative body is under the executive branch, and given the absence of an independent judiciary, the function of the institution falls almost entirely into the hands of the executive branch for its ruling on issues. Thus, answers to questions of the interpretation of policy and procedure are given by administration, and the control of meetings and agenda are likewise under the direction of the executive leadership. Such is not really a democracy, even though operations are done under the guise of democratic process. Rather, it is a recipe for the “kingly power” which Ellen White firmly opposed in the early 1900s and which was a major factor in the restructuring of the institution of the church in 1901, creating the union conferences.

For the most part, the individuals in the executive branch have the best of intentions

and seek to know the needs of the world church. But it is not always so, whether intentionally or unintentionally. It is this issue which is protested by Ellen White in the days leading up to the 1901 General Conference Session. She says, at the opening meeting of that session, “God has not put any kingly power in our ranks to control this or that branch of the work. The work has been greatly restricted by the efforts to control it in every line. . . . There must be a renovation, a reorganization.”<sup>1</sup>

As a remedy for this problem, the structure was changed, introducing unions which were to serve the church in regional areas. “It was in the order of God that the Union conference was organized in Australasia. . . . Those who are right on the ground are to decide what shall be done.”<sup>2</sup> In the context of the 2016 Annual Council meeting, it would appear that there is a concerted effort to reverse this arrangement, with the General Conference asserting its executive authority in an attempt to discipline unions that it sees as operating out of policy.

## **Opinions and Rulings**

Prior to the convening of the 2016 session, GC Secretariat released two lengthy opinion papers making serious charges against those who understand policy in a different manner and act accordingly. What must be remembered and emphasized here is that these expressions of opinion are just that—opinions. The papers of Secretariat are not doctrine, nor policy, nor voted judicial rulings. Likewise, expressions of opinion by presidential representatives are also just opinions. While it is good and proper to hear the opinions of such executive members, they remain just that, opinions which may or may not be accurate. Being elected to executive office at the General Conference does not convey accuracy to all one’s thoughts and expressions of opinion.

But it is not just these released opinions that bring the church to its present situation. The current matters have been brewing for months, as indicated by the appointment of retired Vice

**The local  
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segments of  
institutional  
structure.**

**But the document was not made available until this agenda item was brought to the floor, giving no time for reading and understanding its implications prior to its introduction.**

President Michael Ryan as an Assistant to the President, charged with preparing a document to be presented and voted at the 2016 Annual Council, dealing with unions deemed to be out of harmony with policy.

While the process of bringing the proposed paper to the Annual Council was presented as an appeal to unity, and not as addressing the ordination of women, this was recognized as a thinly-veiled excuse. It is difficult to comprehend why such actions would be conceived in order to discipline a union for doing what is in its authority by policy to do. The ordination issue has repeatedly been recognized as being neither a biblical nor theological matter. It is not a fundamental belief of the church, and is not against policy, which assigns selection of individuals for ordination to the unions. Furthermore, the minutes of the 1990 GC Session record that we “do not have a consensus as to whether or not the scriptures and the writings of Ellen G White explicitly advocate or deny the ordination of women to pastoral ministry.”<sup>3</sup>

It is significant to note that the ordination policy was not changed after the General Conference Session votes in 1990, 1995, and 2015. As Ted Wilson stated after the 2015 vote, nothing has changed. This makes it all the more incredible that punishment of the unions would be undertaken over an issue that is at best shrouded in confusion, while ignoring the fact that the discrimination of women being attempted in various actions is not only a violation of policy BA 60 05, but also a violation of Fundamental Belief No.14. In fact, BA 60 10 clearly establishes that such a matter is discriminatory, and so becomes a policy to violate the Fundamental Beliefs and the statements made earlier in the policy.

The paper that was finally presented to the 2016 Annual Council session was not the first proposal on this issue to be processed. Prior to the beginning of the full session, the presidential council, which consists of the presidents of the divisions and the vice presidents of the GC, considered and voted as their consensus, a paper which was given to the group, but it was picked

up before the close of the meeting to prevent it being circulated outside the room. Consideration of the paper was then passed on to the expanded executive group, which includes presidential, secretariat, and treasury officers. Following this presentation, it was determined that the paper needed to be made into more of an appeal, in a pastoral approach to the unity matter, prior to its presentation to the full Annual Council.

By the time the Annual Council convened, word was out that a significant document addressing unions accused of operating out of policy, would be coming up for a vote. But the document was undergoing revision and not made available until this agenda item was brought to the floor, giving inadequate time for reading and understanding its implications. At that point, the three-page document titled “Unity in Mission: Procedures in Church Reconciliation” was distributed. This occurred on the last full day of the session. It was scheduled to be presented at 2:30 in the afternoon, but the preceding items on the agenda ran over so that the document was not introduced until nearly 3:00, thus allowing about two-and-a-half hours for the matter to be presented and discussed prior to the scheduled adjournment time set for 5:30. The session was a textbook example of how to manipulate a meeting in order to stifle a thoughtful and democratic process.

A short break was called after the previous agenda items were completed and Tom Lemon, serving as chair of the session, called the meeting to order. The introduction of the “Unity in Mission” document consumed considerable time as the document was read aloud and supported by lengthy speeches by both Ted Wilson and Michael Ryan. The delegates, who had just seen the document at the beginning of this session, were struggling to understand its implications, and no time was given for a studied response, even though it was clear that there was considerable reservation regarding its acceptance.

What appeared as odd to many was that procedures for addressing such matters already existed in policy. Why was this document being



advanced as a way to address what was clearly related to the ordination issue, despite the multiple assertions of both Wilson and Ryan that this was not related to ordination? Being presented as a method of resolving conflict matters in general, and not specifically for the ordination issue, was demonstrated to be nonsense by the document itself, given that it called for resolution by the 2017 Annual Council. If indeed this was a general resolution procedure for all time, all places, and all issues, it makes no sense to have such a terminal resolution date in it.

In addition to this discrepancy, the document not only ignored, but also was in conflict with, policies already in existence, namely B 75 and B 95. The first of these, B 75, addresses the process of changing the status of a union conference to that of a union mission. In this action, the union conference is removed from the control of its constituency and placed under the direction of the General Conference, who then assumes ownership of its assets and institutions as well as appointing its leadership. The second, B 95, addresses the process for the discontinuation or dissolution of a union. In this case, the union ceases to exist.

In an article responding to the "Unity" document, Mitch Tyner, a retired former attorney for the General Conference asks, "Why reinvent the wheel" when policy already exists to deal with such matters? And the answer seems to be that the existing policies do not give GC administration an avenue to accomplish what it wishes to see done. The strange conundrum of this whole matter is that the document which appeals for unity in abiding by policy, is actually in violation of the policies already in place to deal with such matters.

Both policies B 75 and B 95 call for a lengthy process which is to begin with the division leadership and Executive Committee, a scenario not likely to deliver the outcome desired and threatened by GC administration. Recognizing these discrepancies, as well as the potential for bypassing the procedures outlined in existing policy, there was considerable objection to pro-

ceeding to a vote without considerable additional time and study of the implications of the document. But the chair was determined to move the matter ahead, saying at one point that the vote needed to be taken by the close of the meeting that day, as he already had a plane ticket to fly out the next day.

After about an hour of talk by GC administrative leadership, the chair opened the floor for discussion without any opportunity for a studied presentation of opinions questioning the provisions of the document. Having received the document only at the beginning of its presentation to the floor, there was not adequate time allowed for such a counter study either to be developed or presented. Delegates were left scrambling to listen to the presentation from the advocates of the document, while trying to read and understand its implications.

With about ninety minutes left before the scheduled adjournment time, the chair ruled that those wishing to discuss the matter should line up at the provided microphones where they would be given two minutes each to express their views. This is a frequently used ploy to control the length of time allowed for such discussions, even as it was used at the GC Session in San Antonio. While such a ruling does limit the rambling on of irrelevant speeches, it seriously inhibits the ability of anyone to develop and present well thought out objections to the matter under consideration and it continually disrupts the flow of ideas being presented.

Questions asked and significant points made were largely ignored by the chair, who became in effect merely a time keeper of the two-minute limit. Dr. Jiří Moskala, Dean of the Seminary at Andrews University, expressed the need for more time to address the theological and ecclesiological implications of the document, but his request was passed over without response, as were other observations of conference, union, and division leadership requesting clarification and additional information.

As the scheduled adjournment time arrived and passed, the chair ruled that the twenty or

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**The strange  
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so speakers who were already standing in line to make their two minute comments, would be allowed to speak, but no others would be added to the line. Thus, the meeting extended on until about 6:00, at which time the vote was called and the document approved. Such a sham and manipulation of democratic process is an embarrassment to the church, which leads to foolish and contradictory actions and decisions being taken without adequate input and study.

### **Reactions**

In reaction to the vote accepting the Unity document, leading university theology departments and faculty, including Andrews University, Loma Linda University, Walla Walla University, Oakwood University, Washington Adventist University, and La Sierra University, weighed in, expressing concern over the implications and discrepancies in the document. GC executive officers, rather than rushing through this action, would do well to give time for and listen to council from the leading theologians of the universities. As Dr. Keith Burton of Oakwood University puts it in his article “A House Built on Sand,” “Indeed, many confuse orthodoxy with orthopraxy. However, in a church that is led by the Spirit of God, there is no room for dictatorial edicts that stifle conscience.”

Ted Wilson, in an online response, expresses his opinion in answer to a cogent question from someone named Bill who asks, “When Unions were established, God saw to it that they had final authority to determine who gets ordained. How is it that when they exercise that authority they are rebellious? Has the GC decided that they know better? How does this (what absolutely appears to be) exercise of kingly authority promote unity? – Bill, from the U.S.A.”

In his attempt at an explanation, Wilson states that GC Policy specifically outlines the “Qualifications for the Ordination to the Ministry,” found in Working Policy L 35. And indeed, it does. There are fifteen such criteria listed. But what Wilson omits from this explanation is that not one of them refers in any way

to gender as a qualification. If gender were to be such a requirement, it would seem reasonable that it would be first on the list, because all the rest would be irrelevant to women if they were excluded.

What he builds his case on is the use of male pronouns and the word “men” in other portions of the policy, as well as a reference to “wife” as being part of ministry. But these are not part of the listed qualifications. Quoting policy, he also refers to the term, “man of God” in 1 Kings 12:22 as being an ancient biblical term used to describe ministers. However, this reference is rather strained in this setting, as Shemaiah, who is being referred to, is not ordained and is actually a prophet in Judah during the reign of Rehoboam, not minister in any New Testament or modern sense of the word. Wilson also brings in the notion of Israelite priests, which truly were all male. But they were also all Israelites. And even more specifically, they were all of the tribe of Levi. So how does that in any way relate to who may be selected as ministers for ordination today?

If we really seek to go down this road of male gender references in Scripture, we will have to deal with the Tenth Commandment which is addressed exclusively to men. “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife...” This poses the question, “Does the Tenth Commandment then not apply to women?” But, we say, that was a patriarchal society, and the use of such terms included both genders. And so also it is used in the same way today. In one of her most famous comments, Ellen White says, “The greatest want of the world is the want of men. Men who will not be bought or sold.”<sup>4</sup> Would we be so narrow as to say that the principles expressed in in this comment exclude women?

Language has, from ancient days to the present, used generic terms such as man and mankind—as well as male pronouns—to refer to the entire human race, as in Job 12:10, “In his hand is the life of every creature, and the breath of all mankind.” Such usage of the term “mankind” is here intended to refer both to men

and women. Unfortunately, such usage of terms often slops over into cultural perspectives where male dominance and patriarchal notions take on supposed religious authority.

