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## Special Issue: The Adventist Unity Conference

# UNITY 2017

## Editorial: Unions Unite for Unity | BY BONNIE DWYER

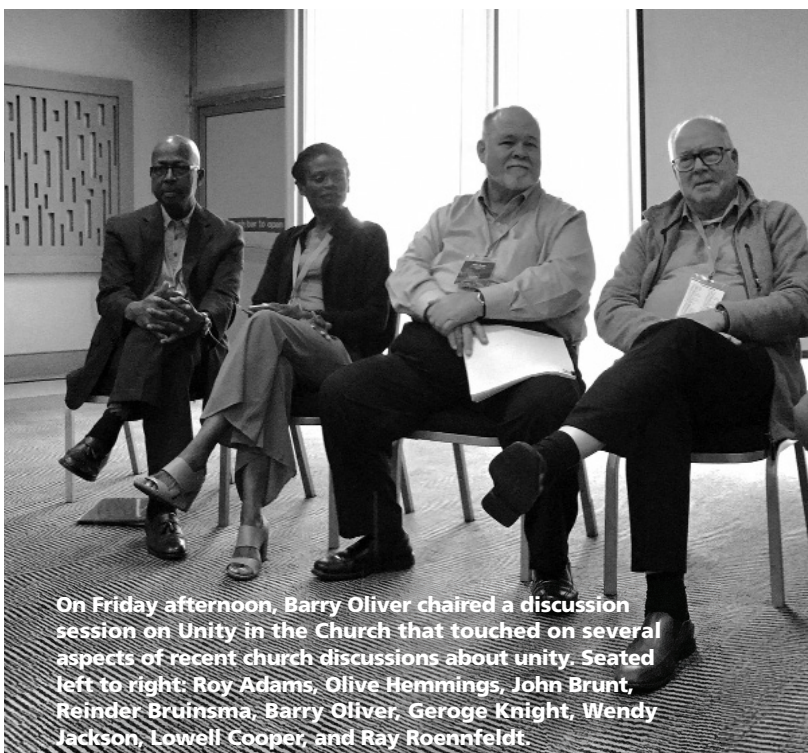
When Adventist leaders from ten union conferences in four world divisions called a meeting to discuss unity, they did so in the spirit of the Sabbath Conferences of the 1840s. Enthused by God's spirit, they suggested coming together to explore the important subjects of church structure and authority, unity, and liberty of conscience. They chose the United Kingdom as a central meeting place, and set the event for 15–17 June, at the Crowne Plaza, Heathrow, London.

As news about the conference spread, there were scholars who enthusiastically volunteered to speak at the meeting only to change their mind after phone calls from General Conference leaders questioned the legitimacy of the event, given that it had not gone through normal channels of approval for the worldwide church calendar. Without that approval, official church media also shied away.

At *Spectrum*, we saw the outline of the program and realized that the papers to be presented would be of interest to our readers, so we volunteered to publish the material from the conference in written form. The conference organizers considered our proposal and accepted it. Thus, this double issue of *Spectrum* contains all the papers that were presented in London, plus a bonus peer-reviewed historical article about church attitudes toward women's ordination in the 1930's, when church leaders decided they wanted to be the most "fundamental of the fundamentalists."

As the event in London unfolded, it was intriguing to me that, despite the political situation which prompted the gathering, church politics were not the focus of the conversation. While the speakers did not shy away from the current situation, they addressed the biblical and historical assignments that they had been given. Round-table conversations after each of the presentations stayed on those topics, too.

It was time for such discussions that motivated the initial calling for the conference. Brad Kemp, the president



On Friday afternoon, Barry Oliver chaired a discussion session on Unity in the Church that touched on several aspects of recent church discussions about unity. Seated left to right: Roy Adams, Olive Hemmings, John Brunt, Reinder Bruinsma, Barry Oliver, Geroge Knight, Wendy Jackson, Lowell Cooper, and Ray Roennfeldt.

of the New Zealand Union Conference and chair of the London organizing committee, noted at the opening of the session the limited time for discussion of agenda items at the Annual Council meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee. While all the union conference presidents are members of that committee, it is the division officers and General Conference personnel who extensively review and prepare the Annual Council items. By the time the union conference personnel arrive, the expectation is often for them to just quickly ratify what the divisions recommend. When a few hours are set aside for a controversial issue, individuals are limited to comments of two minutes, and then a vote is taken. Union and conference level personnel often leave the meetings feeling that their viewpoints have not been adequately heard or considered.

You could feel the hunger for conversation in the room in London. You could hear it in the animated presentations that made even church policy dynamic and interesting. At the round tables there was great interest in views from other parts of the world. The significance of the London Unity Conference thus grew out of the original presentations and conversations.

One attendee commented to me that it was important

to note what the meeting was not, because that is what he found himself telling friends. It was not a political discussion. It was not a review of the General Conference Secretariat document “A Study of Church Governance and Unity” that set in motion the unusual events of Annual Council 2016. It was not a new set of papers on Women’s Ordination.

It was a biblical, historical examination of church authority, structure, unity, and liberty of conscience. A master class on those topics, really. An unforgettable experience. An important meeting in the history of Adventism, much like the 1919 Bible Conference. A privilege to attend.

Talking with Olive Hemmings after her masterful presentation on liberty and justice, I expressed my appreciation for her work. “You are welcome,” she said, “It was a labor of love.”

That love permeated the meeting. It made us all feel, as Roy Adams suggested, that as a church we are really not as separated on issues as it might seem. There is love for one another, love that is the beginning of unity. ■

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Bonnie Dwyer is editor of *Spectrum* magazine.



DENNIS MEER



# MORNING



## Deliverance | BY GARY PATTERSON

It would seem to be an obvious answer. If we are asked how the Ten Commandments begin we quote the first line as “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”<sup>1</sup> And having done so, and thought so for many years, we fail to realize that this answer starts us down the wrong road. That is not how the Ten begin.

But before we get into that, let’s look at a little background. The children of Israel are at the foot of Mt Sinai, having just left Egypt, after having lived there for over 200 years under its polytheistic influence. True, they were the chosen people, the family of promise to Abraham and the descendants of Jacob

whose name was changed to Israel. But after more than two centuries and multiple generations separating them from the patriarchs, and removal from the promised land, there was little memory of those days and promises.

Complicating the matter even further, they had become slaves of the Egyptians, forced to hard labor and under an edict that all newborn male children were to be drowned in the Nile River. Now Moses, who had been adopted into the Royal Family of Egypt, had fled for his life under threat and had been gone for forty years, living in Midian, serving as a shepherd of the flocks of his father-in-law.



# DEVOTIONS

It is in this setting that God called to him from a brightly glowing bush in the desert, introducing himself with the words, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”<sup>2</sup> Thinking as we do in retrospect, it is hard to comprehend that Moses—the author credited with writing the first five books of the Bible—knew so little about the God of the Patriarchs. So this is where deliverance begins as God says,

*I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey. . . . And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.<sup>3</sup>*

After a bit of protest, Moses asks a question that seems strange to us. “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”<sup>4</sup> To us who live in a monotheistic—or even atheistic society—that seems to be an odd question. After all, his name is God isn’t it? Well, no. God is a title, not a name. And in the religion of Egypt, under which influence they had been living for generations, there were hundreds of gods with different names and often different interests which were in conflict with one another.

It is the nature of polytheistic religion that attempting to appease them all is a constant and impossible task. It is with this in mind that Moses asks the odd question, “What is your name?” And God replied, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”<sup>5</sup> The one and only. The existent one. The eternal. He has come to deliver Israel from their captors in Egypt. And indeed,

slavery was one of the big issues being addressed. But even more important than this was deliverance from the host of oppressive and crazy gods of the Egyptians.

The setting is that Israel is now free in the wilderness of Sinai. But they have no functional government. They have no crops. They have no income. They have no structure to their society. And they have no concept of a God who loves and cares for them. It is in this setting that we are now ready to ask the question, “How do the Ten Commandments begin?” And the answer is found in Exodus 20, verse 2, not in verse 3 which we usually think of as the start:

*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.<sup>6</sup>*

OK. So what difference does that start make? Actually, all the difference in where we go from here. If we begin with just the words, “You shall have no other gods before me,” we make him out to be the biggest demanding ego in the universe who you had better obey—or else. But if we begin with “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt” you have an entirely different view based on deliverance: deliverance not just from slavery, but from all those crazy and oppressive gods they had learned to fear in Egypt.

Granted, we live in an entirely different setting today, and the Ten Commandments frequently come in for a bum rap. In our secular society, at best, some view them as archaic, irrelevant, out of date, and an attempt to stand in the way of our good times and fun. And those who still hold them in respect have often contributed to the poor reputation of the Ten by portraying them as a measuring stick, or threat, or as a means of salvation. But God did not give us the Ten to save us from hell fire. He gave us Jesus for that. Rather, he gave us the Ten to keep us from living in our own man-made hell while destroying ourselves and one another in this earthly life.

While it is the grace of Christ that saves us for eternity, it is the Ten that serves as a second grace—a deliverance from our bent to self-destruction. For a band of escaped slaves, the Ten provided protection they had not known in the society where they had lived. Likewise, for us, the Ten saves us from corruption in society today.

It helps me to comprehend all this when I see the commandments as a package, bound together as a unit both from within and without. This “Ten Package” begins, not with the first commandment, but rather with the fifth—the bridge connection between the two sections of the Ten, or the foundation upon which the package is based. It is the family bond that holds it all together, even to the point that the length of life and homeland security are affected by it. It is the basis of society, the seat of learning, the center of worship.

Once having established this base, we see four ascending levels of rights that the Ten provide. The first is the right to existence reflected in the first and sixth commandments. Deliverance from killing as proscribed in the sixth clearly establishes the right to human existence. But like it, the first commandment has double impact. Not only does it establish the right of God as the one and only; at the same time, it delivers the people from the untenable existence of dealing with multiple gods who need to be appeased. Both the existence of God and of mankind are assured by this level of the Ten Package.

The second and seventh commandments address the right of purity in relationships. The term adultery comes into play in both, but it is actually a word derived from chemistry. It is defined as “corrupting, debasing, or making impure a substance by the addition of foreign or inferior material.” And in both our relationship with God and our relationship in marriage, the right to purity is established, and we are delivered from corrupt influences. When Israel wanders and strays from pure worship, God calls them an adulterous nation, employing the very language of the seventh commandment.

The third and eighth commandments deal with the right to possessions. “You shall not steal” is rather straight forward and easily understandable. Don’t take that which is not rightfully yours. But what can you take from God? There it is: “You shall not take the name of God in vain.” The reputation of God is tied to those who claim to be his people. Our frequent interpretation of this commandment is in the context of foul language. And even though this is clearly included, there is so much more. Stealing God’s good name by our crude, disrespectful, and wicked behavior is unacceptable. Even in our religious practice—or perhaps particularly in this way—when

we misrepresent him, we are guilty of destroying his good name and turning others from him.

While the first three levels of the Ten reflect relationships with rather tangible things such as existence, purity, and possessions, the fourth level deals with symbolic relationships—the Sabbath and truthfulness. How so, you might ask? Look at the similarity of these two observations, the first from the prophet Ezekiel and the second from the Gospel of John:

*I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them.<sup>7</sup>*

*I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.<sup>8</sup>*

It is in commitment to truth and to rest in God’s grace—think Sabbath—that we are sanctified. While the first three levels of the Ten address more physical objects and behaviors, the fourth level provides our right to purity on the inside through sanctification, not of ourselves, but as a gift of grace.

So there you have it. The Ten package bound together through the family unit as its base and connection to the four levels of deliverance. I guess that about wraps it up. No! you say. There is one more? Oh yes, the tenth commandment. But it is kind of a throwaway commandment anyway, isn’t it? “You shall not covet,” and then a rather lengthy list of the things you are not to covet. But after all, who is going to know if you violate this one. It all takes place in your own head.

Yet that is just the point. This is the commandment that actually does wrap it all up. It is the shield which surrounds the other nine. Before we would violate any of the others, we first covet that which is not rightfully ours. Putting it in contemporary language, perhaps we could translate it as the phrase “Don’t even think about it.” And that is a good notion. Otherwise, even if we did not actually violate one of the other nine, living in a constant state of longing for that which is not ours not only wears us down inside, but it also diminishes the value of what we rightfully possess so that we

fail to enjoy our blessings.

Ellen White makes an insightful observation about the Ten in these words:

*The ten commandments, Thou shalt, and thou shalt not, are ten promises, assured to us if we render obedience to the law governing the universe. "if you love me, keep my commandments." Here is the sum and substance of the law of God. The ten holy precepts spoken by Christ upon Sinai's mount were the revelation of the character of God, and made known to the world the fact that He had jurisdiction over the whole human heritage. That law of ten precepts of the greatest love that can be presented to man is the voice of God from heaven speaking to the soul in promise. "This do, and you will not come under the dominion and control of Satan." There is not a negative in that law, although it may appear thus. It is DO, and Live. The Lord has given His holy commandments to be a wall of protection around His created beings.<sup>9</sup>*

Properly understanding the Ten requires that we start down the correct path at the outset. Like on any journey, if we choose the wrong path, we will get to the wrong destination. Deliverance is the road to be chosen. And the destination is the Kingdom of God. After all, it was Jesus who prayed, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

## Happy Sabbath | BY GARY PATTERSON

It is unfortunate that we have largely lost the original meaning of the word Sabbath. While it is true that we understand it actually means rest, yet both in ancient Israel and for us as well, it becomes the name of a day, rather than a description of one's behavior. Perhaps if we translated the fourth commandment to read, "Remember the rest day and set it apart from the other six days in which you do your usual things," we would break free from all the excess baggage we carry with the word Sabbath.

It is in recent years that I have heard the simple greeting "Happy Sabbath" being used in our churches. It is difficult to put an exact time frame on it, but I believe I heard it first as "Feliz Sabado" in Hispanic congregations around the early 1990s. And then it seemed to spread rapidly into North

## Responsive Reading

LEADER:

**Lead me Lord to know your law, not as a code of boasted worth;**

CONGREGATION:

*But as a shield of righteousness, a gift of God in my new birth.*

LEADER:

**Lead me Lord, lead me Lord, lead me by Your law.**

CONGREGATION:

*Lead me by Your gentle hand, close to You to draw.*

## References

1. Exodus 20:3, KJV.
2. Exodus 3:6, NIV.
3. Exodus 3:7–9, NIV.
4. Exodus 3:13, NIV.
5. Exodus 3:14, NIV.
6. Exodus 20:, NIV.
7. Ezekiel 20:11–12, KJV.
8. John 17:14–17, KJV.
9. 1BC, 1105

American English-speaking churches as well as "Happy Sabbath." But maybe it goes way beyond that, even to Hebrew heritage in the phrase "Sabbat Shalom." Regardless of its origin, it is a concept which stands in contrast to much of the way we have thought about and related to the Sabbath—think rest day—in the past.

Due in part to a change in our understanding of the word "pleasure" since the days of the translation of the KJV, which states "not doing your own pleasure," we have come up with the idea that if anything is fun, it is forbidden on the Sabbath. What we fail to understand is that the Old English usage of the word was "choice," not "enjoyment" or "fun." The NIV helps us a bit in its presentation of the Sabbath promise given in Isaiah 58:13–14:



*If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.*

Here it is. The rest day is to be not only a change from the humdrum routine of the work-a-day world, it is to be what is called a “delight.” In it we are to find “joy” in serving and remembering the Lord. And while it is easy for us to deride and sneer at much of the baggage the Jews in Jesus’ day had attached to it—making it an unbearable burden—if we are honest, in many ways we have done the same thing.