Recognizing that the matter is a cultural issue, the minutes of the 1990 GC Session record, "In several divisions there is little or no acceptance of women in the role of pastors, ordained or otherwise. In other divisions, some unions would accept women as pastors, but the indications are that the majority of unions do not find this acceptable." With this discrepancy in understanding of the issue it is cogent to ask, "Why is it acceptable to impose the opinion of one cultural group on the other?" Those seeking to move ahead with ordination as gender neutral are not attempting to impose their views on others. But those in opposition seem determined to force their opinion on the entire church. It is a fallacy to maintain that forcing the opinion of one group on the other will alleviate dissent.

### Judicial Authority

Seeking to support their position, GC Officers have released contradictory opinions on the matter. In a document released by the General Conference Officers on August 9, 2012, responding to the action of the Columbia Union on ordination, it is stated, "policy itself is based on Seventh-day Adventist principles found in Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White." This statement is in interesting contrast to one made in a June 29, 2012 letter of the General Conference Officers and Division Presidents, addressed to the Officers and Executive Committee Members of the Columbia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This letter states, "Decisions (1975, 1985, 1990, and 1995) to withhold ministerial ordination to women have been made on the basis of negative impact to unity rather than on the basis of compelling evidence from the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy."

It can't be both ways, and attempts to use opposite arguments to support opinions and rulings on policy in different settings is disingenuous at best. The question asked by Bill, as

quoted above, serves to bring into sharp focus the dilemma which arises from the conflict of understandings reflected in the variant reading of policy by unions and GC executives. Who is to judge between these differing interpretations. Rather than resolving the conflict of opinions between the unions and GC executives, the Unity document has instead brought into focus the judicial dilemma.

When centralized authority exercises control over all the legislative, executive, and judicial functions of governance, this is by definition "kingly power." In the day of kings—and/or dictators—not only did the king act as the executive, but also as judge and law giver. And while such rule may have been accomplished in a benevolent manner, the potential for despotism was ever present.

The judicial dilemma the church is now facing is the conflict of interpretation of both the General Conference *Working Policy* and the Fundamental Beliefs. Unions, to whom administration of the selection of individuals for ordination is assigned, see themselves doing so in harmony with the fifteen criteria in the ordination policy, as well as in harmony with both policy and Fundamental Beliefs forbidding discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, or gender. GC administration, on the other hand, see the unions as being out of harmony with policy voted by General Conference Sessions.

The dilemma is, who is to decide in this conflict of opinions? While there may be a tendency to see opinions and rulings on policy by GC Secretariat or Presidential as being the final arbiter, this is not so. These individuals, or even groups and committees of officers, may express their opinions. But they remain just that, opinions. Perhaps then, votes of the General Conference Committee or the General Conference Session may be seen as the final judicial determination. But this option is fraught by the fact that both the agenda and process of such meetings is controlled by the executive group as well.

Solving this judicial problem is not an easy

**Patterson** ➔ **continued** on page 80

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# FEMINISM AND THE CHURCH



**The Woman at the Well**  
by artist  
Thomas Emmerson

# Finding their Voice: *The Expanding Role of Women—Early Adventism in Context (1865–1875)* | BY GILBERT M. VALENTINE

SHOEBAT.COM/BELIEVE\_PROPHETS



Ellen G. White

**I**mmediately following the Civil War (1861–1865) Adventism encountered a “Feminist Spring.” A surprising burst of wider public involvement of women in the church helped the church cope with a period of rapid

growth. Their involvement also nourished and facilitated the growth. It was a time that allowed women to flourish even in pastoral ministry in the developing Advent movement. But the spring never really turned into a full summer. Exploring how and why this “spring” took place is instructive and perhaps provides insights and hope for the wider future involvement of women in Adventist mission despite the current wintry blasts.

Arising from the ashes of disappointment in 1844, the Advent movement had, by 1851, developed what its leaders believed was a coherent theology and they reached out to disillusioned Millerites with a theological explanation that gave meaning to their experience and reasons to continue to hope for an imminent Advent. In the midst of the calamity of civil war a little more than a decade later, the movement had expanded to the degree that it found it necessary to adopt first a regional (1862) and then a centralized (1863) organizational structure as a church. In the period immediately fol-

lowing the Civil War, the rapid growth of the movement was assisted and nurtured by women in a variety of ways. Women found their voices to be needed in a surprising range of arenas. Their creative energies and skills were welcomed and encouraged in the work of the church. What prompted this?

## Women in Church and Society

What is certain from the careful study of the church’s development is a confirmation of the truth that the church both follows and adapts to societal trends as often as it may be seen to help initiate them. The idea that the church or Ellen White were ahead of their times is at best a partial and limited truth. It is clear from the historical sources that the expanding role of women in the early Adventist church in the post-Civil War period developed to meet particular needs within the church. This development was possible, however, because it was facilitated by radically changing attitudes in the wider society beyond the church. It has often been observed by those who resist the ordination of women to ministry that the church should resist the pressure to follow social trends like feminism. It should certainly not adjust its practices and theology to such movements. Feminism is antithetical to the patriarchal models of scripture. The church must adhere to scripture. It must take a firm stand, resist the pressure of culture, and not ordain women. This kind of response is rooted in underlying assumptions that constitute the very foundations of what it is to be an intense-ly eschatological community—that society is

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**In distinctive ways, Adventism also contributed to the changing social attitudes and helped to make the wider involvement of other women in public life possible.**

getting worse not better—that is why the Lord needs to come. We should resist social changes or at the very least not bother ourselves with them. When the Lord comes all these things will be fixed. The reality, given the delay in the hoped-for Advent is quite to the contrary. The church *is* influenced by change and in turn it influences and reinforces those changes in the effort to try and fix society's problems. The widening scope of women's involvement in the church, post-Civil War, and the valued contribution women were thus able to make to the success of the church was *because* changes were already happening in society.

As historians of America have frequently noted, the Civil War not only created a need for women to be more widely involved in public roles beyond the "domestic sphere" of the home and family but it helped to facilitate their wider involvement. During the war, some 2.75 million men left farm, factory, and family to fight. Approximately 40 percent of the male population between the ages of fifteen and forty-five were called for various periods to serve in the military. By the most conservative estimates, the war claimed a staggering 620,000 lives; some say 130,000 more. Whatever the exact number, it means that approximately a quarter of the men who were called to fight never returned alive. Many of those who did return came home permanently injured, crippled, damaged beyond usefulness.<sup>1</sup> The vacancies during the war were filled by



**A wounded Civil War soldier**

women. Some served as nurses; some moved into desk jobs, into charitable organizations; and others moved into factories and other public activities in support of the war effort. Adventism makes a good case study of this phenomenon. It

demonstrates how the movement was obliged to adjust to these new social developments. In distinctive ways, Adventism also contributed to the changing social attitudes and helped to make the wider involvement of other women in public life possible.

### **Ellen White as Role Model**

While most early Adventist preachers were itinerant and expected to travel without their wives, James and Ellen White were an exception. Ellen constantly travelled with James. Only very occasionally would James travel for preaching appointments without his wife. But in the years following his severe stroke in 1865 Ellen, as occasion demanded, increasingly took the lead role and, after his further strokes of the early 1870s, she aggressively found her own voice and boldly asserted her own ministry independently of her husband.

Ellen's role as a public speaker during the late 1860s, in fact, was a major drawcard for James. Not nearly as many people attended his meetings when he travelled alone. Ellen's preaching during these years had significant novelty value. She reported to her twin sister Sarah in 1867, for example, about the experience of a congregation's disappointment when she had to miss appointments at one set of meetings held in a grove in Johnston, Wisconsin. "James attended one appointment without me and came back much wearied and said the people were so thoroughly disappointed it was the last time he would go without me." She related that people had come "from every direction to hear the woman talk, and our Sabbath-keeping people said if I had known how much they were disappointed I would have come [even] if I had been brought upon a bed."<sup>2</sup> This response was typical. On other occasions when for some reason, usually sickness, Ellen failed to appear, "disappointment" and often disgruntled unhappiness was the response.<sup>3</sup> This was true even for congregations of confirmed Sabbath keepers when little but denunciation,



rebuke, and scolding reproof were the main items on Ellen's preaching menu.

The ability to compete with male preachers Ellen White took as a mark of her success. At the 1867 Wisconsin meeting when, eventually, Ellen White did speak, she reported that she had the disadvantage of a strong wind blowing in the Pine and Oak trees sheltering the grove and "it was almost impossible to make the voice heard by all the people assembled." But she was able to speak for an hour and a half "clear and loud" and every word had been heard distinctly. "Not one man in a thousand" could have been heard as distinctly, she proudly noted, quoting impressed local observers who had made the observation.<sup>4</sup> But Ellen was not just novelty value as a speaker. She was valued because she validated both for Adventist and for non-Adventist women the legitimacy of a woman's right to interpret scripture herself and to preach and speak authoritatively on it in public. In this same year (1867), just a month after the Wisconsin meetings, she was down in Kansas at a camp meeting at Tipton. Two Methodist women (one of whom was a former Quaker) attended her meetings for the express purpose of affirming their own developing convictions about women in ministry. They believed a woman could "exert a powerful influence by public labor in the cause of God." There had been much debate in their local Tipton community among pastors of several denominations and among their own congregants about the propriety of women preaching. The pastors and a large number of their parishioners opposed the idea and asserted that a woman "was entirely out of her place in the desk." The two women and the male clergy had come to the camp meeting to assess for themselves. "If I proved myself able to expound the scriptures to the edification of my hearers," reported Ellen, the women told her that the ministers would cease their opposition. The women came to hear Ellen White "feeling that much was at stake." They were not disappointed. "Such an impression was made on this



community as was never known before," reported Ellen to her son and daughter-in-law, "Prejudice against woman's speaking is gone."<sup>5</sup> Ellen White's public work was facilitated by changing social attitudes—and her own increasingly public role in turn helped to further facilitate the change in nineteenth-century social attitudes. This was a symbiotic dynamic.

### The Widening Scope for Other Women in Public Work

In the case of women being involved publicly in the life of the church, the recognition of Ellen White's distinctive gift and role could perhaps be seen as pre-disposing the movement to be more sympathetic to a wider public role for women in its mission. But the widening scope also came about because of a number of very practical and pragmatic factors. A primary reason related directly to the widening mission of the movement and the increasing complexity in the organizational structure occasioned by the planting of institutions. The reality was that there were simply not enough skilled males available to respond to the many needs. The urgency of the skill shortage was exacerbated by chronic and widespread illness and by the effects of overwork among the existing male leadership. James White's stroke in 1865 and his long illness epitomized the problem.

In regard to the shortage of suitable males, early Adventism also reflected the experience of older, more established church entities as they expanded their missionary work. For example, during this same mid-century period the Evangelical Church Missionary Society (CMS) based in London found it increasingly necessary and then advantageous to call upon

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women to serve as overseas missionaries because of a dearth of suitable males. Large numbers of women were assigned overseas, about a third of them talented, educated, single women and they were found to be more effective as missionaries in many cultures.<sup>6</sup> And England had not experienced a Civil War.

### **Women in Publishing**

Involving women in writing for Adventist periodicals was encouraged from the early 1850s. Annie Smith, initially employed as a proof reader, soon moved into a limited editorial role and found her voice through her poetry. Her voice gave expression to the bright hope and longing of the movement but also ventured at times into doctrinal formulations. Letters from women readers were occasionally published and this feature became more prominent in the 1860s. Such letters reflected on Christian experience and were primarily exhortatory in nature. In 1867, the *Review* was doubled in size from eight to sixteen pages in order to accommodate more news about the development of the church, more general news from society, and to facilitate the sharing of more correspondence from the growing membership. James White reported that the letters pages were among the more popular pages of the magazine.<sup>7</sup> About 50 percent of letters published in the *Review* during the decade after the Civil War were authored by women writers.<sup>8</sup> Adventist women were finding their voice.



Annie Smith

As the decade progressed, the pages of the *Review* increasingly became a platform from which the voices of women were heard on serious topics. While not taking the role of expounding detailed doctrinal arguments and polemical apologetic articles defend-

ing the church's teaching, women writers, nonetheless, began to contribute articles beyond the correspondence section. These were significant expository and exhortatory articles generally discussing aspects of the doctrine of sanctification. Usually between 800 and 1,000 words long, the articles ventured into Christian teaching, explaining the meaning of scriptural texts and drawing out spiritual insights about passages of scripture. These articles are noted for their distinctly feminine perspectives. Some women established themselves as regular contributors.

Mary Guilford, for example, contributed a range of pieces that included such approaches as an exposition of the verse, "Sanctify them though thy truth," John 17:17, an exhortatory piece based on 1 Timothy 1:6 entitled, "The Dangers of Wealth," and a discussion of the scriptural expression "a peculiar people."<sup>9</sup> Another occasional contributor, Mary Howard, ventured deeper into doctrinal reflection and exposition, quoting Spurgeon and defending the biblical doctrine of the resurrection against a dissenting position taken in the *Bible Repository*, a contemporary religious journal.<sup>10</sup> Emma Sturgess could offer a reflective exhortation on Psalm 23, citing numerous other scriptures, and Angela Edmunds would write a discussion on the doctrine of sanctification, creatively using an extended metaphor.<sup>11</sup> While these were not technical, detailed, doctrinal, or historical articles written in dogmatic or apologetic style, they were articles that were homiletic and expository and they dared to interpret scripture and to teach others—men and women—publicly. In the 1880s and 1890s, women authors became even more prominent in the pages of the *Review*, teaching on health, doctrine, and the Christian life.

As the work of the Adventist publishing Association expanded in the late 1860s, and the shortage of skilled males was felt more acutely, women increasingly found their place in editorial roles. In 1864 Adelia Patten (who later married evangelist Isaac Van Horn) had been appointed as editor of the *Youth's Instructor*



Adelia Van Horn

and served for three years. In 1871, Jennie Trembley was appointed as the Youth's Instructor editor after a short period with Goodloe Harper Bell, who had proved unsatisfactory.<sup>12</sup> Mina Fairfield was appointed assistant editor of the Health Reformer, a

thirty-two-page monthly, but carried most of the day-to-day work because James White, as the editor, was frequently absent. Other women in the publishing house found roles as composers, proof readers, book-keepers, mailing clerks, and book binders. In fact, in March 1871, the Review editor, Uriah Smith, boasted that of the thirty-one employees in the publishing office, twenty were female.<sup>13</sup> This was truly a sign of the times.

Thirty-three-year-old Mrs. Adelia Van Horn (née Patten) was a striking example of a woman who was drawn into a more public role and she functioned as a role model for others. In her early twenties, she had lived in the White home, tutoring the boys and serving as an editorial assistant to Ellen. In some ways, she became the daughter that James and Ellen never had. In 1869, she was appointed as the executive secretary of the church's publishing business. In 1872, when she had to withdraw because of ill health, James White, in a formal notice of appreciation published in the Review, observed that Adelia's three years as Executive Secretary of the Review and Herald Publishing Association had been exceptional. Prior to her appointment as Association secretary she had, according to White, shown superior ability in the Review and Herald counting room. White lauded Adelia's astute accounting management of the Review and Herald during the previous three years and attributed to her much of the credit for doubling the assets of the company.

He further added that the thirty-three-year-old had kept the publishing house operating for long periods in his absence.

*In consequence of the absence of the President of the Association a large share of his time, and his feebleness during almost the entire time he has been in Battle Creek, and from want of any other thorough business person connected with the Association, it has seemed necessary that her active penetrating mind should reach beyond her duties as secretary, and enter largely into those of the President, in having to a very great extent, the general supervision of the entire financial workings of the Association. In many cases, our most successful plans in the interests of the Association have been those of her own devising, which, when matured, she has submitted to the President for his opinion, and his acceptance. And although she might decline accepting the credit of any share of the prosperity which has attended the Publishing Association, in doubling its capital stock in three years, yet without the interest, and care, and labor, which she has given it, all the efforts of the President to improve upon a former administration would have amounted to but very little.<sup>14</sup>*



The reality was that there were simply not enough skilled males available to respond to the many needs.



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Van Horn was having to withdraw from her role because of ill health and White urged that his fellow trustees be generous with her severance pay. He thought it would not be inappropriate to give her, above her wages, "a tithe" of what she had earned for the association. (Her annual salary was set at \$520 and White was proposing that she be granted a bonus of approximately \$3,200).

What White did not mention in his valedictory piece for Adelia Van Horn was that she was also currently serving as the Treasurer of the General Conference and had for a time served as Association Secretary at the four-year-old Health Institute across the road from the publishing house. What is striking about this period in the church is the number of talented women who were appointed to very public offices in the young denomination. Anna Driscall, who had served as publishing book-keeper/cashier, was appointed as treasurer of the Publishing Association; Jennie Trembley, in addition to her role as *Instructor* editor, was appointed as secretary of the Michigan Conference; and Addie Merriam accepted the role of Michigan Conference treasurer. During the 1871 General Conference session, five women were given high profile administrative roles in Battle Creek.

### Credentials and Licenses to Preach

Given this much more open attitude to the utilizing of women in public roles in the church it is probably not surprising that it was during this very same period that the church for the first time took action to formally acknowledge the public role of Ellen White as a pastor and preacher. At this same 1871 set of annual meetings, the Michigan Conference voted to issue Ellen White with ordination credentials. It was not right, it was argued, that she should be working as a minister and not be paid as one. The question appears to have not been whether it was appropriate or not to recognize her ministry but rather simply who should do it. The action read "That

Sr. Ellen G. White receive credentials from this Conference."<sup>15</sup> That the role was a ministry role and not a "prophet" role that was intended seems clear from the wording adopted the following year when the credential was renewed by the Michigan Conference. The minutes read "on motion it was voted that credentials be renewed for the following ministers: James White, E. G. White, J. H. Waggoner . . . [and nine others]."<sup>16</sup>

The need for more preachers and evangelists to meet the rapidly expanding needs of the church had been a major concern of the General Conference session the previous year, 1870. Prior to that conference, plans had been laid for the first time to actually train and prepare new men and women beyond those who had been involved in the cause thus far. There was a need to expand the ministry ranks. A Bible Institute comprising professional development classes in preaching, writing, bible study, and other aspects of public ministerial work, were scheduled to follow the 1870 session and there were hopes for at least 100 men and women to attend. This was a major new initiative. "We hope this class will number 100 ardent men and women who are anxious to qualify themselves to teach the truth to others," wrote James White in announcing the plans.<sup>17</sup> Again, a few weeks later, White appealed for "proper men and women, especially the young," to consecrate themselves "not simply as ministers and lecturers," but also as helpers in the various departments of the cause such as Sabbath School and colporteur work. The institute was held immediately following the General Conference session.

That women attended the institute and found their way into the preaching ministry seems clear from the presence for the first time of a number of names of women among those who were granted preaching licenses in various conferences in following years. One example is Sarah Hallock Lindsey of New York who had, as a single woman,



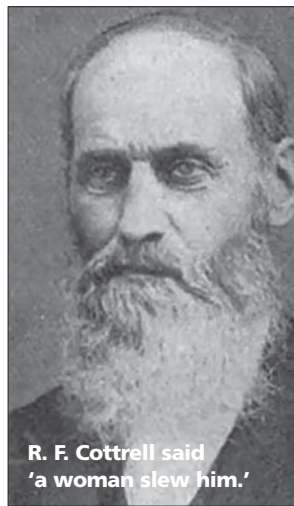
James White

begun preaching as a lay preacher in New York and Pennsylvania a number of years earlier, in the 1860s. Her letters of enquiry to the *Review* indicate that she was a well-educated, thoughtful young woman. She began preach-

ing after responding to a call through the pages of the *Review* for women to become involved in public ministry. This was, however, only after she had first sought clarification through the pages of the *Review* that such traditional texts as 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and 1 Timothy 2:11 were not to be interpreted in such a way as to prohibit or prevent her.<sup>18</sup> She had been successful in her evangelism and had baptized many and then, sometime between 1863 and 1866, she had married another lay preacher, John Lindsay. Surprisingly for the era, she retained her maiden name—another sign of the times! In recognition of her ministerial giftedness the New York Conference had, in either 1869 or 1870, granted her a ministerial license. She had conducted funerals, given bible studies, and delivered many public evangelistic addresses. In 1871, her husband John was also granted a ministerial license.<sup>19</sup> Two other women in the conference were also apparently given, or at least considered for, licenses in 1871.<sup>20</sup>

Sarah Hallock Lindsey was a well-informed and skilled minister who was able to ably engage in doctrinal discussions using arguments based on technical textual variants. If her preaching was like her writing it was clear, tightly-argued, and very persuasive.<sup>21</sup> The local non-Adventist postmaster at Beaver Dam in New York, where she ran a series of meetings attended by many of the local town officials, was very impressed. He reported to

the *Review* that she represented the cause in a very effective manner with good results for the local church.<sup>22</sup> Sarah, however, was not just a good preacher. She was also assertive and confident enough to respond to the challenge to a full-scale formal debate in June 1872, over the seventh-day Sabbath, when it could not be avoided. Experienced debater R. F. Cottrell, who witnessed the discussion, was highly impressed. The challenger was a first-day Adventist minister. Held outdoors in a grove and lasting all day, the debate concluded when Sarah Hallock Lindsey gently, and without personal attack, pushed her opponent into a corner. According to R. F. Cottrell, the challenger thus unexpectedly and abruptly closed up the discussion before all the points listed for debate had been covered. It seemed to Cottrell that the reason may have been to simply avoid embarrassment at



R. F. Cottrell said 'a woman slew him.'

having been beaten by a woman. "Like Abimelech at Thebes, who when mortally wounded by a piece of millstone cast from the hand of a woman, called hastily to his armor-bearer to slay him with the sword, lest men should say, 'a woman slew him.'"<sup>23</sup>

### The Importance of Social Context

Was the sudden interest in granting credentials and licenses to Adventist women preachers in 1871, and the broader administrative involvement of women in publishing and institutional work, simply an internal response to the rapid church growth and the dearth of qualified and willing male workers? Reading through the *Review* alone might tempt one to conclude so. In the recent past, the *Review* had published several short articles discussing the public role of women, and on scriptural grounds defended

**As the decade progressed, the pages of the *Review* increasingly became a platform from which the voices of women were heard on serious topics.**