In my early days, it was forbidden to ride a bicycle on Sabbath—too much fun. And although it was considered to be proper, and even wholesome, to go on a hike in the mountains, it was not OK to go swimming in one of the beautiful lakes you might come across. Who was it that decided these things, and on what basis? In my days of attending Auburn Adventist Academy in the mid-1950s, the hour bell rang across campus sixty minutes before sundown. You had better have taken your shower before that time, because shortly thereafter the shower doors were closed and locked to prevent any miscreant from violating the Sabbath by taking a shower—a concept that seems beyond strange in today’s world where a daily shower is often considered a regular part of morning hygiene in preparation for the day ahead.

Several years ago, I was invited to speak at the 100th anniversary celebration of a church established near Battle Creek, Michigan in the late 1800s. Those were the “good old days” we were celebrating, and as we searched the church records of those early believers, we found an interesting discussion regarding proper Sabbath keeping. The issue centered on whether it was a violation of the Sabbath to let the horses run while pulling the carriages on the way to church. Now Michigan has some very cold days in winter, and a running horse was known to be warmer than one merely walking. So, it was agreed that it would not be a violation to allow horses to run on very cold winter days. But on other warmer days it was not proper.

While this might well be a valid discussion in the context of animal kindness, to make it a Sabbath-keeping matter seems to stretch credulity. Yet this example of our bent to establish rigid behavioral rules for Sabbath observance seems to

reflect the same misguided attempts employed by the Sanhedrin in biblical times.

As much as I favor the idea of church community and corporate worship, it is significant to note that nothing in the fourth commandment refers to going to church on the Sabbath. Rather it is about a change of pace and activities in which we are regularly engaged during the week, thus giving us time for family and community to celebrate the creativity and salvation afforded us by a loving and delivering God. Such activity should lead to what Isaiah says about calling the Sabbath a delight.

How does that play out? Actually, quite differently in various locations, cultures, families, and ages. In a work environment calling for hard physical labor, lower impact activity may serve well as the “rest” called for on Sabbath. But for one whose work is desk oriented or mentally demanding, the Sabbath “rest” may call for outdoor activity that restores the body both physically and mentally.

During the summer of 1968, I was leading a group of thirty-seven young people from the northwestern United States on a three-week tour of Europe in connection with the World Youth Congress in Zurich. Our first Sabbath on tour took us to Denmark where we worshiped with the church on the campus of Skodsborg Hospital and school. It was a delightful experience and we were treated royally. But in the announcements at the end of the church service, the Principal of the school shocked all of our group as he invited us to a croquet tournament on the front lawn after lunch.

Coming as we did from an area where such game type activities were forbidden as Sabbath behavior, we were astonished. Who it is that decides these differing standards, I do not know. But it was a good lesson in avoiding a judgmental attitude as we observed a different culture and location behaving in a manner strange to us.

In the context of calling the Sabbath—read “rest day”—a delight, we need to take a serious look at how we are doing this, particularly with our children and young people. In an era when we frequently decry the loss of a new generation, rather than looking for what is wrong with them, perhaps we need to look at what we are doing or not doing that causes them to lose interest in the church and Sabbath. It is time to be done with the notion that if it is fun, it is forbidden. It is time for open discussion and exploration as to how we can follow the biblical instruction to call the rest day a delight and a joy. And then we need to set about diligently to make it happen in our homes and in our churches.

On a beautiful early spring day in 1980, I was serving as pastor of the Walla Walla University Church. We were engaged in a series of sermons based on the Seven Last Words of Christ on the cross. I had invited a guest speaker for the Sabbath of March 22, Dr. John Killinger, widely known author of many books on preaching and worship, who also had served as my major professor in the doctoral study program at Vanderbilt University. His topic was “The Voice of Human Need—I Thirst.” Well known in Protestant circles, his appointment with us attracted many pastors and members of other churches in the area and, following the worship service, the church hosted a dinner for Dr. Killinger and our many guests, allowing time for them to engage in personal dialog with him and with one another.

Later that afternoon, my wife and I took him on a tour of the Walla Walla Valley countryside. Productive semi-arid climate that it is, the fields were lush green in spring with miles upon miles of winter wheat fields. The orchards were in full bloom. The vineyards were showing the first sprouts with promise of sweet grapes. The famous Walla Walla Sweet summer onions were standing stately in their perfect rows. The asparagus was thrusting its boney fingers out of the ground, and the fresh, cool, dry air of spring blew through the open windows of the car as we drove along the country roads.

And as we did so, we passed by many students and members of the church out for a walk, or a bike ride. Some were pushing strollers with the children on board. Others were slow cruising even as we were doing. Recognizing who it was, they would wave and stop to talk, greeting one another with love and friendship and calling out “Hello Pastor. Thank you for the wonderful worship service today.” Given that this was not an unusual occurrence on a Sabbath afternoon, I did not think too much about it until the following day.

During his visit to the Valley, Dr. Killinger had also been invited to speak at the leading Protestant church in the city. The pastor had invited him, prior to the service, to address the governing board of the church, following which he entered into dialog with them regarding their interests and concerns. One of the members addressed the matter of how fellowship in the church could be enhanced, particularly in the context of attracting young people.

I was unprepared for what happened next. Dr. Killinger offered some suggestions as to how a church needs to move with the times and address the interests and concerns of its youth. But what he then said astonished me. He told of the beauty of our drive through the countryside the day before, and then

said, “Maybe you should ask Dr. Patterson about his Sabbath tradition. That seems to be the secret of reaching the community.” While I was pleased with this recognition of what the Sabbath can mean for us, I only wished that it were as true as he thought it was. “Happy Sabbath”? Would to God that we could make every Sabbath that kind of an appealing “Rest Day.”

In 2005, it was my privilege to serve as Interim Senior Pastor of the Southern Adventist University Church in Tennessee during their search for a new Senior Pastor. Lodging arrangements were made for us in University condo housing up on a hill just a block or two from the church. It was my custom to walk down to the church in the early morning prior to the first service at 8:30. It was on one of these fresh fall mornings that as I walked, the words of a new Sabbath hymn flooded my mind, reflecting the beauty of this rest day:

## Sabbath Morning

*May be sung to “Oasis” #460 in the SDA Hymnal*

When dawns the glorious morning of Sabbath reverie,  
The hand of the Creator reveals His love to me.  
The sunshine, and showers, refreshing earth and sea,  
Display in power, this Holy hour, creation’s memory.

Created in God’s image, His children long to be  
Restored again to goodness, to life and liberty.  
Through gracious forgiveness, He recreates in me,  
New life within, to save from sin, redemption full and free.

Restore these holy hours the joy of Sabbath rest;  
A refuge in the journey of life where sin has stressed.  
A type of eternal rest from sin and woe.  
With thankfulness, Your name we bless this boundless  
grace to know.

## Responsive Reading

LEADER:

**Lead me Lord to know your love, not selfishly in hoarding greed.**

CONGREGATION:

*Show me someone I can cheer, not just in word but generous deed.*

LEADER:

**Lead me Lord, lead me Lord, lead me in Your love.**

CONGREGATION:

*Lead me by Your gentle hand, to Your throne above.*

# Light in the Darkness | BY GARY PATTERSON

It seems clear at the outset that the Gospel of John sets about to establish a theme of Light vs. Darkness as he introduces the reader to his best friend—who just happens to be the God of the universe. Yes, yes, I know. We all are trained to say that Jesus is our best friend. This idea is celebrated even in our songs, such as the line in the old hymn, “He will hear you when you call, he will help you when you fall. O the best friend to have is Jesus.”

And lovely as that sentiment may be to us, this is not what we are talking about in the Gospel of John. He means “friend” in a very literal and personal way. His best friend was the real person he walked and talked with in a radical, physical presence, in real time and actual locations. But the zinger in it all was that this real, physical, on location, in real-time person, also just happened to be the God of the Universe. Wrap your mind around that one.

We are well acquainted with John’s prologue to the gospel:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.<sup>1</sup>*

Unfortunately, we tend at this point to cut away from the flow John is establishing and skip to verse 14, which talks about the Word being made flesh—which is fine if we are exploring the eternality of the Creator—but such a skip interrupts a theme that is being established which is crucial to what follows in the Gospel: an emphasis on light and darkness.

*In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.<sup>2</sup>*

So significant is this light and darkness theme, that the gospel refers to it twenty-four times, and it sets up a contrast that helps us understand what comes next—in the proper light—so to speak.

Clearly the Gospel of John sets about to introduce the reader to Jesus and declare him to be the Messiah. But as I looked at this proclamation in the first few chapters—delivered by various individuals and events—I began to wonder, when does Jesus first announce and claim that title himself? So, I set about reading the record of those early days of his ministry, searching for that first clear declaration from his own lips, stating that he actually was the Messiah.

The first event of this introduction in the Gospel, is Jesus’ encounter with John the Baptist:

*John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’ I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”<sup>3</sup>*

*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘a man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”<sup>4</sup>*

*Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.”<sup>5</sup>*

*The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!”<sup>6</sup>*

Now that is clear enough I would think. Yet in all this, Jesus does not make the claim of Messiahship. These two former disciples of John—now disciples of Jesus—accepted him as their new leader on the word of John the Baptist.

*Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah.”<sup>7</sup>*



Now we have three followers who are joined the next day by Philip and Nathaniel who declares, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”<sup>8</sup> That is all rather clear and potent stuff. But we still do not have the direct claim to Messiahship by Jesus that we are looking for.

It would seem that the next event, in the mind of a good publicist, would be the ideal time for such an announcement—at least Mary, his mother seemed to think so. It is the report of the first recorded miracle of Jesus, turning water into wine. And lest you think this was just a bottle or two, do the calculations. It was 150 gallons or about one half-ton of wine. But still no announcement.

With the Passover nearing, Jesus went to Jerusalem and found a corrupt market extravaganza raging on in the name of religion and worship.

*In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!”<sup>9</sup>*

Again, in the mind of a hired publicist, this would certainly seem to be a moment of broad recognition, but still no announcement.

*While he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.<sup>10</sup>*

Next, in chapter 3, comes the story of Nicodemus, which we are inclined to read in an indulgent light, given that in the end he does come to anoint the dead body of Jesus. But if we read the story accurately, it is not complimentary. And rather than start with chapter 3 as we usually do, we need to go back to the real introduction of the story. It reads thus:

*Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man. Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.<sup>11</sup>*

What is the implication here? What is it that Jesus knows about this man? And one other question—why did this man

come at night? Is this story falling into the “light/darkness” theme set up in the introduction?

But wait. There is more. In the following chapter, there is a woman who meets Jesus at Jacob’s well near Sychar at noon, in full sunlight. A man and a woman. Darkness and light. You might say these stories are as different as night and day. But let’s pursue these differences a little further. Nicodemus was famous as a member of the Jewish ruling council, a noted religious leader. The woman—whose name we do not know—was famous too, or maybe we should say infamous, living with a man who was not her husband and having had five husbands before. How is that for contrast.

Nicodemus speaks first with a compliment in that conversation, but at the well, Jesus opens the conversation with a request for a drink, to which the woman replies with a rather rude observation about a Jewish man speaking to a woman he does not know, who also happens to be a Samaritan. It is interesting to note how quickly both conversations shift—the first from positive to negative and the second from negative to positive.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that things must change saying, “Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”<sup>12</sup> We generally interpret this new-birth experience in the context of our own personal salvation and eternal life. But I think something else is going on here. Perhaps Jesus is telling this religious leader that without a new birth, without a new way of understanding the kingdom of God, he cannot see it when it is right in front of him. And despite containing one of the most famous texts in Scripture—John 3:16—the story ends poorly.

Nicodemus, rather than face the obvious meaning of Jesus’ words, quibbles with a foolish response. “How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born!”<sup>13</sup> Obviously, Nicodemus did not believe that, nor did he assume that Jesus believed it either. Rather, he sought to avoid facing the changes required for entering the kingdom of God that were being brought in by Jesus. The summary of this conversation brings us back to the light and darkness theme again. Imagine sneaking across town in the dark and then hearing these words:

*This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.<sup>14</sup>*

Meanwhile, back at the well, things are going in the opposite direction. Perceiving Jesus to be a prophet, the woman says, "I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."<sup>15</sup> And finally we find what we have been looking for, the declaration from Jesus' own lips, "I who speak to you am he."<sup>16</sup>

The woman leaves the water pot at the well and returns to the town she left only minutes earlier as the reputed sinner of Sychar. But in that amount of time, she has been changed into the ranking evangelist.

*Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."<sup>17</sup>*

So there you have it. Following the conversation with Nicodemus—nothing. Following the conversation at the well, the first congregation forms in Sychar as Jesus declares his Messiahship. Perhaps this—and one other declaration, the announcement of the resurrection, which we will come to in a minute—are the most important and dramatic announcements that Jesus makes in his entire ministry. And it is to a woman of the despised Samaritans that he entrusts the preaching of this great news.

Yet back in Jerusalem, the Jewish ruling council continues in their bent to establish and enforce the rules of religion. That is what authoritarian religious institutions are prone to do. Perhaps it is over the rules for Sabbath observance that they are shown to be at their most foolish extremes. It was at the pool of Bethesda where Jesus saw the tragic sight of human misery.

*Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" The invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.*

*The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law*

*forbids you to carry your mat." But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.*

*Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him."<sup>18</sup>*

It is institutional religious authoritarianism run amuck. Where did they come up with a rule that says it is unlawful to heal on the Sabbath? They couldn't do it, and neither could anyone else. But that was their rule, and they were determined to enforce it, no matter how foolish it was. And again, with the man born blind, we find the same bizarre accusation.

*The day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. Therefore, the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."<sup>19</sup>*

Seeing Jesus as a threat to their cozy little control club, they set about to destroy him. And it was on the preparation day for a high Passover Sabbath that the deed was accomplished. About three hours before the sun would go down, Jesus said, "It is finished."<sup>20</sup> With that, he bowed his head and died. So one problem for the Pharisees was solved in time for proper Sabbath observance. But there remained two others—the thieves were still alive.

And now comes the most bizarre requirement for keeping the Sabbath I can imagine. "Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down."<sup>21</sup> Somehow it had been determined by the authoritarian religious elite that it was not lawful to heal on the Sabbath. But it was mandatory to break people's legs in order to keep it properly. Surely this is the consummate example of religious authority run amuck.

But the story does not end there. It is in darkness again, early on Sunday morning that Mary of Magdala went to the tomb. Upon finding it empty, she ran to tell Simon and John that the stone had been removed and Jesus was no longer

there. Running back to the tomb as light is dawning, they find that it is true, he is not there. But:

*They still did not understand that Jesus had risen from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"*

*Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).*

*Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!"<sup>22</sup>*

So there it is again. Not only is the announcement of Messiahship given to a woman who becomes the ranking evangelist. But the announcement of the resurrection is given to a woman who is sent as the first apostle to proclaim the good news of salvation.