**As the work of  
the Adventist  
publishing  
Association  
expanded in  
the late 1860s,  
and the short-  
age of skilled  
males was felt  
more acutely,  
increasingly  
women found  
their place in  
editorial roles.**

their right to preach.<sup>24</sup> The rationale for these articles had been primarily to defend Ellen White from criticism and to justify her public role in the church but of course, in doing so, they legitimized a public work for all women and that was clearly understood.<sup>25</sup> It should be observed, however, that even as such public work was encouraged it was with the proviso that women were to make sure they were not “usurping authority over men and becoming dictatorial in public assemblies.”<sup>26</sup> As Denis Fortin points out, James White’s cultural framework at this point was not so flexible that he could imagine or believe that a woman could function as being in charge of even just a church business meeting. Women exercising “authority” over males could not be entertained. Maintaining the principle of submission seemed critical for early Adventists in these first steps away from the patriarchal model even as the surrounding society itself, in this matter, was already having to adjust and in which the church would also have to follow. Women as headmistresses or principals of schools or as hospital administrators would have challenged this cultural framework of James White.<sup>27</sup>

The *Review*, however, provides important clues to the wider social context around the church that constitutes the background for these new developments within Adventism. During this same period, editor Uriah Smith, who seems clearly to be a sympathizer with the women’s rights movement that became very active in this same decade following the Civil War, encourages his readers to be aware of respectable women’s rights literature. In January 1871, he drew the attention of readers to *The Woman’s Journal*. Published in Boston, Massachusetts, the magazine was devoted to the sole object of “advocating the equal rights of women, and especially the right of suffrage.” He was not put off by this but expressed interest in the issue of the suffrage movement because he thought it might have religious liberty implications (which he does

not bother to spell out). His mention of the price at only \$1.50 per annum was an encouragement to readers to subscribe—it was not expensive. Three months later, Smith published an endorsement of another monthly women’s journal, *Woman and Her Work*. This journal, Smith reported, was published by the Women’s Christian Association, the purpose of which was to assist “those women who labor in the gospel.” This journal’s mission focused on “enlarging the sphere of woman’s usefulness” especially in the department of



**Victoria  
Woodhull**

“Christian charity.” But this was too narrow, Smith thought. “We are not among those who would hedge up before woman any avenue of labor or usefulness,” he wrote. He thought it appropriate that women should be able to work “in whatever

position her varied capacities may render her efficient,” and again, he mentioned the subscription price, hinting that it too was a journal worth subscribing to. *Review* readers were thus clearly made aware of the meritorious perspectives on woman’s rights issues then stirring up communities across the country, even as denominational leaders such as James White would find occasion to express disgust at the “free love” emphasis of women’s rights activists such as Victoria Woodhull.<sup>28</sup>

*Review* readers who also subscribed to the denomination’s thirty-two-page monthly *Health Reformer* during the same period however, (and that included all of the denominational leadership and a large proportion of the church membership) would have been even more directly exposed to the debate about the involvement of women in public life. If they agreed with the editorial stance of that Adventist journal they would have been much



more disposed to the necessity of making a place for women in the public life and work of the church. Beginning in late 1869 and running through 1871 until early 1872, the *Health Reformer* had repeatedly reported on sensational stories in the national press of prejudice against women in medicine and in other professions. It took a firm editorial stance against such prejudicial conservative positions and vigorously supported the place of women in public roles. The *Health Reformer* provides a highly illuminating context for the new developments within the church. It is not unreasonable to conclude that General Conference actions fostering the public participation of women in the work of the church in 1871, and recognizing that involvement through credentialing and licensing, were to a considerable degree conditioned by such reports and by the palpable social change swirling around them. This is, again, a clear illustration of the fact that the church is both unavoidably shaped by social change and is, at the same time, inextricably involved in influencing social change.

The issue in the *Health Reformer* was the role of women in medicine and the resistance to social change. The first one or two women to be admitted to the study of medicine in the United States were admitted in New York and in Pennsylvania around 1850. Hostility and prejudice made the undertaking exceedingly difficult. Later women-only colleges and hospitals were established in Boston, New York and Philadelphia in order to cope with the prejudice and make the path for women into the profession easier. For those women who undertook the journey it was painful, and obtaining adequate clinical practice was particularly difficult, for it placed them in direct competition with men for what was a limited resource. In the fall of 1869, male medical students at Pennsylvania University had been exceptionally rude, insulting their women colleagues in classrooms and mobbing them in the streets in



Dr. Phoebe Lamson

protest over their access to scarce clinical sites. The professors of medicine in the university had sided with the male students and defended them, and as a result, newspapers all over the country and internationally reported the story.<sup>29</sup>

Subsequently, the Philadelphia Medical Society at its June 1870 meeting, formally voted in support of the male medical faculty and determined to expel from their membership any doctor who subsequently worked professionally with or associated with a woman physician. They would not recognize or admit either female or African-American physicians. They took this stance on the grounds that woman has too much “delicacy,” too little intellect, and African-Americans had not the right kind of anatomy supposedly “in the heel and shin.”<sup>30</sup> The United States National Medical Association soon followed the same policy. The New York State medical establishment followed Philadelphia shortly afterwards, after similar episodes of boorish behavior on the part of male students to their female counterparts, and newspapers around the country again erupted in vigorous denunciation and indignation both for and against. In 1870, the University of Michigan in Lansing took the step of banning the admission of women students into medicine, as did the new university opened the same year in Missouri. The role of women in the professions had become a topic of heated national debate—just at the time of Adventism’s “feminist spring.” The Adventist’s *Health Reformer* reported all this in detail and the editor lent his voice vigorously to the protests and in support of a fair hearing for women.<sup>31</sup> “Women are slowly, but

**What is striking about this period in the church is the number of talented women who were appointed to very public offices in the young denomination.**

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rassment  
at having been  
beaten by  
a woman.

surely, working their way into the professions of medicine, divinity, and law, and into numerous industrial avocations heretofore occupied with rare exceptions, by men alone," he observed. "Whether her 'sphere' should be ultimately so enlarged to include voting and holding office, we do not propose to discuss in the *Reformer*," he added, but it was the position of the *Health Reformer* that when she becomes healthy, self-reliant, and independent, she should be able "to decide for herself her political privileges and social status."<sup>32</sup> This was in fact a backhanded



endorsement of suffrage. The editor concluded that "nothing is clearer than the fact that women are rapidly working their way into the medical profession, and nothing is surer than the fact that they will stay there." The magazine looked forward to the day when the healing art would be "mainly in the hands of educated and competent women."<sup>33</sup> In the meantime, under any and all circumstances she should be entitled to "respectful attention" and women's rights activists should be given fair and accurate reporting. The editor singled out for disdain those journals like the *New York Tribune* who misstated, perverted, and misrepresented the advocates of "Women's rights."

For the rest of the year, the *Adventist's Health Reformer* took pains to notice advances and progress in the participation of women in the medical field, both in North America and overseas, citing cases of progress in France, Scotland, and London as examples.<sup>34</sup> The journal also noted approvingly the appointment of women physicians to the role of City Physician in a number of important American

states, roles where they were expected to exercise authority over men.<sup>35</sup> The magazine reported favorably on those women who successfully broke through barriers. A woman physician, Dr. M. Webster, who won a prize for her clinically supported research, was applauded enthusiastically in the *Reformer*, even if she had to at first get recognition by using a pseudonym.<sup>36</sup>

Dr. Trall's alternative therapy Bellevue College, in New York, was totally committed to the involvement of women in medicine, as was Dr. Caleb Jackson's Home on the Hill institute in Danville, both of which were the direct models for Adventist health care. The Adventist's Health Institute which opened in Battle Creek in 1866 had, by 1869, employed two women physicians, Pheobe Lamson and a Mrs. Chamberlain, and prominently involved them in the delivery of health education and health care. Dr. Phoebe Lamson established herself as a much-quoted authority on health matters. Their articles and columns were regularly featured in the *Health Reformer*, as were their authoritative answers to questions. And they were both credentialed and addressed as "Doctor," not as "commissioned" physician.

## Conclusion

The wider social context beyond the confines of the early Adventist church helps to explain the "feminist spring" for women, in the public life of the church itself, in the decade after the close of the Civil War. Furthermore, it is a matter worthy of note that the Advent movement readily embraced the recognition and employment of both woman physicians and women preachers at the same time, in 1869–1871, in the face of significant societal resistance but following the lead of others who were even more progressive. In the decade after the Civil War, Adventists were at least in step with the times in helping women find their voice in ministry and in medicine. It is a matter of huge irony why the embrace of women physicians in the pub-

lic life of the church, and their treatment on equal terms with men soon became universal practice and their numbers multiplied to bless the church, while women in ministry and in the administration of the church flourished for a time and wilted away to almost nothing in the years after the first World War. The late nineteenth-century “feminist spring” in medicine blossomed into a full summer. No one now dares suggest that “Dr.” is a title only to be borne by males. On the other hand, the embrace of women in ministry and in administration continued as a very cool and sporadic “feminist spring,” skipped summer altogether, and then descended into a prolonged winter. The spring was to prove as ephemeral as the recent “Arab Spring.”

Now, after a further 150 years, there is still much prejudice and resistance to overcome. Perhaps the social change now swirling around the church may yet provide urgency enough for it to see that for it to be effective in its mission in Western contemporary society it simply and absolutely must adapt. It must enable women to exercise their gifts, find their voices, and appropriately recognize and affirm their ministerial roles. It has now become not just a social necessity but a moral issue. Mission is at stake. ■

New Zealander **Gilbert M. Valentine** is professor of Leadership and Administration at La Sierra University and has a special interest in the area of leadership and Adventist history. He is author of a scholarly biography on W. W. Prescott (2005), a history of the White Estate entitled *The Struggle for the Prophetic Heritage* (2006), and a study of the political influence of Ellen White in *The Prophet and the Presidents* (2011). Recently he co-



edited, with Woodrow Whidden, a Festschrift for George Knight entitled *Adventist Maverick* (2014). He is married to Kendra Haloviak Valentine, who also teaches at La Sierra University, and enjoys visiting his Kiwi homeland with him.

## References

1. Of a total population of approximately 31 million, in 1860, about 7.5 million were aged between 15 and 45. Some scholars estimate on the basis of statistical analysis of census data that there were 750,000 Civil War deaths and point out that they exceeded the cumulative total of all other US war deaths from that time to the present. James McPherson, *The War that Forged a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2, 48.
2. EGW to Stephen and Sarah Belden, Sep. 24, 1867, EGWE-DC
3. See *Review and Herald* (Aug 24, and Oct. 26, 1869).
4. Ibid.
5. EGW to Edson and Emma White, Oct. 1879 (Ltr. 16, 1870); *Review and Herald* (Nov. 1, 1870): 156.
6. Sean Gill, *Women and the Church of England* (London: SPL, 1994), 173, ff. By 1909, more than 50% of CMS missionary personnel serving overseas were women and 438 of the total of 1,390 personnel were single women.
7. James White, “Review,” *Review and Herald* (Oct. 1, 1870): 252.
8. See for example, *Review and Herald* (Oct. 27, Nov. 3, and Nov. 10, 1868).
9. *Review and Herald* (May 16, 1871): 175; (Sep. 27, 1870): 114; (Jan. 14, 1873): 39.
10. Mary Howard, “Christ the Life,” *Review and Herald* (Jan., 1869): 34.
11. E. Sturgess, “He Restoeth my Soul,” *Review and Herald* (Aug. 9, 1870): 59; Angelia Edmunds, “Cleansing the Heart,” *Review and Herald* (Mar. 28, 1871): 115.
12. Nine of the twelve editors who produced the magazine during its first thirty years (1852–1882) were women.
13. *Review and Herald* (Mar. 21, 1871): 96.
14. *Review and Herald* (Nov. 12, 1872): 176.
15. “Michigan Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *Review and Herald* (Feb. 14, 1871): 69. Uriah Smith was the session chair and Adelia’s husband, Isaac van Horn, the secretary.
16. *Review and Herald* (Sep. 10, 1872): 102. Ellen White was never “set apart” by laying hands upon her in a formal religious ceremony by the church. Conference delegates simply formally recognized and affirmed her call to ministry by the raising of hands to approve the

**Maintaining  
the principle of  
submission  
seemed critical  
for early  
Adventists in  
these first  
steps away  
from the  
patriarchal  
model.**



**They took this  
stance on  
the grounds  
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and African-  
Americans had  
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and shin.”**

motion of recognition by the Michigan Conference session and she was subsequently employed and remunerated as an ordained minister. It was only in later life Ellen White would assert that she had been “ordained” by God to emphasize the point that her call was not dependent on the recognition of a committee, though of course her work would not have been possible without the validation of her call by her faith community.

17. “Course of Lectures,” *Review and Herald* (Jan. 31, 1871): 56.

18. B. F. Robbins, “To the Female Disciples in the Third Angel’s Message,” *Review and Herald* (Dec. 8, 1859). Robbins suggested that it was the “sectarian” background from which many early Adventists had come that caused them to have “prejudice against woman’s efforts and labors in the church,” and that this discouraged many women from ministerial endeavor. See also “Sarah A. Hallock,” *Review and Herald* (Jan. 12, 1860).

19. The action of the Conference session in 1871 was to “renew” her license. *Review and Herald* (Sep. 12, 1871): 102.

20. Brian Strayer, “Sarah A Hallock Lindsey: Advent Preacher on the Southern Tier,” *Adventist Heritage* 11:2 (Fall, 1986): 16–23. See also Josephine Benton, *Ibid.*, 111, 112.

21. “That One Text,” *Review and Herald* (Sep. 19, 1871): 107.

22. *Review and Herald* (Nov. 14, 1871).

23. “Discussion at Woodhull, N. Y.,” *Review and Herald* (Jun. 25, 1872): 14

24. See for example, “Shall Women Speak in Church,” *Review and Herald* (Mar. 14, 1871): 94; I. Fetterhoof, *Review and Herald* (Apr. 8, 1871): 58.

25. Beverly Beem and Ginger Hanks Harwood read their way through every issue of the *Review* and helpfully explain how early Adventist leaders interpreted and used scripture beneath its plain superficial meaning in order to justify the public role of Ellen White. “‘Your Daughters Shall Prophesy’: James White, Uriah Smith, and the ‘Triumphant Vindication of The Right of The Sisters’ to Preach,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* Vol. 43, No. 1 (2005): 41–58. Also Beverly Beem and Ginger Hanks Harwood, “‘Quench not the Spirit; Despise not Prophesying. Prove all Things. Hold Fast that which is Good’: Early Adventist Hermeneutics, Paul’s Teachings, and Women’s Spiritual Leadership,” *Adventism and*

*Adventist History: Sesquicentennial Reflections*, (General Conference Archives: Silver Spring, MD, January 6, 2014).

26. “Shall Women Speak in Church,” *Review and Herald* (Mar. 14, 1871): 94;

27. Denis Fortin, *Ibid.*, 90. A woman serving as a school headmaster would have fractured James White’s cultural framework on this point. The Civil War, however, facilitated a change in cultural attitudes in this arena as well. Phebe Sudlow, for example, was first appointed principal of a public school in Davenport, Iowa, in 1861, because so many men had gone to war and there were none available for the post. In 1874, she was subsequently appointed the superintendent of a public school district in Davenport, the first woman superintendent to be so appointed in the United States. In this role, she exercised considerable authority over men. The traditional boundaries for “exercising authority” were of necessity being stretched in the wider society White inhabited. See [http://www.iptv.org/iowapathways/mypath.cfm?ounid=ob\\_000175](http://www.iptv.org/iowapathways/mypath.cfm?ounid=ob_000175)

28. “There were those women, doubtless, in the apostle’s day as well as in ours, who could prate about “Women’s Rights” as glibly, if not as filthily, as the notorious Victoria Woodhull.” James White, “Women in the Church,” *Review and Herald* (May 29, 1879): 172.

29. *Health Reformer* (May 1870): 201, 202; (June.1870): 224, 225.

30. *Health Reformer* (Aug. 1870): 27.

31. *Health Reformer* (Sep. 1870): 44.

32. *Health Reformer* (Jan. 1870): 122.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Health Reformer* (Sep. 1870): 44.

35. *Health Reformer* (May, 1870): 134.

36. Dr. Webster had succeeded in having her research articles accepted for publication in the *New York Medical Gazette* only using by a male nom-de-plume.

# The Dangers of Unity | BY MEGEN MOLÉ

Just a few weeks ago, US president Barack Obama published an article on feminism in the fashion magazine Glamour. Identifying himself as a feminist, he wrote that twenty-first-century feminism is about “the idea that when everybody is equal, we are all more free.” This applies not just to basic human rights, but to gender stereotypes as well. We’ve come a long way, he wrote, but there are still many things we need to work on:



*and ambitious in the workplace—unless you’re a woman. Then you’re being too bossy, and suddenly the very qualities you thought were necessary for success end up holding you back.*

For Obama, the feminist movement is far from finished. We need to keep working on feminism to liberate everyone, male and female.

Other people are less certain about the benefits of feminism. In a 2014 social media trend called “Why I Don’t Need Feminism,” women were invited to take a picture of themselves with a caption that described why they don’t identify as feminists—and many did. Last year at the General Conference Session in Texas, I listened to Natasha Nebblett explain to the delegates why she didn’t want the GC to allow women’s ordination.

She argued that while people often recognize her work as president of Generation of Youth for Christ, “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 ministry and the desk and the king on his throne.” I’ve also heard a lot about independent evangelist Doug Batchelor, who argues that feminism is “becoming” more about angry women who wanted to be like

**We need to  
keep working  
on feminism  
to liberate  
everyone, male  
and female.**

*We need to keep changing the attitude that raises our girls to be demure and our boys to be assertive, that criticizes our daughters for speaking out and our sons for shedding a tear. We need to keep changing the attitude that punishes women for their sexuality and rewards men for theirs.*

*We need to keep changing the attitude that permits the routine harassment of women, whether they’re walking down the street or daring to go online. We need to keep changing the attitude that teaches men to feel threatened by the presence and success of women.*

*We need to keep changing the attitude that congratulates men for changing a diaper, stigmatizes full-time dads, and penalizes working mothers. We need to keep changing the attitude that values being confident, competitive,*

HTTP://WWW.MLIVE.COM/NEWS/FLINT/INDEX.SSFZ201601/PRESIDENT\_OBAMA\_SIGNS\_EMERGENC

WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?v=BO\_X3PLWQ\_EA&KEYNOTE\_ADDRESS//NATASHA\_NEBBLETT\_GYC\_2015

**Like Christianity  
(or even  
Adventism)  
feminism is not  
a static entity,  
composed  
of people who  
think exactly  
alike and who  
all move in  
the same  
direction.**

men rather than attaining the rightful respect for being a “woman.” He feels that feminism is pushing the church “beyond” voting rights and equal pay into the arena of unisex “thinking.” Now that women have equal pay and are allowed to vote, what is feminism doing? For Batchelor, it’s turning all of us into some form of male-female hybrid. It’s limiting us, both male and female.



Doug Batchelor

Who is right? Is feminism a liberating movement or a limiting one? The answer is too complex to be summed up in a few words. But let’s see what we can do.

Feminism existed before the women’s liberation movement in 1960s America, and it’s likely to be around for a good while. It has been many different things at different times, to different people. It’s only natural that things get a little complicated as a movement gains size and momentum. Like Christianity (or even Adventism) feminism is not a static entity, composed of people who think exactly alike and who all move in the same direction. Nor should it be—if it was, it wouldn’t be able to do the thing it aims to do: work towards equal rights for all people, regardless of their sex.

In fact, the illusion of unity—unity of one group, or even of the whole human race—was one of the problems feminism had to overcome along the way. Let me explain what I mean with a short history lesson.

Hillary Rodham Clinton may be the first woman nominated to a major political party in the US, but she’s certainly not the first woman to run for the office of president. In 1872, almost fifty years before any woman would be able to legally vote for her, Victoria Woodhull became America’s first female presidential can-

didate. A campaigner for women’s suffrage, she reasoned: “If Congress refuse to listen and to grant what women ask, there is but one course left to pursue. What is there left for women to do but to become the mothers of the future government?” If the government was not going to listen to women, women would just have to join the government. She lost spectacularly to Ulysses S. Grant, but her campaign drew a great deal of media attention, and she continued to campaign for women’s rights until she died at the ripe old age of eighty-eight—seven years after women were finally granted the right to vote.

Woodhull, and other women like her, formed what we call the “first wave” of modern feminism. The height of first-wave feminism was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the suffragettes and the women’s rights movement. These feminists were largely focused on the legal aspects of equal rights: the vote, the right to be educated, the right to own property, etc.

The “second wave,” generally marked as taking place from the 1960s through the 1990s, came up against a different set of chal-



Hillary Rodham Clinton

lenges. Equipped with the legal rights won by first-wave feminists, the second wave set out to negotiate questions of identity and social justice. Women were now legally “equal,” but deep-seated cultural biases still kept them from true equality on most fronts. They had to fight for the right to be women in the workplace, and in this new environment they were forced to reconsider what it actually meant to be a woman, and what it meant for a woman to be equal to a man. Undaunted by these challenges, second-wave feminists succeeded in



reforming higher education, business and politics, and reproductive rights; set up organizations and legislation for the protection of battered women; and raised awareness about the movement at a popular level. Second-wave feminism was loud and proud, and this is the wave we are still most likely to associate with the term “feminism.”

They also changed history in a deeper way. I work at a university, teaching, and research-

from a very specific point of view. Most of the art was made by men: specifically, well-off white men from the West.

We discovered that “we” were not as united as we had thought, and that our unity had only been possible because we were excluding everyone with a different perspective than ours—people who were women, who were black, who were poor or uneducated. These people didn’t matter in our society, and so



“Second wave” feminists, led by Betty Friedan, in a 1971 march for constitutional equality.

ing literary and cultural criticism. Basically, I study how art and literature shape identity. In my field feminism is hugely important—and not just because the feminist movement ensured my right to work in the first place. For hundreds of years we assumed that great art was universal. We believed that it held up a mirror to the world—that it showed us who we were as people. Then, in the middle of the twentieth century, we suddenly and shockingly realized that most of the art we had previously considered “great” was actually only reflecting a very small portion of the world,

their art couldn’t possibly matter either.

Until a group of feminist critics came along—at this point still mostly women—who, thanks to their nineteenth-century feminist forerunners, were finally allowed to participate in scientific discourse. They pointed out, in a language other scholars could understand, that actually these other perspectives were everywhere, and could be very valuable indeed.

The impact this realization had on the arts (and later on the sciences as well) cannot be overstated. There were endless, conflicting worlds and perspectives out there, just waiting

**Second-wave  
feminism**

**was loud and  
proud.**



Victoria Woodhull

to be recognized. The effect was revolutionary. Batchelor argues: "All of history has been altered in the last fifty to sixty years. Up until the feminist movement, the church understood for 1,900 years that the final authority was to rest solely with husbands

and men pastors." He's absolutely right. Feminism is responsible for teaching us to read differently, from multiple perspectives. It opened our eyes. It showed us that our society wasn't as fair as we thought it was, but that we could make it better. We just needed to open the floor to other voices.