Thus it is also with us. We are all united in the service of the Master. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."<sup>23</sup>

## Responsive Reading

LEADER:

**Lead me Lord to know Your grace, not just received but spread abroad.**

CONGREGATION:

*Teach me that forgiveness shared, reflects from me the love of God.*

LEADER:

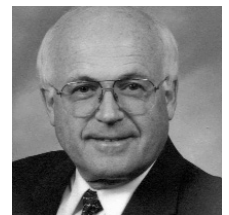
**Lead me Lord, lead me Lord, lead me through Your grace.**

CONGREGATION:

*Lead me by Your gentle hand, soon to see Your face.*

## References

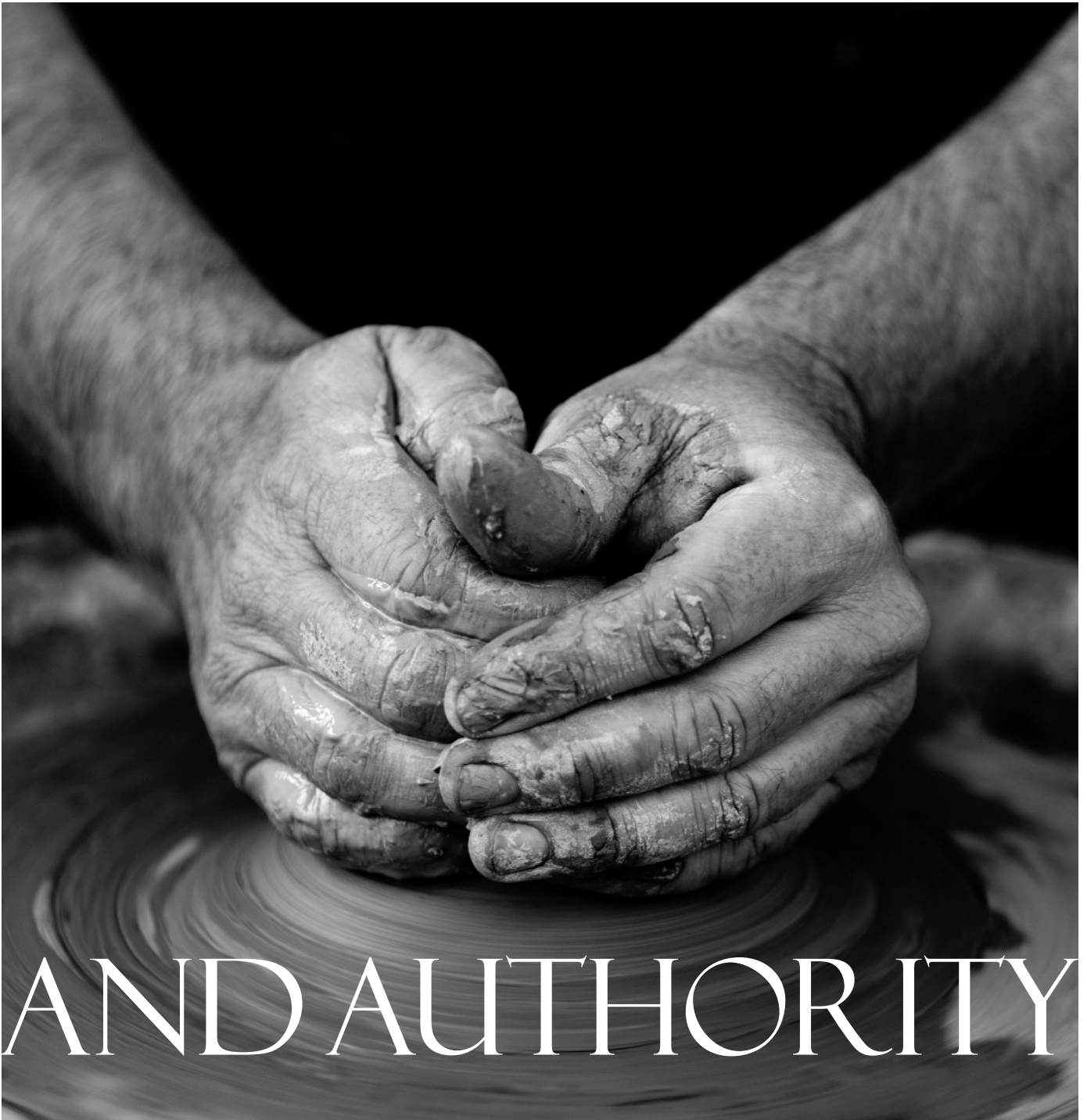
1. John 1:1–3, NIV.
2. John 1:4–12, NIV.
3. John 1:15,23&26, NIV.
4. John 1:29–30, NIV.
5. John 1:32–34, NIV.
6. John 1:36, NIV.
7. John 1:40, NIV.
8. John 1:49, NIV.
9. John 2:14–16, NIV.
10. John 2:23–25, NIV.
11. John 2:24–3:1, NIV.
12. John 3:3, NIV.
13. John 3:4, NIV.
14. John 4:19–21, NIV.
15. John 4:25, NIV.
16. John 4:26, NIV.
17. John 4:37–42, NIV.
18. John 5:3–15, NIV.
19. John 9:14–16, NIV.
20. John 19:30, NIV.
21. John 19:31, NIV.
22. John 20:9–18, NIV.
23. Galatians 3:28–29, NIV.



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.



# CHURCH STRUCTURE



# AND AUTHORITY

# Reorganization of Church Structure, 1901–03: Some Observations<sup>1</sup> | BY BARRY OLIVER

**DISCUSSED** | reorganization, development of mission, diversity and unity, centralization of power

## Introduction

It is the purpose of this paper to:

1. Briefly describe aspects of the denominational context and the organizational design of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863;
2. List and briefly discuss a number of factors which led to the reorganization of the Church in 1901–1903;
3. List the changes that reorganization brought to the organizational structures of the Church;
4. Locate mission as the primary impetus for reorganization;
5. Discuss the principles which, in 1901, undergirded the introduction of the union as an added layer of organizational structure; and
6. Distil from the historical data learnings which may be instructional for the contemporary Seventh-day Adventist Church.

## Perspective of the Paper

With respect to perspective, this paper should be read keeping in mind that:

1. The paper reflects an abiding sense of loyalty to and love for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The author, now retired, has served as an ordained pastor, evangelist, associate professor, administrator, and finally as president of the South Pacific Division and vice-president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists;
2. Care has been taken to ensure that all quotations reflect the context from which they are taken. Thorough referencing gives the reader opportunity to investigate the extended context;
3. The paper is written in a spirit of open enquiry and discussion; and
4. It is acknowledged that history is always contextual, as is the application of principle and practice in diverse contemporary contexts.

## Limitations

The paper assumes a working knowledge of Seventh-day Adventist organizational structure. There is no attempt to describe contemporary structure. There is limited discussion of the theological interplay between Alonzo T. Jones and those aligned with him in 1901, and Arthur G. Daniells and those aligned with him. The polemic between these two groups strongly influenced the outcome of the restructuring process.<sup>2</sup> Further, in this paper there is only passing reference to the impact of the Kellogg debacle on the individuals and decisions of the early twentieth century.

## Aspects of the Denominational Context and the Organizational Design of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863

**T**he Seventh-day Adventist Church was formally organized at a meeting of believers at Battle Creek, Michigan in 1863. At that time, the membership was approximately 3,500. It was decided that there would be three administrative levels of Church structure: the local church, the conference, and the General Conference with headquarters in Battle Creek. The officers of the General Conference were a president, secretary, and treasurer. Three persons were appointed as the members of a General Conference executive committee and General Conference sessions were to be held annually.<sup>3</sup>

There were those who had argued that by being organized the Church would become Babylon, but those who saw the necessity for an efficient system of organization prevailed. Indeed, it was James White who, throughout the controversies surrounding the proposed organization in the late 1850s and early 1860s, was the most vocal proponent of the need for organization.<sup>4</sup> White, as editor of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* and the unofficial leader of the Sabbatarian Adventists, was continually writing and speaking in support of organization. His wife also supported the need for sound or-

ganization. It appears, however, that when it came to denominational structures, the Church understood her role to be more exhortatory and advisory than definitive.

For example, in August 1861, Ellen White had reproved those who did not have the courage of their convictions:

*The agitation on the subject of organization has revealed a great lack of moral courage on the part of ministers proclaiming present truth. Some who were convinced that organization was right failed to stand up boldly and advocate it. . . . They feared blame and opposition. They watched the brethren generally to see how their pulse beat before standing manfully for what they believed to be right. . . . They were afraid of losing their influence. . . . Those who shun responsibility will meet with loss in the end. The time for ministers to stand together is when the battle goes hard.*<sup>5</sup>

The arguments which were used to persuade the believers to organize themselves into a denomination were not based strongly on biblical or theological reasoning.<sup>6</sup> Rather, pragmatism won the day. In 1907, A. G. Daniells, reflecting on the events of the 1860s, listed some of the problems of disorganization, implying that organization solved these and other issues facing the Church. His list included failure to keep proper church membership records; paucity of church officers; inability to determine the accredited representatives of the people; no regular support for the ministry; and no legal provision for holding property.<sup>7</sup>

Even a list of reasons which Ellen White compiled in 1892 was largely pragmatic, although she did leave room for more latitude. Her reasons for organizing the church in 1863 were (1) to provide for the support of the ministry, (2) for carrying the work in new fields, (3) for protecting both the churches and the ministry from unworthy members, (4) for the holding of church property, (5) for the publication of truth through the press, and (6) for many other objectives.<sup>8</sup>

## **Factors Which Led to the Reorganization of the Church in 1901–1903**

Despite the simplicity and uniqueness of the structures set up in 1863, the need for major modification of those structures became evident as the Church expanded during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. A number of contextual factors led to the need for change.

## **1. Numerical Growth and the Beginnings of Diversity**

Although Seventh-day Adventists still understood themselves to be simply “a body of believers associating together, taking the name of Seventh-day Adventists, and attaching their names to a covenant simply to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus,” with the Bible as “their only creed and discipline,” by 1888 there were already thirty organized conferences containing 889 organized churches. There were 227 ordained and 182 licensed ministers. The constituency was supporting six publishing houses, three senior educational institutions, and two medical establishments. By the turn of the century, the church had 75,000 members spread not only across the United States, but also in Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, and increasingly in the “mission fields.”<sup>9</sup>

As the church continued to grow and diversify, it was evident that the meager organization that was set in place in 1863 could not cope with this numerical and geographical growth.

## **2. Institutional Growth**

Further, the organizational structures of 1863 did not anticipate the increase of organizations to care for the publishing, educational, health, and missionary interests of the Church. These entities were not a part of the conference administrative structure of the Church, but stood as independent units apart from it. Although they had a separate infrastructure, most shared personnel with the administrative structure of the denomination; most were located in Battle Creek.

The major auxiliary organizations that were in existence at the beginning of 1888 were the General Tract and Missionary Society, established in 1874; the General Sabbath School Association, established in 1878; the Health and Temperance Association, established in 1879; and the General Conference Association, established in 1887. The National Religious Liberty Association was established in 1889, an autonomous Foreign Mission Board in the same year, and the Seventh-day Adventist Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association in 1893.<sup>10</sup>

## **3. Loss of Coordination and Integration**

These organizations were legally incorporated as independent bodies that had their own officers and executive boards or committees. Although they were all part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—officers being appointed by and re-



porting to the General Conference session—they were not administered directly by the General Conference. Because of their independent status, coordination and integration were perennial problems during the 1890s. Not until the 1901 General Conference session and its reorganization of the administrative structures of the church were the auxiliary organizations incorporated into the conference structure as departments of the General Conference.

#### 4. Administrative Centralization

The growing global missionary consciousness of the church during the 1870s and 1880s was accompanied by increased centralization of administrative control. In 1885, George Butler, president of the General Conference from 1871–1874 and again from 1880–1888, spoke of the principles upon which the organization of the church was established. He declared,

*Supervision embraces all its [the General Conference] 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>11</sup>

Butler's concept of administration grew out of his concept of leadership. After the General Conference of 1888, Ellen White wrote of Butler:

*A sick man's mind has had a controlling power over the General Conference committee and the ministers have been the shadow and echo of Elder Butler about as long as it is healthy and for the good of the cause. Envy, evil surmising, jealousies have been working like leaven until the whole lump seemed to be leavened. . . . He thinks his position gives him such power that his voice is infallible.*<sup>12</sup>

In response to some tensions that existed between James White and other church leaders, Butler had written an essay in 1873 in which he encapsulated his attitude toward leadership. His position was clear from the opening sentence:

"There never was any great movement in this world without a leader; and in the nature of things it is impossible that there should be."<sup>13</sup>

Butler described a leader as a benevolent monarch. He supported his assertion by references to numerous biblical examples of authoritarian leaders. While he was willing to concede that Christ was indeed head of the church, he insisted that some men were "placed higher in authority in the church than others."<sup>14</sup>

Subsequently, the 1875 General Conference session passed a resolution that called for a revision of Butler's essay.<sup>15</sup> The 1877 session rescinded all parts of the essay that referred to the leadership of the church as residing in one man. This was supported by a resolution which stated 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>16</sup>

Although James White made it clear that he did not agree with Butler's position, and despite Ellen White's continuous appeals, Butler did not modify his leadership style very much until well after he was voted out of the presidency at the 1888 General Conference session.<sup>17</sup>

In the early 1880s, Ellen White began to rebuke General Conference administrators for taking too much of the responsibility for decision making on themselves and failing to give others opportunity to have input. In a letter to W. C. and Mary White in 1883, Ellen White pointed out that "every one of our leading men" considered that "he was the very one who must bear all the responsibilities" and "failed to educate others to think" and "to act." In fact, she charged, the leading men gave the others "no chance."<sup>18</sup>

Implicit in her condemnation of those who followed that practice was reproof for those who permitted them to do it without seeking to cor-

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rect the situation. Conference leaders, for instance, were told that they were to make their own decisions. The president of the General Conference could not possibly “understand the situation as well as you who are on the ground.”<sup>19</sup>

As a corrective for centralization of control, Ellen White advocated proper use of the committee system that had been established when the General Conference had been organized in 1863. She made it clear that even in the operation of institutions one man’s mind was not to control the decision-making process. She emphasized that “God would not have many minds the shadow of one man’s mind,” but that “in a multitude of counselors there is safety.”<sup>20</sup>

### **5. Financial Crisis**

Another precipitating factor which led to restructuring was the state of the finances of the church. When G. A. Irwin assumed the presidency of the General Conference in 1897, he had to face a woeful financial predicament. Within a few weeks of his appointment, the situation was so desperate that he wrote to N. W. Allee that the General Conference was “living from hand to mouth, so to speak.” He told Allee that “some days we get in two or three hundred dollars, and other days we have nothing.” On the particular day that he was writing, he lamented that the treasury was “practically empty,” even though there were at that time “a number of calls for means.”<sup>21</sup>

Despite concerted effort by General Conference leaders, the situation did not improve substantially. While there were some periods when the predicament was not as desperate as it was at other times, at all times the situation was out of control. The financial statement for 1899 showed that at the beginning of that year the General Conference had only \$55.33 cash on hand. The same report showed that by October 1 of the same year, there was an operating deficit of \$9,529.74.<sup>22</sup> At the beginning of 1901, the deficit was \$41,589.11. In August, the deficit was still \$39,600.<sup>23</sup>

Because of the chronic shortage of operating capital, nothing was being done to repay debts

that had been incurred in order to establish various institutions. Percy Magan, who realized that part of the problem lay in the ease with which institutions borrowed money and the ease with which church members lent it to them, charged that “all our institutions” had been in “the borrowing business.” He advocated that it was time for them “to quit” borrowing. But not only were institutions to cease borrowing; church members were to cease dabbling in “the lending business.” Had the members not been “in the lending business,” then it was certain that the institutions “would never have been in the borrowing business.”<sup>24</sup>

Desperate times called for desperate measures.

### **6. Decreasing Ability to Support Missionary Expansion**

The inability of the denomination to financially support its growth was having an effect on its missionary expansion. In the last five years of the nineteenth century there was a slackening of missionary activity by the denomination. At the 1899 General Conference session, Allen Moon, president of the Foreign Mission Board, reported that

*During the last two years we have opened up no new work in any part of the world. It has been an impossibility. There have been demands for opening the work in China. That work ought to have been opened a year ago, yet we have been utterly unable to do anything toward opening it.*<sup>25</sup>

The failure to commence any new work between 1897 and 1899, and the decrease in the number of missionaries being sent abroad between 1895 and 1900, does not appear to have been the result of any marked decrease in the church’s eschatological or missiological vision. A more likely explanation for the problems is that the centralized organization as it existed was just not able to cope financially and administratively with its missionary enterprise.<sup>26</sup>

Arthur Daniells realized that such a situation confronted the church as he visited Africa and Europe on his way from Australia to the 1901

General Conference session. In August 1900, while in Europe, he wrote to W. C. White that

*My heart is filled with interest that I cannot express in behalf of these foreign fields, and I sincerely hope that the next session of the General Conference will rise to the high and important position it should take in behalf of these countries. . . . I see much to encourage us, and some things that need careful management in the way of reorganization. . . . In all these places I have secured all the details I can regarding the work, the same as I did in Africa, and shall arrange these data for future use if needed.*<sup>27</sup>

Change was needed not only to accommodate the growth of the past but also to facilitate growth in the future.