Soon the feminist scholars were followed by postcolonial scholars and class scholars. They didn't focus on women, but on non-Western peoples and on the poor. They were followed by disability studies and by queer theory. Some feminist critics (male and female) even turned their focus back to the old perspective, to learn how these new perspectives could help us re-evaluate thousands of years of rich, white masculine—and all the men left out by that category. The floodgates were opened and the knowledge poured in. Some people took this knowledge to strange extremes, as people always do. This was OK. Feminism taught us that difference wasn't the end of the world, it was the beginning. Some feminists hate men, and some feminists are men.

A thousand varieties of third-wave feminism were born. They responded to second-wave feminism's attempts to avoid the mistakes of the past 2,000 years by teaching us that there is more than one way to be a woman (or a man). Where the second wave was mostly composed of highly educated white women, third-wave feminisms work to improve conditions for all people, each according to their

needs. Some of these feminisms are contradictory, and that's OK. People are contradictory as well. But it's important to recognize that feminism made their contradiction possible in the first place. Feminism isn't obsolete. It's still doing exactly what it was meant to—building the opportunity for real democracy and equality, for everyone.

The Adventist church still needs feminism too. The world church is arguing for unity, but feminism has taught us the dangers of that type of unity. Can the church be truly unified? Or are we enforcing unity at the cost of people? Are we only united at the cost of excluding everyone with a different perspective? Could that be why the church needs feminism? Not, as Batchelor fears, to push the church into "unisex" thinking, but to allow everyone in the church a voice? To make our church better and more fair? To let all of us be equal and more free?

Feminism isn't about ordaining female pastors and it's not about recognizing the position of wife and mother above that of president or king. Feminism is about recognizing that you should have the right to prefer being a mother or father over being president, and vice versa. Feminism is about recognizing that your way of looking at things is not the only way of looking at them.

Of course, that's just my perspective. The beauty of feminism is that you are free to offer your own perspective on equal footing, regardless of your sex, race, class, or gender. No matter how radical. ■

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**Megen Molé** is a feminist and a fourth-generation Adventist. She was a Dutch delegate to the 2015 General Conference session in San Antonio, and she is currently a teacher and PhD researcher at Cardiff University in Wales.

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# LGBT ISSUES

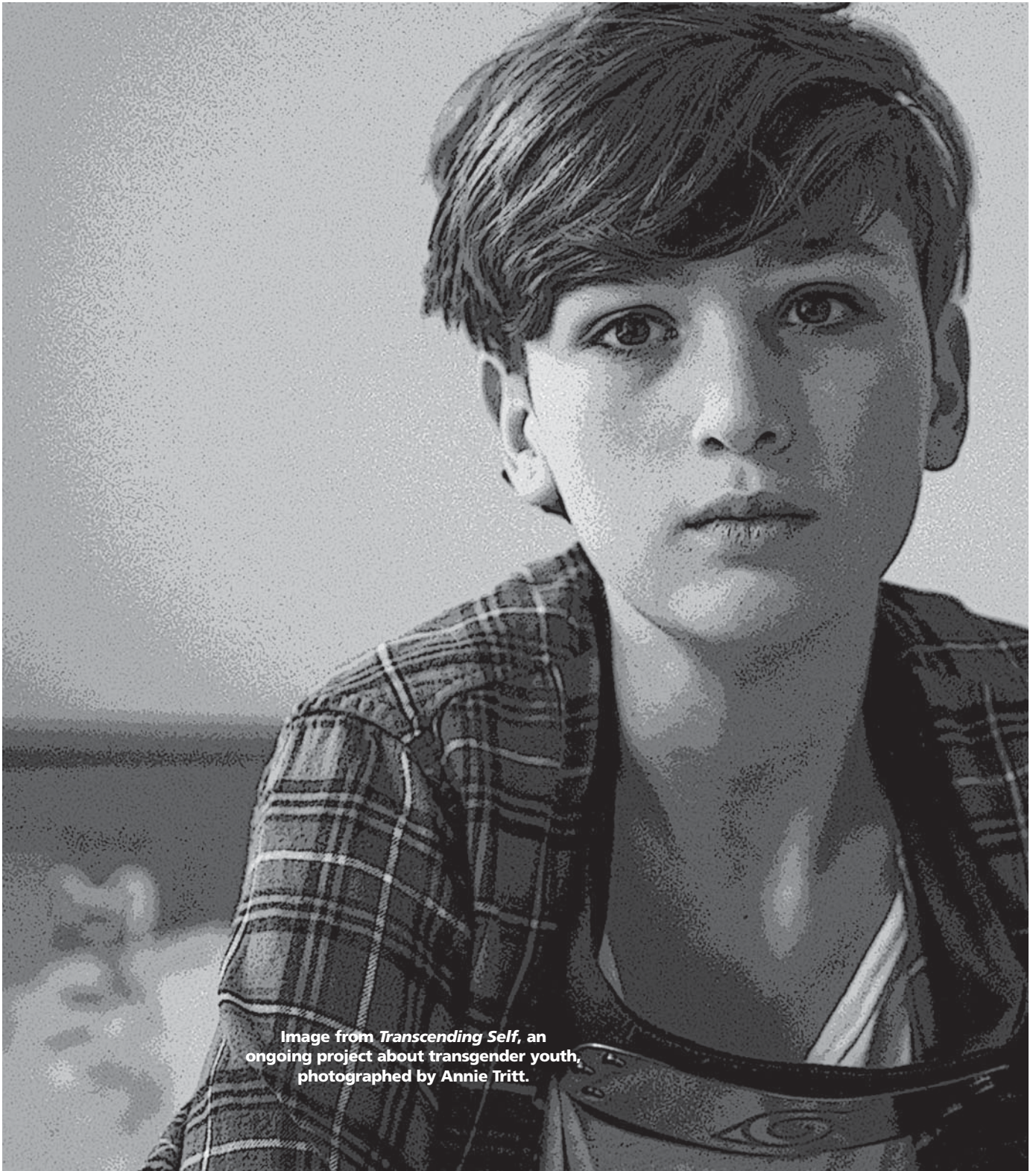


Image from *Transcending Self*, an ongoing project about transgender youth, photographed by Annie Tritt.



# The Story of SB 1146 | BY HALLIE ANDERSON

**SB 1146 is, or rather, was a bill intended to extend non-discriminatory requirements to religious institutions.**

I headed into the California State Capitol in late June of 2016, heels clicking and eyes scanning the long hallways for directions. After talking with a friendly sergeant who, of course, knew that I was lost, I found my way up to the gallery where I'd have a bird's-eye view of the session that morning.

"UPON ADJOURNMENT OF SESSION." That's when the hearing would be, according to the State Senate website. All I had to do was wait through the general session and then I'd be on my way to what I really drove to Sacramento for—the hearing on SB 1146.

To explain, SB 1146 is, or rather, was a bill intended to extend non-discriminatory requirements to religious institutions. This meant that private colleges and universities in California, including Adventist campuses, would no longer be able to discriminate against LGBT students, if the students attending the institutions received funding from the state, such as Cal Grants.

It also stated that a student "who is denied equal rights or opportunities on the basis of gen-

der identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation by a postsecondary educational institution that claims the Title IX exemption may seek appropriate remedies through civil action for violations of the Equity in Higher Education Act."

With complicated language and worrisome implications, the bill received criticism. By threatening to pull state funding, it could be



[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/05/Exterior\\_View\\_of\\_the\\_California\\_State\\_Capitol\\_Building\\_in\\_Sacramento,\\_CA\\_1900-1920\\_\(CH5-5654\).JPG](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/05/Exterior_View_of_the_California_State_Capitol_Building_in_Sacramento,_CA_1900-1920_(CH5-5654).JPG)

assumed that some private institutions would not enroll students who had Cal Grants in order to avoid messy lawsuits. This would of course defeat the purpose of the bill and only make matters worse for students from low-income families who rely on state support. The bill took different forms throughout the year, amended time and time again. When I learned about the bill in June, it had been amended but still had the same intentions. One change to the bill stated, “the changes made by the bill shall not be construed to affect the operation of the Cal Grant Program and other provisions of law that prohibit discrimination on the basis of certain characteristics, or to prohibit students from seeking civil remedies, as specified.”

An Assembly Judiciary hearing was scheduled June 30 to discuss the bill, one of the many stops a bill makes as it goes through the legislative process.

At this particular hearing, Senator Ricardo Lara, author of the bill and chair of the Appropriations Committee, would present SB 1146 to a panel of committee members. During this hearing, several reasons for opposing and supporting the bill would be discussed.

As I sat in the front row in the small room where the hearing was held, I was on the lookout for any Seventh-day Adventists who might also be in the room. Eventually the floor was opened up for people to come forward and state their name, affiliation, and whether or not they supported or opposed the bill. These people would not be voting, as votes are reserved for committee members only. This portion of the hearing is simply to allow public opinion to be heard. Several people formed a line, announcing that they opposed the bill, and nearly all were proudly from Biola University in Southern California or William Jessup University in Northern California. Parents, students, teachers, and alumni came forward, one by one, to declare that they did not support the bill.

To my surprise, not one official representative from La Sierra University (LSU), Loma Linda University (LLU) or Pacific Union College

(PUC) came forward. One elderly gentleman did go up to the mike and said his daughter went to PUC over twenty years ago as a nursing student, and that he opposed the bill—but that was it.

No California Adventist pastors. No presidents, vice presidents, or stand-in representatives of Californian Adventist colleges. No students attending Adventist colleges in California. Adventists simply were not present.

After the hearing, the committee members voted 7–2 in favor of the bill in spite of all the opposing testimony. The only votes against or abstentions were made by members wanting more specific wording in the bill, because the implications were still far-reaching and unclear. Everyone quickly dispersed and it was like we hadn’t all just sat through an hour of disputes and debate. I stood and shook the hands of a few trailing senators and assemblymen, nodding my head as I wished I had paid more attention in my high school government class when they talked about the next steps for the bill.

It was pointed out to me that morning that our California lawmakers would be on recess for the month of July. This meant that the bill wouldn’t move along to the next stop, the Appropriations Committee portion of the hearings, until August. All that my intern ears heard was that there wouldn’t be much talk about the bill for approximately four weeks—I couldn’t have been more wrong.

“Your help needed, now more than ever! SB 1146 is a frequently amended piece of legislation that is wreaking havoc with the rights of religious colleges and universities to freely practice their faith.”

Alarm bells were ringing. This is an excerpt from one of several information pamphlets sent out in droves to Adventist churches in California, my home church in Grass Valley being no exception. I had seen these flyers before, branded unmistakably by the Church State Council, the Pacific Union’s religious liberty ministry, headed by Alan Reinach. These small sheets of paper had been circulating for weeks, filling church mailboxes and welding together email chains

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throughout California.

As the latest installment from Church State Council made its way into my hands, I was perplexed. How could one group of Adventists be so seemingly up-to-date and outspoken on the progress of the bill, while I had heard virtually nothing from any of the three Adventist colleges and universities in California?

To learn the answer to that question, I emailed Heather Knight, president of PUC. I was told Dr. Knight had planned to attend the same June hearing that I went to as a representative of the three California Adventist institutions, but when the date of the hearing was postponed by two days she was unable to rearrange her schedule. After I didn't hear from her for nearly a week, I emailed again. She responded in just over an hour, apologizing and saying that she was on vacation and "would rather not make any public comment in regard to SB 1146 at this time." I offered an invitation to respond upon her return to Angwin but didn't hear back.