### **Changes that Reorganization Brought to Organizational Structures**

For all of these and perhaps other reasons in addition, the 1901 General Conference session saw a major reorganization of the administrative structures of the Church. The impetus for change continued at the 1903 General Conference session. The changes that were made at those sessions were based on the principles of organization that were established at the denomination's founding in 1861–1863. By 1901, it was recognized that those principles needed to be updated and applied in the contemporary context. Ellen White was particularly pointed in her endorsement of change. On the day before the official opening of the 1901 General Conference session she declared, "God wants a change . . . right here . . . right now."<sup>28</sup> The following day when reiterating the concerns which she had communicated on the previous day, she added, "according to the light that has been given me—and just how it is to be accomplished I cannot say—greater strength must be brought into the managing force of the Conference."<sup>29</sup> She called for change and flexibility. She left it to the assembled delegates to determine just how that change would be accomplished and what organizational structures would be put in place.

The principal changes that were made in 1901–1903 were:

1. The formation of union conferences as the constituent bodies of the General Conference;
2. The decentralization of much decision making from the General Conference administration to union conference executive committees;
3. The consolidation of departments of the General Conference and the dissolution of independent incorporated entities that had been operating departments and some institutions; and
4. The title of the chief officer of the General Conference was to be "Chairman of the Board" rather than "President." At the 1903 General Conference session the title "President" was reinstated.

### **The Development of Mission as the Major Impetus for Reorganization**

At the time of organization in 1863, mission was a relatively insignificant reason among many given for forming an organized church. But by the time of reorganization in 1901, mission was the preeminent reason for organization. It is abundantly clear that when it came to the need for organization, A. G. Daniells and his associates began with the certainty and imminence of the return of Jesus Christ. The imminence of the second coming of Christ determined the urgency of the mission.

For those allied with Daniells, ecclesiology was more a function of their eschatological and missiological perceptions. The church existed because it had been commissioned to perform a specific task. That task was missionary in nature. The missionary nature of the church was the theological perspective that informed the need for and shape of the structures of the church. Writing to W. C. White in 1903, Daniells stated that "the vital object for which Seventh-day Adventists have been raised up is to prepare the world for the Coming Christ; the chief means for doing this work is the preaching of the present truth, or the third angel's message of Rev. 14:6–12."<sup>30</sup>

**"A sick man's  
mind has had  
a controlling  
power over the  
General Confer-  
ence committee  
and the minis-  
ters have been  
the shadow and  
echo of Elder  
Butler about  
as long as it  
is healthy and  
for the good of  
the cause."**

Because the need for organization arose from a perception of eschatological and missiological necessity, there was no doubt among those who held this view that the structure which they erected was biblically based. They understood that the New Testament affirmed that Christ was returning and that the transmission of the gospel to the world was the primary precondition for his return. With a consciousness of divine providence, they understood that Seventh-day Adventists had been specifically chosen within a precise time reference in order to herald the “everlasting gospel” to all the world. It was a conviction born of commitment to the necessity of a biblical foundation for their faith and practice, including their organizational practice. Daniells reflected the conviction of the denomination when, in 1906, he confidently declared that

*The doctrines we hold not only created our denomination, but our denominational aim, purpose, or policy, as well. This denominational purpose or policy is formed by our view of what the Bible teaches. It is peculiar to our denomination. It differs from the policies of other denominations and organizations as widely as our doctrinal views differ from theirs.*<sup>31</sup>

Some years later, W. A. Spicer was even more emphatic than Daniells. Challenging the church to take up the “world-wide proclamation of the everlasting gospel and the finishing of the work,” he contended that “every principle in the organization of our work . . . is found in the Word of God.” Clarence Crisler, who was the private secretary of Ellen White from 1901 until 1915, began the foreword to a pamphlet that he wrote the year before her death by categorically stating that “the underlying principles of the organization of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination . . . may be traced in the records of the New Testament.” Both Spicer and Crisler were careful to say that it was “principles” and not forms that were to be found in the New Testament.<sup>32</sup>

Reorganization was undertaken in the first place not because the end was coming, but because there was a “work” to do before the end could come. Reorganization, or for that matter organization, could not be substantiated on the basis of the return of Christ alone. Those who insisted that organizational form be determined only by the imminence of the return of Christ had, in the history of Adventism, often denied the necessity of any

form of organization at all. It was the mission policy of the church that in 1905 was described as “the most important feature of our denominational policy,” and it was the urgency associated with that mission that was more the precipitating factor in reorganization than the imminence of the Christ’s return.<sup>33</sup>

## **The Principles Undergirding the Formation of Union Conferences**

At the 1901 General Conference session there were two opposing viewpoints with respect to the reasons for and the shape of reorganization. Alonzo T. Jones and his associates derived their principles of organization more from their individualistic understanding of soteriology and their ecclesiological emphasis. Arthur G. Daniells and his associates derived their principles of organization more from their evaluation of the pragmatic situation of the church with respect to the fulfilment of its missionary task. Having just returned from extended periods of foreign missionary service, Daniells, W. A. Spicer, Ellen G. White, and William C. White were keenly aware of the inadequacy of the existing administrative structure to cope with the needs of the Church’s global missionary enterprise. Their focus was on the reorganization of the administrative structures of the church so that they could be an instrument rather than an inhibitor of mission.

The development of the missionary focus of the church in the years since 1863 certainly did not diminish the need for structures. Daniells contended that the principles which governed the choice of organizational structures should be those which supported the maintenance of the structures, not those which tended to destroy them. In retrospect, he pointed out that the principles which guided the church in its reorganization could not be permitted to lead the church towards disorganization or the abandonment of those “general principles” which, in the 1860s, had transformed a scattered group of “believers” into a viable denomination.<sup>34</sup>

Daniells would later list the advantages of reorganization and attempts would be made to systematize the theological rationale for reorganization.<sup>35</sup> However, despite repeated reference to “principles,” again, no systematic treatment that could be used as a basis for decision making was forthcoming. Without a systematic ecclesiology, there was really no substantial basis upon which the church could build its principles of organization.



Those principles which can be derived from extant records and which appear to have most strongly influenced reorganization and the formation of unions were as follows:

### 1. Decentralization

For Daniells and his associates, decentralization as a principle of reorganization was paramount. In 1902, reflecting with the General Conference committee on what had been accomplished in 1901, Daniells affirmed that “the guiding principle [of reorganization] had been the decentralization of authority by the distribution of responsibility.” He added that the application of that principle had led “to the organization of union conferences,” and representation “on all operating committees” of the “four features of our work—the evangelical, medical, educational, and publishing interests.”<sup>36</sup>

At the 1903 General Conference session, when he was explaining his understanding of the sentence from Ellen White’s 1896 letter that had been used by Jones, Waggoner, and Prescott in an attempt to do away with the presidency of the General Conference, Daniells stated that according to his understanding, Ellen White was saying that the leaders of the church needed to “decentralize responsibilities and details and place them in the hands of a larger number of men.”<sup>37</sup> In this sentence he was using the term “decentralize” in the sense of the verb “to delegate.” He understood Ellen White to be discussing the need for responsibility to be delegated to several persons rather than being concentrated in just one person—the president of the General Conference.

One of Daniells’ favorite expressions (one that he had taken from Ellen White), was that those “on the ground” should bear the burden of administration and have the prerogative of decision making.<sup>38</sup> He saw the implementation of the union structure as the manner in which administrative responsibility was being delegated to those “on the ground.” The union administrators were, for Daniells, those “on the ground.”<sup>39</sup>

Under Daniells’ leadership the commitment to the principle of decentralization was never revoked. Decentralization continued to be considered as a vital principle which governed the reorganization of the church. However, the confrontation and polemics over organizational issues that began in mid-1902 and continued for the next seven years (until Jones was removed from church membership in 1909), caused a renewal of emphasis on the need for unity in the church. That desire for unity on the part of the administration of the church meant that the structures of the church became more an instrument of the centralization of authority than they did an instrument of delegation and decentralization of authority. Jones claimed that just such a tendency was built into the very structures themselves. Such was not necessarily the case, but circumstances and the disposition of the leaders themselves did indeed influence just what emphasis was evident in practice.

### 2. Unity and Diversity

When Daniells discussed the principles which were to govern the reorganization of the church at the 1901 General Conference session, and described the benefits which would accrue from the implementation of the union conference plan, he did not particularly mention unity. Certainly Ellen White had done so in the College Library Address, and certainly the principle of unity had always been a top priority for Seventh-day Adventists and would continue to be so, but for both Ellen White and A. G. Daniells the immediate priorities were elsewhere. In his single, most significant explanation of the operation of the Australasian Union Conference and its application to the world church, Daniells discussed the simplification of machinery for transacting business, the need to place laborers [administrators] in the field in personal contact with the people, the advantage of having general boards in the field, the necessity of having a general organization which did not concern itself primarily with af-

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minds the  
shadow of one  
man’s mind,”  
but that  
“in a multitude  
of counselors  
there is safety.”**



fairs in the United States, the General Conference as a “world’s General Conference,” and the necessity for the boards of institutions and the committees of union conferences to be composed of persons familiar with their geographical areas of administration.<sup>40</sup> But he did not even mention the need for unity.

At the second meeting of the General Conference session in 1903, however, Daniells did include unity among the list of advantages and benefits that were realized by reorganization. Having pointed out that reorganization had resulted in a distribution of responsibility and that “work in all parts of the world” was to be dealt with by those who were “on the ground,” and that the “details” were to be “worked out” by them; he summarized, “in short, the plan recognizes one message, one body of peo-

ple, and one general organization.”<sup>41</sup>

By 1903, even though decentralization was still vital, it was now a form of a decentralization which was carried out only along “prescribed lines.” In some respects, particularly in the organization of departments of the General Conference, there was more centralization than decentralization. Apparently, some were concerned that things were going back to what had occurred during the years leading up to reorganization.<sup>42</sup>

Ellen White sensed the danger of slipping backwards and placing inordinate stress on the oneness of the organization. Her concern was that such a position would result in the need to centralize authority, resulting in organizational uniformity. Specifically, with reference to the publishing concerns of the church, she said,

*No man's intelligence is to become such a controlling power that one man will have kingly authority in Battle Creek or in any other place. In no line of work is any one man to have power to turn the wheel. God forbids.*<sup>43</sup>

She was particularly outspoken regarding failure to implement principles that had been introduced in 1901. Writing to Judge Arthur in January 1903, she maintained that as the delegates who had been in attendance at the session returned to their homes, they carried with them into "their work the wrong principles that had been prevailing in the work at Battle Creek."<sup>44</sup>

The context does not indicate exactly what "principles" were being discussed. Although structural changes which she approved of had been made in 1901, apparently the new structures could be abused with the same result as the former structures. Thus, Ellen White once again found it necessary to reprove the leaders of the church and its departments because of the tendency to gather power about themselves.

Whenever the need to promote unity was prioritized to the extent that it disrupted the maintenance of equilibrium between the principles of unity and diversity, and diversity was not taken into consideration as it should have been, centralization was the result.

During the 1890s, both unity and diversity had negative and positive aspects as far as the mission of the church was concerned. Diversity was positive when it enhanced the potential of the church to reach diverse "nations, tongues, and peoples," and led to decentralization of decision making. It was negative when it caused chaos and confusion, such as was the case with the multiplication of auxiliary organizations. Unity was positive when it bound the church into oneness in Christ. It was negative when it was interpreted to require uniformity and unnecessary centralization of authority.

Unity was necessary in order to encompass the dimensions of the mission of the church. There was no way for the Seventh-day Adventist Church with its emphasis on worldwide evangelization, to succeed in that task unless there was unity of purpose, belief, and action.

Unity of action required administrative coordination that could best facilitate strategic initiatives on a global scale. Further, the functional ecclesiological self-image that was characteristic of the church permitted a centralized administration that could coordinate and facilitate the mission of the church. It cannot be denied that, given the church's theological and pragmatic priorities, some centralization was necessary and legitimate. But in 1901, the principle of diversity was more determinative than the principle of unity in the establishment of an additional level of administration, and by delegating some functions which had previously been performed by the General Conference to union conferences. The emphasis was on the need to recognize diversity by decentralization. Past growth had made the recognition of diversity necessary, but projected future growth made provision for diversity imperative.

### **3. Participation/Representation**

#### **Local Conference Participation**

Daniells made a concerted effort to carry his emphasis on diversity and decentralization not only into union conferences but also into the local conference setting. Soon after the 1901 General Conference session, he began to promote broad-based participation in the decision-making process by encouraging the state conferences to permit all state church members to participate at their respective state sessions as delegates. Daniells' innovation in this respect was a departure from the system of permitting only duly appointed delegates to vote at the session.

Daniells' idea of representation was that any and every person who was in attendance at a local conference session and a member in that conference should be a delegate to the session. He strongly advocated a participatory election process for local conferences at most of the local conference sessions that he attended in 1901, at the Lake Union Conference session (of which he was president), and at the European Union Conference in 1902. In Europe, he stated his concept as a principle. He said,

**It is abundantly**

**clear that**

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**ates began with**

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**and imminence**

**of the return of**

**Jesus Christ.**

**Reorganization  
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not because the  
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but because  
there was  
a “work” to do  
before the end  
could come.**

*As to representation, nobody can represent anybody except himself. All should be the Lord's representatives; but nobody can represent some other person, or a church. A church is "fully represented" in a Conference when all its members are present; but nobody can delegate his mind or his conscience to another. If a person is present at any meeting, he does not want somebody else to speak for him.*<sup>45</sup>

It was further reported that while he did not presume "to dictate to any how they should do, he gave it as his conviction that just as in any church meeting all the members present are entitled to speak, so in any Conference all the members present are properly delegates." He added that his plan had "been adopted in quite a number of Conferences in America."<sup>46</sup>

Daniells was questioned at length concerning his proposal. Apparently quite a few of the delegates had read Loughborough's article, or were familiar with the early history of the development of the organizational structure of the church and saw pragmatic difficulties with the plan. They were concerned that such a plan could give one district an undue proportional influence and control. Daniells rebuffed such a suggestion on the basis that all were Christians; the implication being that no one member or group of members would exercise arbitrary or political power over others. Daniells countered even further. Given his commitment to mission, he assured the delegates that the principle of numerical representation could not be a satisfactory principle because if it were strictly followed from the local conferences right through to the General Conference, it "would leave the heathen lands wholly unprovided for, and was thus opposed to missionary effort." Each member was to "consider himself as representative of the world, and not merely of his particular locality."<sup>47</sup> He was somewhat inconsistent in his reasoning, however. He was not promoting participatory representation as a principle to be adopted at all levels of church administration. He was only concerned for its adaptation to local conference governance, and, to some extent, to union conferences. At General Confer-

ence level, Daniells' ideas of representation, especially with reference to overseas fields, were not at all participatory, nor were they even particularly representative.

### **Union Conference Representation**

At the union level of administration, the concept of representation changed from broad-based participation by the people to unilateral representation of the departments and the institutions in the union. The same situation applied at the General Conference. In 1901, Daniells allowed the proposal that the executive committee elect its own chairman because he, along with W. C. White, considered the committee to be a "thoroughly representative one." But the committee selected in 1901 comprised representatives of departments and institutions, with only the union presidents as representatives of "the people" who were supposed to be the authority base in the church. The union presidents were outnumbered seventeen to eight and could very easily be outvoted. Further, as chairmen or executive board members of the institutions within their own unions, union presidents were more often focused on institutional concerns than on the concerns of the local churches and the church members. They were, therefore, more likely to be sympathetic to institutional problems and needs than to the needs and concerns of the church at large. The composition of the committee inevitably led to a focus on institutional concerns. In this respect, Seventh-day Adventist mission methodology was in accord with that of most mission agencies which depended to a large degree on the establishment of institutions.

### **International Representation**

The situation with regard to representation of the worldwide constituency of the church was even more troublesome. As the composition of the General Conference executive committee was being discussed in 1901, G. G. Rupert asked if there was any provision for the "different na-



tionalities among us” being represented on the committee. Prescott answered him by quoting Gal 3:28 and assuring the delegates that such was not necessary because “ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” The outcome was that the safest course was chosen—only North Americans were elected to the executive committee. But that is not to say that there was no commitment to the principle of representation. Representation was understood as being compatible with the higher principle of decentralization. The church and its members were very much in the mind of Daniells both at the General Conference session in 1901 and in the year that followed. Though he was conscious “more and more” of the “influence and power” that the General Conference had, he was anxious to use that power “rightly” and get into “sympathetic touch” with the “rank and file” of the church constituency. He censured conference officers for failing to consult their constituencies when decisions of importance were to be made. In 1901, he had wanted administration and government in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”<sup>49</sup>

#### 4. Decision by Consensus

Along with his regard for the prerogatives of the members of the church and his desire to implement a participatory decision-making process at local conference level, Daniells advocated decision making by consensus in 1901 and 1902, rather than by majority vote. In contrast to his concept of participation which was promoted only on the state conference level, he advocated consensus decision making at every level of administration. Daniells told E. R. Palmer, his associate and confidante in Australia, that at the 1901 General Conference session no measure “received unkind treatment.” Some of the proposals advanced were “amended” and a few “dropped out,” but it had all been done by “common consent,” not by “majority vote.” Daniells declared that he had never seen “anything like it.”<sup>50</sup>

One may wonder just what Daniells had in

mind when he advocated the concept of consensus decision making.<sup>51</sup> Whatever was the case, his attitude changed rapidly, again as a consequence of the confrontation with Kellogg, so that, by the General Conference Session of 1903, vital decisions were being made on the strength of majority vote.<sup>52</sup>

The church had some adjustments to make in the years immediately after 1901. Some of the plans that were made and the methods that were followed were not wise. Daniells himself admitted that. However, the shift from emphasis on participatory representation and consensus decision making to emphasis on more structured representation and majority-vote decision making after the clash with Kellogg, and the extended polemics with those opposed to the church structure, was indicative of a shift from emphasis on the need for diversity (or decentralization) to emphasis on preservation of unity.

#### 5. Constituent Authority

In 1901, Daniells intended that the General Conference executive committee should be advisory, not executive. Referring to the plan of organizing unions, he hoped that the General Conference and the Mission Board (which had been integrated into the General Conference executive committee), would be “ultimately . . . quite free from perplexing details.” He was convinced that the new plan of organization would enable the committees “to take the position of general advisory boards.”<sup>53</sup> Two weeks later he wrote to the members of the General Conference Committee:

*We are glad that the details in the various Union Conferences are being so fully taken over by those who are on the ground. . . . Our hope is that we shall be left almost entirely free to study the large questions of policy affecting the entire field, and to devote our energies to fostering the work in the weak parts of the field, and also the great mission fields in the regions beyond. Thus the general machinery is being reduced to a few simple parts.*<sup>54</sup>

Some were concerned, even so, that too much power was being centralized in the hands of one

**Unity was positive when it bound the church into oneness in Christ. It was negative when it was interpreted to require uniformity and unnecessary centralization of authority.**

board. They may have been beginning to question the wisdom of forming departments in the General Conference to replace the auxiliary organizations. Apparently in response, Daniells wrote to Edith Graham, the treasurer of the Australasian Union, that the General Conference executive committee could not possibly be guilty of centralizing because the facts of the matter were that the authority to act was being placed in the hands of “those on the ground.” Daniells continued:

*The General Conference Committee does not propose to deal directly with the affairs in any Union Conference. We propose to interest ourselves in the welfare of every Union Conference, in every line of work. . . . So instead of centralizing our work, we have been distributing it.*<sup>55</sup>

Daniells’ answer to the centralization of power in the General Conference committee was that the committee was not going to make executive decisions. It was going to be a fostering, advisory board whose interest was coordination, not supervision. With Ellen White’s advice in mind, no doubt, Daniells was concerned that the General Conference committee should not exercise executive control, but that it should do everything in its power to coordinate the administrative functions of the church so as to respect that authority resident in the church membership. With the reforms that were suggested and implemented and with the movement away from centralization of authority, Daniells hailed the events of 1901 as the “beginning of a new era,” the beginning of “our last grand march.”<sup>56</sup>

By 1903, Daniells was speaking as though he still held the “advisory” concept of the role of the General Conference executive committee. But he was not speaking with the same certainty. At the General Conference session he stated, “As the work is now shaping, the province of the General Conference Committee is of an advisory character to a large extent—not altogether, by any means—and it is of a missionary character or phase.”<sup>57</sup> No longer was the role of the General Conference executive committee merely advisory. A change of attitude had taken place. Notice, however, that no change had taken place with regard to the priority of mission. Any changes in the role of the General Conference executive committee with respect to coordination as set over against control were being made with reference to the missionary focus of the committee and the church.<sup>58</sup>

## 6. Simplicity

In view of the complication and confusion that had characterized denominational administration in the 1890s, reorganization was perceived as a simplification of the organizational system. In the 1890s, Ellen White had advocated simplicity in organization and insisted that the machinery was not to be “a galling yoke.” Therefore, when reorganization was being considered in 1901, simplicity was understood to be an essential principle. The principles of representation and distribution of authority were related to the principle of decentralization. So also was the principle of simplicity.<sup>60</sup>

Daniells expressed himself most succinctly on the need for simplicity at the European Union Conference session in 1902. He said, “Organization should be as simple as possible. The nearer we get to the end, the simpler will be the organization. I have no idea that we have got to the limit of simplicity.”<sup>61</sup>

In 1903, simplicity was still described as a desirable principle of reorganization. In his “Chairman’s Address” Daniells used the integration of the auxiliary organizations into General Conference departments as an example of the application of the principle of simplification.<sup>62</sup> However, it was admitted that, in some regards, the machinery was still too complicated. Simplicity was proving to be an elusive quality in organization and it was to remain so. Especially was that to continue to be the case in those parts of the world where the administrative machinery that may have been necessary in North America or Europe was just “too complicated.”<sup>63</sup>

## 7. Adaptability

The principle of adaptability was, in 1901, almost too obvious to need extended treatment. The very fact that the church was willing to enter into a process of radical reorganization is sufficient to indicate that priority was given to adaptability in organizational structures. Further adaptations in 1903 indicate that the commitment to adaptability remained. In 1902, in addition to his remarks at the European Union conference regarding simplicity, Daniells insisted,

*We see many things differently from what we did ten years ago, and I expect that we shall see still more. As new light comes, we ought to advance with it, and not hold rigidly to old forms and old methods. Because a thing is done 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>64</sup>

Further attention could be given to Ellen White's attitude to adaptability and the possibility of subsequent structural change.<sup>65</sup> Apart from Ellen White, W. A. Spicer was probably the most vocal advocate of the importance of allowing adaptability in the form that organization took in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was Spicer, an experienced missionary, who was responsible as much as anyone for the success of the missionary enterprise of the church in the early years of the twentieth century. With his wide exposure to different cultures and situations, he repeatedly said,

The details of organization may vary according to conditions and work, *but ever as God has called his church together there has appeared in it the spiritual gift of order and government, the spirit that rules in heaven.*<sup>66</sup>

### Learnings Which May Be Instructional for the Church

By way of conclusion, the major learnings derived from this paper which may be instructional for the contemporary Seventh-day Adventist Church are:

1. When a major discussion is needed and a decision is to be made, it is necessary for people of influence to speak up and participate in the discussion rather than keeping silent.
2. It is possible for leaders to take too much responsibility for decision making on their own shoulders and not listen to others or give them opportunity to participate in the process.
3. The committee system when utilized properly can be a corrective for centralization. Ellen White declared that "God would not have many minds the shadow of one man's mind," but that "in a multitude of counselors there is safety."<sup>67</sup> Group-think is not to be in evidence in the decisions of the Church.
4. The holding of position of responsibility by any individual, does not in itself guarantee the best opinions or the best decisions by that individual.
5. Position does not grant irrevocable power.
6. Financial crisis can be a powerful catalyst for change.
7. A commitment to a global mission which arises from belief in the imminence of Christ's return is the major catalyst for efficient and effective organization. Organization must serve mission, not vice versa.
8. The determining principles of organization are derived more from an evaluation of the pragmatic situation of the church with respect to the fulfilment of its missionary task than from systematic theological considerations. A pragmatism which takes into account biblical teaching and contextual imperative has been the *modus operandi* of the Church.
9. Decentralization was the most pervasive principle of reorganization. As a corrective to centralization, as much as possible and practical, decisions are to be made by those "on the ground."
10. Confrontation and polemics in the Church result in emphasis by leaders on the need for unity. In this context, the structures of the church become more an instrument of the centralization of authority than an instrument of delegation and decentralization of authority. Circumstances and the disposition of the leaders themselves have considerable bearing on which is evident in practice.
11. No one person is to become such a controlling power that he/she has too much influence on the direction that the Church takes on any issue.
12. Both unity and diversity can have negative and positive impacts on the mission of the Church. Diversity is positive when its acceptance enhances the potential of the church to reach diverse "nations, tongues, and peoples," and decentralized decision making is practiced. It is negative when it is taken too far, appropriate organizational boundaries are not respected, and it results in syncretism. Unity is positive when it binds

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the Church into oneness in Christ. It is negative when it is interpreted to require uniformity and unnecessary centralization of authority.

13. Given the church's theological and pragmatic priorities, some centralization is necessary and legitimate. But in 1901, the principle of diversity was more determinative than the principle of unity in the establishment of unions, and by delegating some functions which had previously been performed by the General Conference to union conferences. The emphasis was on the need to recognize diversity by decentralization.
14. In the reforms of 1901, Daniells affirmed that it was not the intention of the General Conference committee to deal directly with the affairs of any union conference. Daniells' answer to the centralization of power in the General Conference committee was that the committee was not going to make executive decisions. It was going to be a fostering, advisory, board whose interest was coordination, not supervision. By 1903, Daniells was speaking as though he still held the "advisory" concept of the role of the General Conference executive committee. But in practice, no longer was its role merely advisory. A change of attitude had taken place.

Adaptability and flexibility are vital for the fulfilment of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Not everything is to be done the same way everywhere. When there is no direct "Thus saith the Lord," the Church must be flexible if it is to be true to its reason for existence. ■

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11. *Seventh-day Adventist Year Book: 1888* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1889), 50.

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19. These words were spoken to the delegates assembled at the General Conference session in 1883. Ellen G. White,



"Genuine Faith and Holiness," Manuscript 3, 1883, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

20. Ellen G. White to John Harvey Kellogg, Letter 7, April 26, 1886, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

21. G. A. Irwin to N. W. Allee, May 5, 1897, Record Group 11, Letter Book 18, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

22. General Conference Committee Minutes, Oct. 10, 1899, Record Group 1, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

23. A. G. Daniells to Members of the General Conference Committee, August 2, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 24, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland. See also A. G. Daniells to J. E. Jayne, August 3, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 24, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

24. Percy T. Magan, "Denominational Debts," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (April 11, 1899): 235–36.

25. *General Conference Bulletin* [hereafter *GC Bulletin*] (1899): 73.

26. The missionary program was being stifled because decisions which should have been made by "those on the ground" had to be referred to Battle Creek. See W. A. Spicer to A. G. Daniells, October 5, 1893, Record Group 9, A. G. Daniells Folder 2, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; A. G. Daniells to E. H. Gates, May 23, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland. In his letter to D. A. Robinson, White focused on the dilemma caused by centralization. In reference to a "pioneer to a new mission field." He said: "If he consults with the Board in everything he will be forced sometimes to vary from instruction. If he does not consult them he will get the credit of moving independently. Whichever way he does, he will wish he had done the other." In a letter to Percy Magan, W. C. White said that "mother has been cautioned not to give sanction to any arrangement in connection with this [missionary] enterprise by which one class of men or of institutions shall lay binding restrictions upon another class of men or institutions; that His servants in one part of the world should not dictate to or lay restrictions upon His servants in another part of the great harvest field." W. C. White to Percy T. Magan, March 8, 1900, Letter Book 15, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

27. A. G. Daniells to W. C. White, August 23, 1900, Incoming Files, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

28. "Talk of Mrs E. G. White, before Representative

Brethren, In the College Library, April 1, 1901, 2:30 P.M.," MS 43a, 1901, (emphasis supplied). This manuscript together with MS 43, an edited edition of Ellen White's speech, is available in the Ellen G. White Estate Office. The author commends to the careful reader a thorough reading of these manuscripts.

29. *GC Bulletin* (1901): 25 (emphasis supplied). Bulletins which report on General Conference sessions are available at the Ellen G. White Research Centre at Avondale College.

30. A. G. Daniells to W. C. White, May 17, 1903, Incoming Files, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

31. A. G. Daniells, "A Statement Concerning Our Present Situation—No. 3," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (February 22, 1906): 6, (emphasis supplied.)

32. W. A. Spicer, "Divine Warnings against Disorganization," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (September 14, 1916): 4; C. C. Crisler, *The Value of Organization: An Historical Study*, (n.p.), 3. See also S. N. Haskell, "Organization—No. 18," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (May 16, 1907): 4; A. G. Daniells, "Organization as Developed by Our Pioneers," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (February 21, 1918): 5; and J. L. McElhany, "Principles of Conference Administration," *Ministry* (March 1938): 5.

33. A. G. Daniells, "The President's Address: A Review and an Outlook—Suggestions for Conference Action," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (May 11, 1905): 8.

34. A. G. Daniells, "A Statement of Facts Concerning Our Present Situation—No. 9," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (April 5, 1906): 6.

35. At the 1903 General Conference session Daniells made reference to some of the "features" of the "work" which were the result of reorganization. See A. G. Daniells, "Some Beneficial Features of Our Organization," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (March 14, 1918): 6.

36. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Minutes of Meetings of the General Conference Committee, 13 November 1902, 2:30 P.M., Record Group 1, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

37. "Original Reports and Stenographically Reported Discussions Thereof Had at the Thirty-Fourth Biennial Session of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference, April 19, 1901," Record Group 0, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland, 75.

38. Ellen G. White to A. O. Tait, August 27, 1896, Letter 100, 1896, Ellen White Estate; A. G. Daniells to W. T. Knox, May 21, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; A. G. Daniells to

**The holding  
of position of  
responsibility  
by any  
individual, does  
not in itself  
guarantee the  
best opinions  
or the best  
decisions by  
that individual.**

**“Organization**

**should be**

**as simple as**

**possible.**

**The nearer we**

**get to the**

**end, the simpler**

**will be the**

**organization.**

**I have no idea**

**that we have**

**got to the limit**

**of simplicity.”**

E. H. Gates, May 23, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; A. G. Daniells to Edith R. Graham, May 24, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; A. G. Daniells to W. C. White, June 19, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; A. G. Daniells to Members of the General Conference Committee, August 2, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 24, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland. In 1895 Ellen White had used the phrase in a testimony to ministers. She said, “Be sure that God has not laid upon those who remain away from these foreign fields of labor, the burden of criticizing the ones on the ground where the work is being done. Those who are not on the ground know nothing about the necessities of the situation, and if they cannot say anything to help those who are on the ground, let them not hinder but show their wisdom by the eloquence of silence, and attend to the work that is close at hand. . . . Let the Lord work with the men who are on the ground, and let those who are not on the ground walk humbly with God lest they get out of their place and lose their bearings.” Ellen G. White, *Special Instruction to Ministers and Workers* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1895), 33.