From there I continued to look for answers far and wide. I emailed Gordon Bietz, the newly appointed associate director of the North American Division Education Department. As a former Adventist university president, Dr. Bietz would know all about university policy and would be able to shed some light on whether the North American Division was responding to the bill. I also asked how he thought the bill would impact Adventist education if it were to pass and whether or not he knew if Adventist campuses in California had taken a stand on the bill. He replied that he did not have enough information on the bill to respond.

Whether it was because I attached my name to the word "intern" or because the topic was too touchy, this pattern of no response and hesitancy to comment was a common theme in my inbox the month of July. Similar exchanges unfolded after reaching out to La Sierra's president and even Alan Reinach himself.

Reinach did respond initially when I had asked him whether or not he had been in touch

with the Adventist campuses in California. I wanted to know if what he was sending out in those flyers and emails was reflective of what the campuses wanted to convey. I wanted to know what conversations, if any, had been exchanged between Church State Council and Adventist institutions in California. The colleges certainly weren't responding to me, so perhaps they had been in contact with the one doing all the relaying of information. Reinach responded in a timely manner, saying he was not authorized to speak for the colleges and suggested that I speak to the colleges themselves. Unfortunately, I had spent the last month trying to do exactly that.

By this time, August was approaching and I knew that meant I'd have another trip to the Capitol on my calendar.

As I approached the large Appropriations Committee hearing room, I tucked my notebook under my arm and found a seat near the front. People slowly trickled in and the meeting began. There were countless bills on the agenda for presentation that day, and one by one, senators approached the front to discuss the bills they had authored. Several senators waived presentation on bills as there were simply too many to cover that day and many bills were still being tweaked and tailored.

I patiently waited for Senator Lara to come forward with his handful of bills, my pen ready to jot down notes on SB 1146. Sure enough, the senator came quickly to the front, in a hurry and running behind schedule. As he began presenting his bills, he mentioned that he would be waiving presentation on several. Seeing as how my summer of chasing this piece of legislation had gone thus far, I should have seen it coming. Presentation was waived on SB 1146.

The senator finished presenting on the bills he did choose to discuss and then promptly left the room. I sat in my seat, trapped in the middle of my row as I realized what had just happened. There would be nothing on SB 1146 today or any time soon. With no reason to stay and listen to the rest of the line-up, I left the room in search of the senator or someone who could tell



me where I should go from there.

"The bill will sit in the suspense file now," the Chief Clerk, Parliamentarian of the Assembly, patiently explained to me. He suggested I continue to track the bill online and wait for any possible amendments to the bill to be made. The senator was nowhere to be found and his office staff told me to continue to reach out to him by email.

Defeated, I left the Capitol. I still had no story. During the following week, I worked on other news stories and checked for progress on the bill each afternoon. I also took this time to find out as much as I could about the author of the bill, Senator Lara.

Lara has represented the cities of Southeast Los Angeles County in the Thirty-third Senate District for the last four years. As a member of several committees and chair of the Appropriations Committee, he is no doubt an influential member of California's government system. He attended San Diego State University where he earned his B.A. in Journalism and Spanish with a minor in Chicano Studies. Lara's accomplishments have been recognized on both local and national levels; President Obama even named him a "Champion of Change." Credentials aside, it is really Lara's personal life that makes his work with this bill most intriguing. His parents are Mexican immigrants, making him no stranger to the minority community. He states on his website that he "knows first-hand the challenges facing working families." He has a passion for education, authoring handfuls of bills designed to educate and empower immigrants in his home state. In addition to this, Lara is both Catholic and the first openly gay person of color to be elected to the California Senate.

With this background in mind, a deeper understanding is given to the senator's reasons for authoring such a bill. His sensitivity and connection to religion, minorities, and the LGBT community perhaps may also explain his reasoning for a surprising amendment about a week later.

On August 10, an email from Richard

Osborn, vice president of WASC and former PUC president, landed in my inbox. We had been in touch throughout the summer as I had also asked him his thoughts on the bill back in July. While he had no response on the bill, he had seen news here and there on SB 1146. His email this day was a link to an article by *The LA Times*.

The headline read, "State senator drops proposal that angered religious universities in California."

I quickly started researching. As it turned out, the bill had been waived for presentation at the Appropriations Committee because it was undergoing significant amendment, and this amendment changed everything.

A provision was dropped from the bill that would have allowed LGBT students to sue religious colleges and universities more easily on the basis of discrimination. Now the bill no longer seriously threatened private institutions' right to discriminate and instead simply stated that religious schools must disclose whether or not they have exemptions that allow them to discriminate against LGBT students.

The amendment was made after the senator was faced with increasingly intense opposition from several religious institutions. Schools like William Jessup University, Point Loma Nazarene University, and Azusa Pacific University had been busy during the month of July and joined forces to create the Association of Faith-Based Institutions. The association raised approximately \$350,000 in an effort to stop the bill. The opposition of many religious schools in California had not only become vocal, but noticeable.

Once revised, the bill gained the support of the previously angered Christian colleges, and moved quickly. A succinct final copy of the bill was enrolled September 2 with the August amendment in place.

Some painted a picture of victory for religious institutions and defeat for Lara. However, Lara stated, "The goal for me has always been to shed the light on the appalling and unaccept-

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able discrimination against LGBT students at these private religious institutions throughout California.” He continued, “I don’t want to just rush a bill that’s going to have unintended consequences so I want to take a break to really study this issue further.”

His reflection encapsulates both his personal understanding of the issue and his passion for equal rights. His August amendment changed the bill dramatically, but set something in place that he plans to revisit and reshape in the following year.

After the dust settled, I learned that our Adventist colleges had been paying closer attention than it appeared. All those declined responses and hesitant answers were not due to a disengaged approach. Rather than joining the efforts of mailers put together by the coalition of Christian colleges in the state, and rather than attaching themselves to the pamphlets from Church State Council, the Adventist colleges worked behind the scenes to influence changes in the wording of the bill. There is a stark contrast in the approaches. While mailers, which are referred to by people at the Capitol as hit pieces, can be effective and certainly make it clear where a party stands, they are one-way communication. The Adventist colleges sought dialog with their behind-the-scenes approach.

It’s not that our Adventist colleges supported the bill as it was originally written. Religious institutions all over the state saw the bill as hostile and intrusive, Adventist campuses included. Our schools knew that a bill like this would have a direct impact on campuses. However, PUC, LSU and LLU are not naïve—they know that they have LGBT students attending their schools. They know they have faculty members with LGBT children. They also know they have hundreds of students who rely on financial support from the state to attend private schools. LLU alone has 268 students receiving Cal Grants, and LSU and PUC have even more. This conversation about SB 1146 undoubtedly applies to Adventist campuses.

However, the Adventist colleges chose to not

get publicly involved in the issue or join forces with Christian colleges raising money and looking for lobbyists. Instead they left the lines of communication open with legislatures and worked together to reach agreements, laboring over the language of the bill as it was frequently amended. It was the Adventist campuses’ off-the-record approach that actually allowed them to be more involved. Their attitude was not removed, but rather closely coordinated.

The significant August amendment and new direction and plan for the bill brought rejoicing from the Church State Council. “We are happy to report that SB 1146 has been drastically amended,” read the opening line to another one of their pamphlets. It explained what the amendment meant to private institutions in California, assuring audiences that the bill was no longer a threat—at least for this year. The announcement closed with a line of warning: “For now our schools are safe but as Senator Lara has stated he will pursue other legislation next year so it is imperative that we as a church get organized and involved.”

While not lacking the recognizably dramatic language I’d followed all summer in these pamphlets, there was truth to what Alan Reinach was saying, and I had to agree with the announcement.

It absolutely is imperative that we as a church—as students, as congregations, as committees, as councils and as colleges—get organized and involved in issues of justice and equality for all. ■

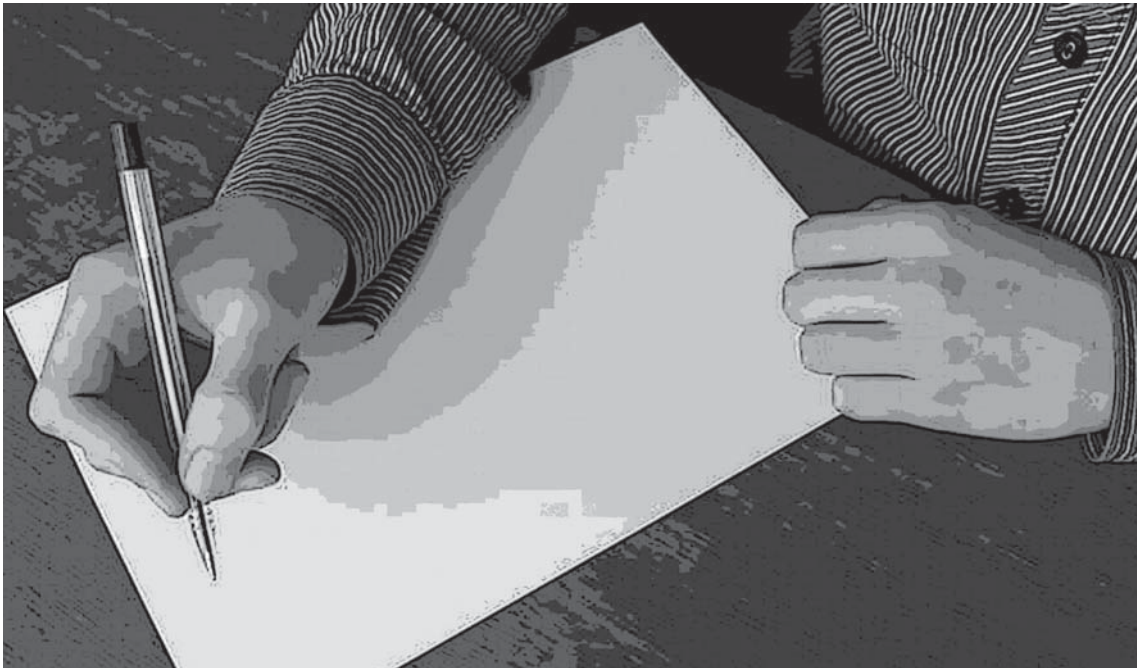
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**Hallie Anderson** is a graduating senior at Walla Walla University where she studies journalism and public relations. She considers herself fortunate to have spent her summer with *Spectrum*, gaining valuable writing experience as an intern.



# An Open Letter to Any Parent of an LGBT+ Child

BY ELDER O. KRIS AND DEBBIE WIDMER



We have a  
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## Dear Parent of an LGBT+ child,

Recently and ongoingly, (Kris is a preacher and poet; so occasionally he forges new words) transgender people have been in the news. The world and national news, as well as the internal news that Adventists hear through their social media and other communication channels, have seen a steady stream of stories about transitioning people, bathroom laws, and murders or suicides of transgender men and women.

Transgender people have been in our personal news lately too—at least for the past four-and-a-half years.

We have been asked to share our experience as parents of a MTF (that's male-to-female for those who are not aware of transgender abbreviation lingo) transgender daughter.

So, in this open letter, we write/speak to any parent of a LGBT+ child (of any age), sharing with you a few of our major *decisions* and *learnings* since our child came out to us. We have a heaven-sent burden to see Christian families continue to be personable and loving units, to maintain and even strengthen the bonds of familial love, in spite of the sexuality or gender identification of their children.

You can still be a believer in God's ideal for human identities and relationships, and be a loving parent to your child (or anyone) that doesn't conform to that ideal.