39. A. G. Daniells to H. W. Cottrell, June 17, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

40. *GC Bulletin*, 1901, 228–29.

41. *GC Bulletin*, 1903, 17–21.

42. See “Original Reports and Stenographically Reported Discussions Thereof Had at the Thirty-Fourth Biennial Session of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference, 9 April 1903, Record Group 0, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland, 20–20a.

43. Ellen G. White, “Principles for the Guidance of Men in Positions of Responsibility,” Manuscript 140, 1902, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

44. Ellen G. White to Judge Jesse Arthur, January 14, 1903, Letter 17, 1903, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

45. *Bulletin of the European Union Conference Held in London, May 15–25, 1902*, [Hereafter *European Conference Bulletin*], 2.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*, 2–3.

48. *GC Bulletin*, 1901, 206.

49. A. G. Daniells to E. A. Sutherland, December 20, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 25, General Conference

Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; A. G. Daniells to W. C. White, June 18, 1901, Incoming Files, Ellen G. White Estate Office; A. G. Daniells to N. P. Nelson, July 17, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 24, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

50. A. G. Daniells to E. R. Palmer, May 3, 1901, Record Group 9, A. G. Daniells Folder 6, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

51. Just before his death in 1932, R. A. Underwood made some terse observations with regard to James White’s concept of consensus decision making. He said, “Elder James White was what men would call a shrewd leader—He understood the effect of being united—and one of his diplomatic moves was this in all the questions that secured a majority vote in the General Conference or district or otherwise whatever carried by a majority of even a few votes—he got the delegates to agree that it should be reported unanimous—and no opposition was referred to in the report.” R. A. Underwood to L. E. Froom, December 8, 1930, Record Group 58, 1920s–1930s Interpretation Development of Folder, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland. Underwood’s punctuation was not precise and his memory was not acute—districts were not introduced into the administrative structure until eight years after the death of James White. However, one wonders how much correlation there was between the practice of White (as recalled by Underwood) to seek unanimity for the sake of the report, and that of Daniells who was not in the “habit of calling for the opposition vote to any measure” *European Conference Bulletin*, 3.

52. In the reply to Jones in 1906, it was pointed out that the decision to adopt the new constitution at the 1903 General Conference session was made by majority vote. In fact, all the decisions made at the General Conference session in 1903 were adopted by majority vote. By that time majority vote was the method being consistently followed, despite Daniells’ stated desire to the contrary less than one year earlier. See *A Statement Refuting Charges Made by A. T. Jones Against the Spirit of Prophecy and the Plan of Organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination*, (Washington D.C.: General Conference Committee, 1906), 28. The statement can be found at <http://ellenwhite.org/content/file/statement-refuting-charges-made-t-jones-against-spirit-prophecy-and-plan-organization#document>.

53. A. G. Daniells to J. J. Wessells, July 15, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 24, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

54. A. G. Daniells to Members of the General Conference Committee, August 2, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 24, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

55. A. G. Daniells to Edith R. Graham, May 24, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

56. A. G. Daniells to E. H. Gates, May 23, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland; A. G. Daniells to M. H. Brown, June 17, 1901, Record Group 11, Letter Book 23, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland.

57. *GC Bulletin*, 1903, 100.

58. Francis Wernick has somewhat astutely made reference to Daniells' 1901–1902 concept of the role of the General Conference as an impartial, advisory, fostering board. Wernick observed, however, that since that time, the General Conference has enlarged its role from a coordinating, counselling body to "more of a supervisory role." Wernick advised that "we need to rethink the role of the General Conference." He added, "We do need a central office to preserve unity, to give coordination, and to give counsel. . . . Supervision versus coordination needs further study and definition." Francis W. Wernick, "Philosophy of the Role of the General Conference" [paper prepared for the committee on the role and function of denominational organizations, 1984], Record Group 500, Monographs Series, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland. Note Wernick's agenda. The preservation of unity heads the list of concerns. It has been that way ever since the mid-1902 crisis.

59. *GC Bulletin* (1893): 22–24; Ellen G. White, "Overbearing Control Reproved," Manuscript 43, 1895, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

60. In early 1902 Daniells said, "I believe that we have thrown away a great amount of money and energy in trying to keep useless machinery running. I find that the less complex we make our work, and the more we center our efforts on the simple straight lines of missionary evangelization, the heartier is the response of the people, and the greater is the manifestation of life in the enterprise" A. G. Daniells to C. H. Jones, April 21, 1902, Incoming Files, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

61. *European Conference Bulletin*, 2.

62. *GC Bulletin*, 1903, 18.

63. At the 1903 General Conference session Daniells quoted Ellen White with reference to the simplification of machinery. He noted that she had declared that in "some parts of the work it is true, the machinery has been made too com-

plicated.'" "Original Reports and Stenographically Reported Discussions Thereof Had at the Thirty-Fourth Biennial Session of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference, 9 April 1903," Record Group 0, General Conference Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland, 75b. Even in 1909, Ellen White found it necessary to stress that "simple organization and church order" were set forth in the New Testament and that the Lord had ordained such for "the unity and perfection of the church." Ellen G. White to the Leading Ministers in California, December 6, 1909, Letter 178, 1909, Ellen G. White state Office.

64. *European Conference Bulletin*, 2.

65. For example, soon after the General Conference session of 1901, Ellen White wrote to A. G. Daniells, regarding the work among the "colored people" in the South. She admonished Daniells to be flexible in his administration because of the unique needs of the South. The church was not to become "narrow" and confined by "regular lines." Different methods of organization and approach were necessary in culturally diverse situations. For administration to be tied to an inflexible predetermined policy which could not adapt to diverse cultural and sociological needs was, for Ellen White, an abuse of administrative prerogative. See Ellen G. White to A. G. Daniells, Letter 65, June 30, 1901, Ellen G. White Estate Office. The very same day, Ellen White wrote to her son Edson, who was working in the southern part of the United States. Edson was inclined to be too adventurous in his innovations. Whereas Daniells, the administrator, had to be counseled to allow change and innovation in a different socio-cultural milieu, Edson had to be cautioned not to be too hasty. Ellen White wrote: "You need now to be able to think and judge with clear discrimination. Great care must be exercised in making changes which differ from the old-established routine.

Changes are to be made, but they are not to be made in such an abrupt manner that you will not carry the people with you. You who are working in the South must labor as if in a foreign country. You must work as pioneers, seeking to save expense in every way possible. And above all, you must study to show yourselves approved unto God." Ellen G. White to J. Edson White, Letter 62 June 30, 1901, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

66. W. A. Spicer, "The Divine Principle of Organization," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (March 25, 1909): 5, (emphasis supplied.)

67. Ellen G. White to John Harvey Kellogg, Letter 7, April 26, 1886, Ellen G. White Estate Office.

**Adaptability  
and flexibility  
are vital for  
the fulfilment  
of the mission  
of the Seventh-  
day Adventist  
Church.**

# Catholic or Adventist: The Ongoing Struggle Over Authority + 9.5 Theses I

BY GEORGE R. KNIGHT

**DISCUSSED** | Christian unity, noncompliance, “kingly authority,” freedom to experiment, data manipulation

**O**n October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. This year, the Protestant world is celebrating the five-hundredth anniversary of that event. On May 8, General Conference President Ted Wilson, addressing the faculty of Middle East University, cited Ellen White, who predicted that Seventh-day Adventists would carry that Reformation on until the end of time. Beyond that, he quoted 1 Timothy 1:7: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”<sup>1</sup> With that good advice in mind, we will begin our study of the history of authority in Adventism with Luther and his struggle with the Roman Church.

Given my topic, many people would expect me to deal with the theme of the development of ecclesiastical authority in Adventism. But the authority of the church in the denomination is contexted within Adventism’s understanding of the authority of the Bible and that of Ellen White. As a result, I have divided my presentation into three parts: Adventism’s approach to biblical authority, Ellen White’s thoughts on authority, and the development of authoritative structures in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

## Adventism’s Historical Approach to Biblical Authority

Adventism has historically viewed itself as a child of the Protestant Reformation. As a result, it is crucial that we recognize that the Reformation was not primarily about indulgences or even justification by faith. At its heart, the Reformation was about the issue of authority.

“What is new in Luther,” Heiko Oberman writes, “is the notion of absolute obedience to the Scriptures against any authorities; be they popes or councils.”<sup>2</sup> That thought is evident in his testimony before the Diet of Worms:

*Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason—for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone. . . . I consider myself convicted by the testimony of Holy Scripture,*

*which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one’s conscience is neither safe nor sound. God help me. Amen.*<sup>3</sup>

Ellen White’s comments on Luther in *The Great Controversy* are helpful. Luther “firmly declared that Christians should receive no other doctrines than those which rest on the authority of the Sacred Scriptures. These words struck at the very foundation of papal supremacy. They contained the vital principle of the Reformation.”<sup>4</sup> Again, she penned, the Romanists “sought to maintain their power, not by appealing to the Scriptures, but by a resort to threats.”<sup>5</sup> Finally, we read that “in our time there is a wide departure from their [the Scriptures’] doctrines and precepts, and there is need of a return to the great Protestant principle—the Bible, and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty. . . . The same unswerving adherence to the word of God manifested at that crisis of the Reformation is the only hope of reform today.”<sup>6</sup>

At this point, it is important to realize that Adventism’s primary Reformation heritage is not Lutheranism or Calvinism but Anabaptism, or the Radical Reformation, which in essence held that the magisterial reformers had not been consistent in their Bible-only approach. For the Anabaptists, it was wrong to stop where Luther, Calvin, or Zwingli did theologically. As a result, they moved beyond such teachings as infant baptism and state support of the church and toward the ideals of the New Testament church.

Perhaps the best representative religious body in the spirit of Anabaptism in nineteenth-century America was the Restorationist movement, for which there was no creed but the Bible itself. Their drive to get back to the Bible set the stage for Adventism. Both Joseph Bates and James White came to Adventism from the Christian Connection, a branch of Restorationism. For White, “every Christian is . . . in duty bound to take the Bible as a perfect rule of faith and duty.”<sup>7</sup>

In summary, Adventism at its best in 2017 stands on a





**The General  
Conference  
leadership in  
2017 is coming  
dangerously  
close to repli-  
cating the  
medieval church  
in its call for  
the serious  
discipline of  
large sectors  
of the church  
on the basis  
of a non-  
biblical issue.**

**It can be argued that the real lesson to be gained from Acts 15 is one of unity in diversity, with Jewish and Gentile Christians having freedom to follow differing paths because the Holy Spirit fell in the same way on both groups.**

firm platform of the Bible-only as the rule of faith and practice. One of the unfortunate features of Roman Catholicism, and many other Christian movements in history, is that when they could not establish their claims from the Bible they were tempted to use threats and force, backed up by ecclesiastical authority.

At this point in our discussion of biblical authority we need to briefly examine two passages: the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, and the binding and loosening function of the church in Matthew 18:18. Those passages have become important due to their use in recent documents produced by the General Conference. In those documents, a favorite passage is Acts 15. A September 2016 document notes that “what is often called the ‘Jerusalem Council’ is significant almost as much for its process as for the theological decision that resulted.” The decision of the Council “was regarded as binding on churches everywhere.” And, we read, “in sum, the lesson of the Jerusalem Council is that, in the Church, *diversity of practice can be allowed, but only after a representative body has agreed to allow some variation.*”<sup>8</sup> That is an astounding conclusion, since *the lesson from the Jerusalem Council is exactly the opposite.* In Acts 15 the diversity had already been taking place. The Council met and validated that existing diversity, which previously had been blessed by the Holy Spirit.

But, as we will see, that reversal of fact is only one problematic aspect of the September 2016 document’s use of Acts 15, when viewed from the perspective of what has actually taken place in recent Adventist history. But before treating that history, it will be helpful to examine Ellen White’s remarks on the Council. In *Acts of the Apostles* she notes that “it was the voice of the highest authority upon the earth,” a descriptor she would later apply to General Conference sessions. Those words are also found in *The Story of Redemption*, where the section on the Council has the editorial title of “The First General Conference.” The section notes that the Council was called because the Jews did not believe that God would authorize a change from traditional prac-

tices. But, she concludes that “God Himself had decided this question by favoring the Gentiles with the Holy Ghost” to demonstrate the need for change. In short, God had given the Spirit to the Gentiles in the same manner that he had to the Jews.<sup>9</sup> Thus unity in diversity was approved.

The point about the Spirit settling the matter is an interesting one since at the 2015 General Conference session there was no testimony from female pastors regarding how the Holy Spirit had blessed their ministries in the same way as that of males: the very type of testimony that had led to breaking the deadlock over accepting Gentiles in Acts 15 (see vv. 8, 9), and had reinforced many members of the General Conference-appointed Theology of Ordination Study Committee to approve, by a strong majority, the concept of allowing those divisions that desired to ordain females to move forward. In that sense, the decision-making process of Acts 15 was not followed.

A further point to note is that in Acts 15 all of the decisions had a clear biblical base. The same cannot be said of the 2015 General Conference session vote, as we will see in our treatment of Adventism’s ecclesiological authority.

Several other points should be made in relation to Acts 15. First, Paul later opted not to follow the Council’s decision of Acts 15:20, 29 in regard to abstaining from food sacrificed to idols. That is evident from 1 Corinthians 10:23–30,<sup>10</sup> where in verses 25 and 27 he claims that it is permissible to eat meat offered to idols if it does not offend anyone, a ruling that goes directly against Acts 15 with its categorical prohibition. So we find Paul adding conditions and making exceptions based on cultural context. What Paul could have done was to announce that the first General Conference in session had passed a universal rule and that he had a copy of the letter to prove it. That would have solved the problem and saved Paul a lot of ink and explanation. In actuality, we do not find Paul in any of his letters referring to the Acts 15 Council, even though it could have been helpful to him.

A second point that should be noted is that the

Seventh-day Adventist Church does not follow the “universal” rulings of Acts 15:29, 20 in that it does not prohibit the eating of blood by requiring flesh eaters in its midst to eat only kosher meat that has been killed in the proper way, so that the blood is drained completely from it. So, we find the Adventists being similar to Paul in interpreting and discarding aspects of the ruling largely based on cultural considerations.

With those facts in mind, it can be argued that the real lesson to be gained from Acts 15 is one of unity in diversity, with Jewish and Gentile Christians having freedom to follow differing paths because the Holy Spirit fell in the same way on both groups.

Regarding Matthew 18, the September 2016 documents produced by the General Conference Secretariat claim that “Seventh-day Adventists believe the authority granted to the Church by Jesus enables Church leaders to make decisions that bind all members.” Such leadership decisions, the documents note, are made “at GC Sessions and Annual Councils.”<sup>11</sup>

That is an interesting perspective, especially in the light of the Roman Catholic Church usage of that passage, and its parallel in Matthew 16, to teach 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.”

The *Commentary’s* remark on the parallel passage in Matthew 16:19 is even clearer. Namely, the binding and loosening function of the church is “to require or to prohibit whatever Inspiration clearly reveals. But to go beyond this is to substitute human authority for the authority of Christ . . . a tendency that Heaven will not tolerate in those who have been appointed to the oversight of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven on earth.”<sup>13</sup> Ellen White makes the same point when she notes that “whatever the church

does that is in accordance with the directions given in God’s word will be ratified in heaven.”<sup>14</sup>

What is most interesting in the General Conference’s repeated use of the binding and loosening verses is that it consistently uses Matthew 18:18 and neglects Matthew 16:19. That is understandable since Matthew 16:18, 19 not only sets forth the binding function of the church but also contains Christ’s remark about Peter and the rock upon which Christ will build His church and the keys of the kingdom, making it the foundation of Roman Catholic ecclesiology. With that in mind, it is easier to see why the General Conference documents emphasize Matthew 18:18 but avoid the parallel passage. There is not much to be gained in using Catholicism’s favorite passage even if it makes the same essential point. But a fascinating aspect of the use of those verses is that both the Adventists in their recent documents and the Roman Catholics have misread the text in the same manner for similar ends.

One interesting point related to the General Conference’s use of Matthew 18 is that it is not the church that calls pastors but, according to Ephesians 4:11, God. All the earthly church can do is bind or ratify God’s decision through commissioning or ordaining. That is biblical, as is the laying on of hands in recognition of God’s call. What is not biblical is ordination as we know it. In fact, our English word “ordination” does not derive from “any Greek word used in the New Testament, but from the Latin *ordinare*.”<sup>15</sup> As a result, modern translations tend to use such words as “appoint” or “consecrate” where the KJV uses “ordain.”<sup>16</sup> *The word “ordination” as Adventists use it is not a biblical teaching but one that finds its roots in the early and early-medieval church.*<sup>17</sup> *From that perspective, the distinction between ordaining and commissioning is a word game of no biblical substance.*

### Ellen White’s Historical Approach to Authority

At the very heart of Ellen White’s understanding of religious authority was the place of the Bible. “The Bible,” she wrote, “must be our standard for

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every doctrine and practice. . . . We are to receive no one's opinion without comparing it with the Scriptures. Here is divine authority which is supreme in matters of faith. It is the word of the living God that is to decide all controversies."<sup>18</sup> That thought undergirded Ellen White's theology throughout her long ministry.

In regard to her own authority, she (as did the other founders of Adventism) regarded it as derived from the authority of Scripture and subservient to it. She pictured her relation to the Bible as "a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light."<sup>19</sup>

In many ways, the most enlightening episode regarding Ellen White's position on authority took place in relation to the 1888 General Conference session.<sup>20</sup> At that event she had to confront those pushing traditional Adventist perspectives at several levels of human authority. One approach was General Conference President G. I. Butler's self-perception of having "the highest position that our people could impose" and his claim of special rights and responsibilities in settling theological issues in the church. Ellen White made short shrift of that approach. Soon after the 1888 meetings, she wrote that Butler "thinks his position gives him such power that his voice is infallible." "No man is to be authority for us," she penned.<sup>21</sup>

A second approach she had to deal with was the attempt to use Adventist tradition to solve the biblical issues. She responded to that tactic by writing that "as a people we are certainly in great danger, if we are not constantly guarded, of considering our ideas, because long cherished, to be Bible doctrine and in every point infallible, and measuring everyone by the rule of our interpretation of Bible truth. This is our danger, and this would be the greatest evil that could ever come to us as a people."<sup>22</sup>

A third category of human authority she had to face in the 1888 era was the drive at the Minneapolis session to solve the theological and biblical issues by establishing the denomination's official position through a formal vote of the General Conference in session. As usual, Ellen White had words for the denomination on that topic. "The church," she penned, "may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord, but they cannot quench it and establish perfect agreement. Nothing can perfect unity in the church but the spirit of Christlike forbearance." W. C. White expressed his view regarding an official vote to settle the disputed issues by declaring to the Min-

neapolis delegates that he would feel compelled "to preach what he believed, whatever way the conference decided the question" at hand.<sup>23</sup>

Unrelated to the 1888 event, but intimately connected to the problem of churchly authority, is Ellen White's statement in *The Great Controversy* that "the very beginning of the great apostasy was in seeking to supplement the authority of God by that of the church."<sup>24</sup>

A second major topic related to Ellen White's historic view on authority has to do with the General Conference as God's highest authority on earth. That topic will be treated in the next major section of this paper, which deals with ecclesiastical authority in Adventism.

But before moving to that topic we need to examine briefly Ellen White's perspective on ordination. We noted earlier that ordination as practiced by the church is not a biblical issue. But according to Ellen White, it did become an important issue in the history of the early church. In treating the laying of hands on Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:3, she writes that God

*instructed the church . . . to set them apart publicly to the work of the ministry. Their ordination was a public recognition of their divine appointment. . . . [They] had already received their commission from God Himself, and the ceremony of the laying on of hands added no new grace or virtual qualification. . . . By it the seal of the church was set upon the work of God. . . . At a later date the rite of ordination by the laying on of hands was greatly abused; unwarrantable importance was attached to the act, as if a power came at once upon those who received such ordination.*<sup>25</sup>

In speaking of the same event in another place she says much the same thing, but adds that their ordination by the laying on of hands "was merely setting the seal of the church upon the work of God—an acknowledged form of designation to an appointed office."<sup>26</sup>

By speaking of abuse of the term "ordination" in the church, Ellen White is undoubtedly referring in part to the sacerdotal approach to the authority of the priesthood conferred by ordination that gave them such power as to transform the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ. But more to the point is the hierarchical power of the higher clergy, in which excessive authority has traditionally been granted to bishops with special headship function as fathers of the church. Such power is



conferred through the “sacrament of holy orders or ordination.”<sup>27</sup>

Given the amount of heat generated in some Adventist circles on the topic of ordination, one might surmise that somehow power and authority is being transferred to the ordinand. While that might do for Roman Catholic theology, it does not hold up in either the Bible or Ellen White. To the contrary, just as baptism does not erase original sin but is rather an outward symbol of a changed heart, and just as the bread and the wine are not magically transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ in the sacrifice of the Mass but are rather symbols of what Christ accomplished on the cross, so it is that the laying on of hands in what has come to be called ordination does not confer power but is symbolic in recognition of the power already conferred by God in the calling and empowerment of a pastor. *What counts is not the act of ordination but the calling of God.* And the Seventh-day Adventist Church has for many years recognized that God calls both men and women to pastoral ministry. The only difference is that the church has opted to call one ordination and the other commissioning. Such non-biblical verbal gymnastics must lead the angels to scratch their heads in bewilderment. However, it all seems to be clear in Adventist policy.

But at least Ellen White is forthright on the topic. No power or authority is transferred in ordination. That is a product of the history of the church. And, in the words of the Revelator, much of the Christian world seems to be following after the beast (Rev. 13:3, NKJV) on the understanding and importance of ordination.

## Historical Issues in Adventism’s Approach to Ecclesiology

So far, this paper has examined Adventism’s approach to biblical authority and Ellen White’s historical approach to authority. Thus, the stage has been set for an examination of the denomination’s struggle to find and be faithful to a balanced and biblical view of ecclesiastical authority.

## The Earliest Adventists and Ecclesiastical Authority: 1843–1863

Looking back at early Adventism, no one could have predicted that, by the mid-twentieth century, Seventh-day Adventism would be the most highly structured denomination in the history of Christianity, with four levels of authority above the local congregation.<sup>28</sup> The plain fact is that the earliest Adventists feared structured churches. And with good reason. That fear is nicely expressed in the October 1861 meeting that saw the establishment of the first local conference. Part of the discussion at that historic meeting had to do with developing a formal statement of belief. John Loughborough took the lead in the discussion and laid out five progressive points that nicely express the attitude of most of his audience.

- “The first step of apostasy,” he noted, “is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe.
- The second is, to make that creed a test of fellowship.
- The third is to try members by that creed.
- The fourth to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed.
- And, fifth, to commence persecution against such.”<sup>29</sup>

James White also expressed his fears. “Making a creed,” he wrote, “is setting the stakes, and barring up the way to all future advancement.” Those churches that had set up creeds,

*have marked out a course for the Almighty. They say virtually that the Lord must not do anything further than what has been marked out in the creed. . . . The Bible is our creed. We reject everything in the form of a human creed. We take the Bible and the gifts of the Spirit, embracing the faith that thus the Lord will teach us from time to time. And in this we take a position against the formation of a creed. We are not taking one step, in what we are doing, toward becoming Babylon [as oppression].<sup>30</sup>*

**Butler “thinks  
his position  
gives him such  
power that  
his voice is  
infallible.”**

**“No man is to  
be authority  
for us.”**

**Both of the major innovations adopted by the 1901 General Conference session were in response to regional mission and both were developed in opposition to General Conference counsel.**

Those points are informative to those of us who live 150 years later. While White feared a backward-looking rigidity that would inhibit the progressive dynamic in what the early Adventist's thought of as an ongoing present truth, Loughborough expressed fear of persecution for those who did not line up with official positions.

And the participants in that 1861 meeting had good reasons to fear organized religious bodies. Fresh in their memories was the persecution of Millerites in 1843 and 1844 as pastors lost their pulpits and followers their memberships because of their belief in the Bible's teaching on Second Advent. They had come to see organized religion in terms of the persecuting Babylon of the books of Daniel and Revelation. It was no accident that Millerite George Storrs wrote in early 1844 that "no church can be organized by man's invention but what it becomes Babylon *the moment it is organized.*" In the same article Storrs asserted that Babylon "is the *old mother* and all her children [the Protestant denominations]; who are known by the family likeness, a domineering, lordly spirit; a spirit to suppress a free search after truth, and a free expression of our conviction of what is truth."<sup>31</sup> Charles Fitch had been of the same opinion in his famous sermon calling Millerites to come out of Babylon, the fallen denominations.<sup>32</sup>

It was the fear of Babylon as persecuting churches that kept any of the six major groups that came out of the Millerite movement from organizing before the 1850s and 1860s. And none but the Sabbatarian Adventists would ever organize above the congregational level.<sup>33</sup>

The fear of organized denominations as persecuting Babylon stands at the foundation of early Adventist attitudes in regard to organizing as a church. But, in the 1850s, James White began to emphasize an alternate biblical meaning of Babylon. In July 1859, he let it be known in the most descriptive language that he was sick and tired of the cry of Babylon every time that anyone mentioned organization.

*Bro. Confusion, makes a most egregious blunder in calling system, which is in harmony with the Bible and good sense, Babylon. As Babylon signifies confusion, our erring brother has the very word stamped upon his own forehead. And we venture to say that there is not another people under heaven more worthy of the brand of Babylon than those professing the Advent faith who reject Bible order. Is it not high time that we as a people heartily embrace everything that is good and right in the churches?*<sup>33</sup>

It is impossible to overestimate the force of White's redirection of the emphasis from Babylon being primarily seen as persecution to that of confusion. That new emphasis went far toward paving the way for the Sabbatarians to organize as a religious body, legally own property, pay pastors on a regular basis, assign pastors to locations where they were needed, and develop a system for transferring membership. In the end, developing church organization had one major end. Namely, to expedite the mission of the denomination.

But the redefinition of Babylon was only one of the transformations that allowed the Sabbatarian Adventists to organize. A second essential transformation had to do with moving beyond the biblical literalism of White's earlier days, when he believed that the Bible must explicitly spell out each aspect of church organization. In 1859, he argued that "we should not be afraid of that system which is not opposed by the Bible, and is approved by sound sense."<sup>35</sup> *Thus he had come to a new hermeneutic. White had moved from a principle of Bible interpretation that held that the only things Scripture allowed were those things it explicitly approved to a hermeneutic that allowed for developments that did not contradict the Bible and were in harmony with common sense. That shift was absolutely essential to moving forward in the creative steps in church organization that he would advocate in the 1860s.*

That revised hermeneutic, however, put White in opposition to those who maintained a literalistic approach to the Bible that demanded that it explicitly spell something out before the church could accept it. To answer that mentality, White noted that nowhere in the Bible did it

say that Christians should have a weekly paper, a steam printing press, build places of worship, or publish books. He went on to argue that the “living church of God” needed to move forward with prayer and common sense.<sup>36</sup>

Without the radical shift in hermeneutical principles there would have been no organization among the Sabbatarians above the local congregation. But the new hermeneutic allowed them not only to organize but to create a structure that made it possible to take their unique message to the ends of the earth. Mission, we must note again, was always behind the Adventist mentality as it sought to dynamically move forward on the basis of a hermeneutic that allowed those things that did not contradict the Bible and were in harmony with common sense.

With the new hermeneutic and the new definition of Babylon in place, the Sabbatarians were in position to develop the non-biblical concept of local conferences in 1861 and the equally non-biblical concept of a General Conference in 1863. That last move was “for the purpose of securing unity and efficiency in labor, and promoting the general interests of the cause of present truth, and of perfecting the organization of the Seventh-day Adventists.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Ecclesiastical Tensions and the Creation of Unions: 1863–1903**

As might be expected, tensions eventually developed between the authority of the local conferences and that of the General Conference. In August 1873, for example, 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>38</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 ex-

ception, *unless they can be shown to conflict with the word of God and the rights of individual conscience.*”<sup>39</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.”

Interestingly, Ellen White on several occasions questioned whether the rulings of the General Conference were always the voice of God. 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>40</sup> Again, in 1896, she noted that the General Conference “is no longer the voice of God.”<sup>41</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 that it was almost blasphemy. The voice of the conference ought to be the voice of God, but it is not.”<sup>42</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>43</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 delegates 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*

**What counts  
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of ordination  
but the calling  
of God.**

*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>44</sup>

The second round of organizational refinement took place between 1901 and 1903,<sup>45</sup> when several major changes were made. The two most important were the replacement of the autonomous auxiliary organizations (such as those that controlled education, publishing, medical, Sabbath school, and so on) with the departmental system, and the development of union conferences to stand as intermediary administrative units between the General Conference and the local conferences. Both of those innovations had been experimented with in South Africa and Australia before the 1901 session. Both of them had been developed in response to regional mission needs, and both were developed in opposition to General Conference pronouncements and procedures.

General Conference President O. A. Olsen thought he saw “elements of danger” in the departmental systems and told A. T. Robinson in South Africa not to develop departments.<sup>46</sup> But it was too late. Because of the large amount of time it took to communicate from North America, Robinson had instituted the program and found out that it worked.

It is of interest that the General Conference leadership also opposed the creation of union conferences.<sup>47</sup> But W. C. White and A. G. Daniells, president and secretary of the Australian field, moved forward in spite of counsel from headquarters. 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>48</sup>

*Here we need to remember an important lesson in the history of Adventist organization. Namely, that both of the major innovations adopted by the 1901 General Conference session were in response to*

*regional mission and both were developed in opposition to General Conference counsel. But they worked. The major lesson is that without the freedom to experiment, Adventism would not have its present system of organization.*

Ellen White was overjoyed with the development of union conferences. In calling for reform on the first day of the 1901 session she noted to the delegates 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>49</sup> At the 1903 session she declared that “it has been a necessity to organize union conferences, that the General Conference shall not exercise dictation over all the separate conferences.”<sup>50</sup>

On the basis of those and other comments, 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 GC.”<sup>51</sup>

“To put it 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 whoever they wanted as president.*<sup>52</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.

The situation looked good in 1901 with the union conferences in place. But the push for both unity and uniformity by the General Conference over time would erode the accomplishments of 1901. The most significant move



along that line, as we will see, took place at the 1995 General Conference session.

The erosion of the ideal of unity in diversity had, unfortunately, already begun soon after the 1901 session. The following two years would witness a major struggle for the control of Adventism between General Conference President A. G. Daniells and J. H. Kellogg, the powerful leader of the denomination's medical work.