Perhaps our testimony here will be helpful to you—parent to parent—as you love your children—who surely are also those for whom Christ died. We walk with you, along the path of unconditional parental love.



**We decided**

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**The fact is**

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### **We decided:**

1. We decided to listen. When our son came out to us, he asked us to listen to a ten-page letter he wrote and read to us sobbing. We listened, then held her close.
2. We decided to grieve. The fact is we had “lost” a son. We didn’t announce it in church and there was no funeral—but our son had “died.” Accepting this loss prepared the way for our acceptance of the new reality, so we could accept the daughter he told us she was.
3. We decided we had been placed in a “second closet” when she came out. At first we didn’t talk about “it.” To complicate matters, we are a pastoral family. Who should we talk to? How would we answer the question “How is your son?” Closets are protective, but they are dark and unhealthy places to live. So, we decided to open the door to our closet—swallow hard—and talk about “it” appropriately to others.
4. We decided to educate ourselves through reading. We searched the Internet for information. We read books. We read other people’s testimonies. We adopted an open mind on the topic and read to learn, not to confirm preconceived opinions or long-standing traditions.
5. We decided we are still a family. We decided God was calling us to live out the deepest depth of parental love. “Can a mother forget her nursing child . . . Yes they can.” Isaiah 49:15. Could we? Yes. Should we? No! We decided we would *never* emotionally or physically abandon the person that carries our genes—regardless of her gender identity or presentation; regardless of her name, clothing, hair color, piercings, or tattoos. She’s stuck with us. We’re her parents. We’re stuck with her. She is our child.
6. We decided to stay in family fellowship. This wasn’t a hard decision, but it had to be intentional. We continue to claim her as our flesh and blood—and we still want to do things together, now in adulthood. Her Master’s degree graduation happened six months after she came out. Of course, we were there. And there are holidays to enjoy, ball games to attend, dinners out together. Her sister sibling is getting married. She is included. Period.
7. We decided to continue to be parentally physically affectionate. The experts say a person needs twelve hugs a day. She probably isn’t getting that, given the fact that she’s single and transgender—so we are committed to hugging her in greeting and parting—and other times in between.
8. We decided to believe her story and experience. Rather than discounting her perspective on her thoughts about herself, we choose to take her word for it. We believe you, girl.
9. We decided to use feminine pronouns and her female name. (The name she settled on was actually suggested by her mother!) We did this out of respect for her as a person and also to communicate love and acceptance. To do otherwise; to insist on using his old name and calling him “he” may have resulted in pushing her away.
10. We decided to put ourselves in her place. What would we want from our family were we in her situation? We feel the Golden Rule applies here. We decided to model God’s grace—taught in The Prodigal Son (Luke 15). We choose to *not* give her what some felt she deserved (rejection)—but what she needed (inclusion).
11. We decided that we are not alone. So, we sought others for peer support and counseling. We heard from caring friends and family—some ahead and some behind us in a similar life journey. Out of these emails, conversations, and meals out, we found that we were “normal” in our feelings and thoughts. We found other Adventist parents who found the grace to love their children, too.
12. We decided to take a break from ministry. We took a sabbatical, and the time away from the daily grind of work gave us schedule space to deal with thoughts and emotions.
13. We decided to have a key heart-to-heart talk



with our children—individually alone and then together. This was a turning point in our family dynamics, and no one could do it but the two of us. We—mom and dad—did it together. It was transformative.

14. We decided to keep praying with and for her. God is not dead and the Divine is still at work—in our lives and her life. We lift her up in prayer daily, and when she leaves our presence, she joins us in a family prayer circle.
15. We decided to stop asking God to change her back into a him—and began asking God to change us. God has been answering those prayers.
16. We decided talking about our family was healthy. We talk about our own feelings and our daughter in appropriate ways with people we can trust. We have slowly moved from silence to advocacy for others in the LGBT community, offering love and care where we can.
17. We decided that we would stop blaming ourselves. We know it's not our fault as parents that our child has these thoughts about herself. We didn't cause this. The jury is still out on causative factors (a choice of nurture or a condition of nature?) so we have decided to blame the reality of humanity's fall instead.
18. We decided to get acquainted with her friends—other members of the LGBT community. This includes attending worships,

parties, and outings. Even a pizza night. You know—normal human kindness kinds of interactions.

### **We learned:**

1. We learned that acceptance was a harder road—but we were up for the challenge. We know we “can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.”
2. We learned we could find peace in a new normal.
3. We learned perfect families don't exist—“You have the perfect family, a boy and a girl, and the boy is older,” someone once said. In their patriarchal world, this may be a good thing, but it hardly matters. Our family is what it is—imperfect just like yours is—and we love each other.
4. We learned that our families of origin are more gracious than we thought they might be. After she came out to the rest of the extended family, we saw them offer continued love and grace to our child. We should have known that would be the case, for they have shown grace to us throughout our lives.
5. We learned we will never fully understand what our daughter is going through. We are cis-gendered. Our brains match our bodies. Hers does not. But we learned we could have empathy.
6. We learned that all people deserve love,

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respect and all people deserve to be at “God’s table,” and not under it. We should never equate people with “dogs.”—Matthew 15:27. Jesus welcomes all to His table and offers a feast of food, friendship, and faith to each one.

7. We learned that gender identity and expression is a painful experience for a person who is transgender. It isn’t something that they choose to be hip or cool. And we need not make their life more painful. In fact, the Christian would make their path smoother and their load lighter by living out the love found in 1 Corinthians 13 and taught in the Sermon on the Mount. We choose to practice this basic Christian ideal.
8. We learned personality is not gender related. She is the same as he was. She is just as creative, messy, and funny as he ever was. She is computer savvy and still a passionate baseball fan—just like he was.
9. We learned that the brain is still the great mystery of the human body. A mass of grey, gelatinous tissue; it controls the whole of the body. It is the holy of holy of the human, if you will. And *all* aspects of brain function, chemistry and its final output in thought and feeling is still a great mystery.
10. We learned to interpret the traditional homosexual Bible passages through the interpretive lens of the ministry of the grace of Jesus. The same Jesus who loved tax collectors, women, lepers, and the foreigner would also love the LGBT community today. By following Jesus’ example in this, we realize that we will likely be criticized the same way He was. “Why do you eat with publicans and sinners?” To that question, we will give Jesus’ answer.
11. We learned to find comfort in Bible verses not usually quoted in discussions of the intersection of faith and the LGBTIAQ community.
  - a. Luke 10:26 – When asked for a list of things or one thing to do for eternal life, Jesus asked a question back. “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?” That is a key question. “How do you read it (the Bible)?”
  - b. Romans 14:5 – “Each person should be fully convinced in their own minds.” Since humanity is a glorious mix of races, cultures, perspectives, genders, etc.—there is bound to be differences of conclusions. And every person is given the freedom to think and act for themselves.
  - c. Romans 14:15 – “Do not, for the sake of your food destroy and ruin someone for whom Christ died.” We could insert any topic in the place of food. Do not for the sake of \_\_\_\_\_ destroy someone for whom Christ died. Do not for the sake of your views on sexuality or gender destroy someone for whom



Christ died! In the kingdom of grace, a person is more important than a policy, a proposition, or even a principle.

d. Matthew 19:12 – Jesus’ mention of three types/causes of eunuch-hood deserves consideration and study. Born that way, made themselves that way, or made that way by others. Certainly people born with any difference—physical, emotional, mental, etc.—receive Jesus’ accommodation in the kingdom.

e. While Deuteronomy 23:1 says that the sexually injured/altere (eunuchs) were once prohibited from the entering the presence of the Lord, Isaiah 56:1–6 seems to reverse this ban! And a Eunuch was baptized in Acts 8. It seems God does change after all, allowing those who find themselves non-ideal into the ideal embrace of His love.

12. We learned that love is a choice. And we choose love. Love is drawing our daughter close, rather than pushing her away. Love is including, not excluding. Shunning is not an option for us.

13. We learned that if the family dog, Lady, could treat her the same as always—with a friendly tail wag and an eager tongue—we could follow Lady’s example, minus the wagging and licking.

14. We learned two wonderful phrases of healing, encouragement, and hope:

*“There are some things that only God knows... and They (the Trinity) are not telling.”* Life is mysterious and there many things we don’t understand. God’s ways are not our ways and our thoughts are not God’s thoughts. God’s ways are beyond finding out. Some things are best left with God.

*“We are not in Eden anymore and we are not in Heaven yet.”* We are here: outside one perfect garden, and not yet in the next perfect garden. We are trapped here—on a flawed, sin filled earth, of which we are a part. We’re all in this

together—so sinner, be kind and gentle and neighborly to your neighbor, the sinner.

And we’ll close with one additional decision: We decided to courageously use our names. Having written before with pseudonyms, this piece is signed with who we are.

We both come from families that have been part of the Adventist Church for several generations; there are accountants, teachers, pastors, chaplains, doctors, nurses, and professors in our family tree that have served God in this church for entire careers. Others, whose jobs weren’t and aren’t in denominational employ, have served this church in numerous volunteer officer roles as well. We are Adventists by faith and fellowship. And, we are a family that has LGBT members.

Our limb of the family tree includes a gay graft and a lesbian leaf and a couple of transgender twigs. (Kris, the poet, strikes here with alliteration.) And that is just what is known at this time.

We understand that the only way to end the culture of shame in the Adventist Church is to speak out and up for the marginalized members of our church.

So we say, “Love your gay and lesbian children. Love your bisexual kids. Love your transgender kids. Love your asexual kids. Love your intersex children. Love your queer child. And if you don’t have one of your own, love someone else’s. For surely, they are among us.”

That’s our story. We love our daughters. Your results may vary.

Sincerely,  
Elder O. Kris and Mrs. Debbie Widmer

**Kris and Debbie Widmer**, shown here with their daughter,



**Teagan**, have served in nursing ministry for 20 years, pastoral ministry for 35, and parental ministry for 28 years. They live, love, laugh, and love in California.

**The same  
Jesus who loved  
tax collectors,  
women, lepers,  
and the  
foreigner would  
also love the  
LGBT community  
today.**

Letters → continued from page 6

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

**Editorial Note:** Letters to the editor are welcome, and should be sent to [editor@spectrummagazine.org](mailto:editor@spectrummagazine.org). All letters are subject to editing to fit space.

...as a pastor,  
I have been  
challenged by  
the conflict  
between church  
policy and  
the Bible.

—Lonnie Wibberding

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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. ■

**Gary Patterson** has served the church for over 50 years as a pastor, evangelist, youth leader, and administrator. His ministry included two university churches, president of two conferences, North American Division administration, and



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.

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P.O. Box 619047 • Roseville, CA 95661-9047

tel: (916) 774-1080 fax: (916) 791-4938



## Thirsty Woman at the Well

BY BRUCE JOHANSON



A cold drink for a stranger sitting near by  
she poured from her jar at the village well.  
Thirsty she had come at the high noon hour  
safe from the glower of town-women scorn.  
She was after all a seven-man woman  
with a hole in her soul that the years had worn.  
Then he opened his heart,  
poured out water sweet and clear,  
drowned her fear, her guilt washed away.  
She was the thirsty woman who drew from his well,  
free at last from her seven-man hell.

---

**Bruce Johanson** was born in India to Adventist missionary parents. After graduating from the Adventist Seminary at Andrews University, he moved to Puna, India, where he taught at Spicer College, before going to the University of Uppsala in Sweden where he earned his doctorate in New Testament studies. He then taught in the School of Theology at Walla Walla University until his retirement. Now he devotes himself to research, writing poetry, and bird photography.