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>53</sup> In 1901 and 1902, Daniells had championed that ideal, noting in 1902 to the European Union Conference that just "because a thing is done 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>54</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. In that struggle, the Kellogg/Jones forces pushed 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 Barry Oliver points out, unity at the expense of diversity has been the focus of the General Conference leadership ever since the 1902 crisis.<sup>55</sup>

The only significant development in Adventist church structure since 1901/1903 took place in 1918 with the creation of world divisions of the General Conference. But it should be noted that the divisions are not conferences with their own constituencies but parts of the General Conference administration that represent the central body in various parts of the world.<sup>56</sup>

An ongoing temptation of the General Conference throughout its history has been to overstep the bounds of its authority. General Conference President George I. Butler generated one of the boldest moves in that direction in 1873. "Never," he penned on the first page of his

little book titled *Leadership*, was there a "great movement in this world without a leader. . . . As nature bestows upon men a variety of gifts, it follows that some have clearer views than others of what best advances the interests of any cause. And the best good of all interested in any given object will be attained by intelligently following the counsels of those best qualified to guide." Butler had no doubt that James White had played a role akin to that of Moses, and that in all matters of expediency in the Adventist cause it was right "to give his [White's] judgment the preference."<sup>57</sup> The 1873 General Conference session officially adopted Butler's ideas. But both of the Whites eventually felt uncomfortable with the document and wrote against many of its principles.<sup>58</sup> As a result, the 1875 and 1877 sessions rescinded the endorsement, especially those sections dealing with leadership being "confined to any one man."<sup>59</sup>

Kevin Burton, in his recent MA thesis on Butler's *Leadership*, did an excellent job of demonstrating that Butler wrote with James White as the leader he had in mind. But the self-imposed scope of Burton's research did not allow for the demonstration that Butler's style and claims in the 1873 document mirror his own style and claims in the 1888 conflict.<sup>60</sup> On October 1, 1888, Butler wrote a long letter to Ellen White repeatedly emphasizing that he had "the highest position" in the denomination and should have the rights that go with that position. She replied to him on October 14 that he did "not understand [his] true position," that he had "false ideas of what belonged to [his] position," that he had turned his "mind into wrong channels," that he had "not kept pace with the opening providence of God," and that he had mingled his "natural traits of character" with his work. *Most serious of all the charges was that he was seeking to manipulate the information that would come before the 1888 General Conference session.* Speaking to the General Conference president and Uriah Smith (the secretary), she wrote that "you must not think that the Lord has placed you in the position that you now occupy as the only men who are to decide

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Catholicism.

as to whether any more light and truth shall come to God's people." She noted in this letter and others that Butler's influence had led other session delegates to also "disregard light."<sup>61</sup>

A broad study of the 1888 crisis indicates that the most serious problem troubling the Minneapolis meeting was the high-handed assertions of position and manipulation of data by the president and his colleagues.<sup>62</sup> It should be noted in passing that the theme of Butler's 1873 *Leadership* was "union" and "order."<sup>63</sup> Unity was the goal in that document and the same preservation of unity would be Butler's goal in the manipulation of data in the 1888 period.

Butler, as we know, lost the 1888 struggle. He had sought to impose not only unity but theological uniformity on the denomination. But Ellen White pushed against him with the alternate ideal of unity in diversity. She was, the General Conference's newly elected secretary reported in 1890, not so much interested in theological unity as she was in the unity of having a Christlike spirit built on brotherly love.<sup>64</sup>

The major lesson to flow out of the 1888 crisis is unity in diversity. That same principle would undergird the reform of church structures in 1901. As we saw earlier, the unity in diversity ideal had begun to run into major difficulties in 1902 when Daniells began to assert his authority as General Conference president in his struggle with Kellogg. At that point, diversity began to take a back seat to unity and Ellen White, in 1903, had to warn the reforming General Conference president that he could not "exercise a kingly power over [his] brethren."<sup>65</sup>

#### **Removal of the Union Conference Firewall: 1980–2016**

In spite of Daniells' temptation to wrongly use the power of his office, the balance between unity and diversity institutionalized by the creation of union conferences fared tolerably well for most of the twentieth century. In his summary of that period, Gerry Chudleigh notes that the constitutions and bylaws created and voted at the 1901 session for the first unions "contained no requirement that the unions adopt or

follow GC policies, procedures, programs, initiatives, etc."<sup>66</sup>

But that would begin to change in the legal documents of the denomination in the 1980s and come to a climax in the 1990s and the first two decades of the twenty-first century. The 1980s witnessed the development by the General Conference of a "Model Union Conference Constitution and Bylaws." In 1985, the *Working Policy* stated that the model should be "followed as closely as possible." But by 1995, the same section would note that the model "shall be followed by all union conferences. . . . Those sections of the model bylaws that appear in bold print are essential to the unity of the Church worldwide, and shall be included in the bylaws as adopted by each union conference. Other sections of the model may be modified." In 1985 the model stipulated that all "**purposes and procedures**" of the unions would be in harmony with the "**working policies and procedures**" of the General Conference. By 1995 General Conference "**programs and initiatives**" had been added. And in 2000 all "**policies**" was included. All of those additions were in bold print.<sup>67</sup> Thus, between 1985 and 2000, the *Working Policy* not only erased the 1901 model of unity in diversity set forth for unions in the Ellen White-led drive for decentralization, but had become progressively more engineered toward centralization of authority in a drive for unity with less and less diversity.

The challenge for the General Conference in the mid-eighties was to get existing union conferences to adopt the new model. In that, they succeeded in some unions and failed in others.

The case of the North Pacific Union opens a window into the dynamics. In September 1986, it rejected the model. But perhaps the most significant event connected to that rejection was the reading of General Conference president Neal Wilson's letter to the delegates. Wilson made it clear that the General Conference was the "highest authority in the church" and that it had the authority to create subordinate organizations. He then chastised the

North Pacific Union for having two years before created its own constitution that was not in harmony with the model. He also threatened the noncompliant union, claiming that he saw “the only other option” to be an investigation “to determine whether [the] union . . . is operating within the spirit and guidelines established for union conferences, with the understanding that appropriate action will be taken in the case of organizations that do not measure up to the standard.”<sup>68</sup>

That unvarnished threat indicates that the type of actions threatened by the General Conference in 2016 have a history. And that history is solidly rooted in the tightening up of the relationship between union conferences and the General Conference in the modified *Working Policy*.

The 1990s would witness the move by the General Conference leadership to centralize its authority move into high gear. Robert Folkenberg, the new General Conference president, faced with the important but daunting task of maintaining order in a massive world church, established in 1991 the Commission on World Church Organization, which met several times until its work was completed in 1994. The successful aspects of the Commission’s work went to the 1995 General Conference session. Others fell by the wayside. All of them were aimed at the centralization of authority.

Among those that fell by the wayside was an attempt to take away the exclusive right of local congregations to disfellowship members. The stimulus for the move was the fact that Des Ford of Glacier View fame and John Osborne of Prophecy Countdown still held church membership in sympathetic congregations that would not disfellowship them. Osborne’s case is interesting since, although he lived in Florida, his membership, being threatened there, had been rescued by the Troy, Montana, church where he had never lived. At that point, those in the General Conference who wanted action threatened to disband the church. I still remember getting a late-evening phone call from one of the congre-

gation’s leaders telling me that they had an ultimatum: either disfellowship Osborne or face dissolution as an Adventist church. The congregation was disbanded, but Osborne’s membership had been rescued by the Village Church in Angwin, California. Interestingly enough, it was the Pacific Union College Church in the same city that held Ford’s membership. Neither congregation responded to the call to disfellowship the men. But the solution seemed obvious—give higher levels of the church structure the prerogative of disfellowshipping local church members.<sup>69</sup> Ideally, the idea ran, the same sort of logic could be used to remove ministerial credentials and disband congregations. Thus the “higher” levels would have more control over situations that they believed the lower levels were not handling correctly.

Bert Haloviak, General Conference archivist at the time, notes that he, Paul Gordon of the White Estate, and a member of the Biblical Research Institute were summoned to Folkenberg’s office and each asked to write a paper with the “hidden agenda” of supporting some of the General Conference’s initiatives. The Institute’s paper was written by Raoul Dederen of Andrews University. All three papers, although written independently and from different perspectives, concluded that the General Conference did not have grounding to do such things as disfellowshipping members. I recall Dederen, a colleague of mine at the time with specialties in ecclesiology and Roman Catholic theology, having remarked at the Cohutta Springs meeting of March 1993 that some of the proposed initiatives were in essence the revival of medieval Catholicism.<sup>70</sup>

The most successful aspects of the Commission’s recommendations saw passage at the 1995 General Conference session. That session not only witnessed a further tightening of the control measures embedded in the model constitutions, but also passed legislation that allowed for noncompliant unions, conferences, and missions to be disbanded if they did not come into line with General Conference poli-

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power  
structure.**

**The major event of the 2015 session, of course, was the vote to not allow divisions the option of ordaining female pastors.**

cies and initiatives. Since 1995, the General Conference *Working Policy* has contained a new section titled “Discontinuation of Conferences, Missions, Unions, and Unions of Churches by Dissolution and/or Expulsion.”<sup>71</sup> Utilizing the ever more centralizing requirements of the model constitution, the new section (B 95) proclaims the power to disband any union, conference, or mission that is out of harmony with General Conference policy. With what has become policy B 95 in place, the General Conference had arrived at the point where it could threaten the existence of two North American Division unions in September and October 2016.

Meanwhile, the measures attempted in the early nineties had met a fair amount of resistance both in committees and at Annual Council meetings. Susan Sickler, a member of the Governance Commission, saw it as a “huge power grab,” while Herman Bauman, Arizona Conference president, said that the essence of the commission report could be spelled “with the letters C-O-N-T-R-O-L.” One General Conference staffer quipped in a private conversation that “What the Catholic Church took 300 years to achieve, we are doing in 150.”<sup>72</sup>

Folkenberg, on the other hand, “kept saying this was in no way a centralization of power.” In response, one NAD union president noted to the Commission that “if it walks like a duck and it quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck.” Neal Wilson, who had his own issues with his successor, aggressively supported those who saw the issue as centralization.<sup>73</sup>

Ted Wilson, then president of the division encompassing Russia, was reported to have said at a commission meeting that he would have difficulty getting some of the recommendations accepted in a country that had just exited communism.<sup>74</sup> That, needless to say, was a pertinent insight that might have meaning in 2017 for those who understand the significance of the Protestant Reformation.

One final point needs to be made in regard to the Governance Commission. Namely, that

some person or persons “high up” in the General Conference apparently manipulated the data so that the final form of the commission report did not line up with what was voted. Folkenberg did not indicate “how and why it came into final form without discussion and a vote from the commission.”<sup>75</sup> The manipulation of data would reappear in 2015.

We now move to the 2015 General Conference session as a final building block that led up to the noncompliance threat issued at the 2016 Annual Council. The major event of the 2015 session, of course, was the vote to not allow divisions the option of ordaining female pastors. That action is clear enough. But the way it took place leaves open the question of whether the action represents a “voice of God” vote enacted by the General Conference in session.

To grasp the significance of that issue we need to go to the early presidency of Ted Wilson, when he established the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC). This worldwide panel of over 100 scholars and non-scholars, who had a burden on the topic met in 2013 and 2014 with the aim of informing the church on ordination issues at a scholarly level so that an informed vote could take place in 2015.<sup>76</sup> The study cost the denomination hundreds of thousands of dollars. As the General Conference Secretariat noted, “voices from around the world from all sides were heard; the arguments and supporting documents of all perspectives were made freely available online. . . . The process was unmatched in both breadth and depth.”<sup>77</sup> All those points are true and were included in a document that suggested penalties for those unions that had not come into line with the 2015 vote. All of this is forcefully outlined in a document entitled “A Study of Church Governance and Unity” developed by the General Conference Secretariat in September 2016.

But, unfortunately, the “Study” in actuality set the stage for disunity in that it inflated the document’s value for its own purposes but did not report the findings of TOSC. That maneuver is merely the tip of a nasty iceberg.



As impossible as it seems after having spent so much money and time on the project, the results of TOSC were never clearly presented to the General Conference session at the time of the vote. And for good reason. Apparently, TOSC's consensus did not support the desired conclusions of certain individuals at the top of the denominational power structure.<sup>78</sup> Thus the 2015 delegates were not informed that a supermajority of two-thirds (62 for and 32 opposed) of the members of TOSC was in favor of allowing divisions to make the choice on whether to ordain female pastors.<sup>79</sup> In addition, the delegates were not informed that at least nine<sup>80</sup> of the thirteen divisions of the church in their TOSC reports were favorable toward letting each division make its own decision on female ordination. Nor did the final TOSC report present that data. It did, however, present the positions of three distinct groupings of delegates that developed during TOSC's two-year journey. But the delegates at the 2015 session were not explicitly informed that two of those orientations were in favor of each division making its own choice.<sup>81</sup>

Had the actual findings of TOSC been reported, the vote, in all probability, would have been different. After all, a 10 percent shift in the vote would have changed the outcome. The final tally at the General Conference session in San Antonio was 977 (42%) in favor of flexibility in ordination to 1,381 against, a remarkably close vote considering how the process was handled.

Not the least of the problems associated with the vote was the non-neutrality of the General Conference president, who reminded the session delegates on voting day that they knew his position on the topic (which was clearly understood to be against the ordination of women). That non-neutrality was bad enough, but it was stated with the full knowledge that a significant majority of TOSC, a committee that he had authorized to solve the problem, had concluded to recommend that divisions should have the right to ordain females if they chose to do so.<sup>82</sup> And

in a world church in which the vast majority of the delegates come from tribal and Roman Catholic cultures, a word from the denomination's top administrator has significance. The Norwegian Union Conference made an important point when it suggested that if unity was high on the agenda of the General Conference president, he could have clearly reported the findings of TOSC and called for a solution in line with its results.<sup>83</sup>

At this point the widespread "disgust" expressed by a significant number of the TOSC membership at the reversal of the General Conference president should be noted for the record. At the beginning of the meetings, when it apparently looked like the carefully selected participants would come up with the "correct" conclusion, he spoke to the committee on the importance of their work, that it was not merely another investigation into a much-studied topic but that their findings would make a difference. But when the majority recommendation went the other way, he intimated at the final meeting that it was largely a North American committee and that if it had been a world committee the decision would have been different. He was reminded publicly that although many of the members were working in North America, they were in fact from around the world. But to no avail. The findings of the committee seem at that point to have become not so important and were marginalized at the 2015 session.<sup>84</sup>

There were also serious irregularities in the 2015 voting, but this is not the place to discuss them.<sup>85</sup> On the other hand, it should be pointed out that no matter how the vote turned out or how it could have turned out, the procedure itself suffered from the suppression and manipulation of data. This is a serious charge to make, but there is no alternative in the face of the handling of the TOSC findings and the ongoing misuse of them in General Conference documents, which trumpet the importance of the study without reporting its results.<sup>86</sup>

William Johnsson, retired editor of the *Adventist Review*, has pointed out that 2015 will go

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down in history as the most divisive General Conference session since 1888.<sup>87</sup> And he is correct. What is interesting is that in both sessions, top people in the General Conference manipulated data. In the 1888 era it was President G. I. Butler, who Ellen White faulted for his desire to decide what information came to the delegates.<sup>88</sup> One can only guess who decided to suppress and manipulate the reporting of the findings of TOSC in 2015, but the only possibility is a few people near the top of the General Conference structure.

The significance of the manipulation and suppression of crucial data that had been produced at immense expense for the purpose of informing the church has vast implications, especially since Ellen White, as we saw earlier, repeatedly claimed in the 1890s that she no longer held that the General Conference was the voice of God because its decisions were really the decisions of a few men. That is exactly what we find in the events leading up to the vote in San Antonio. A few people decided what information went to the delegates. Even the General Conference's "Study of Church Governance and Unity" document pointed out that Ellen White was upset when "two or three men" tried to control the church's mission or when "merely a half a dozen" at the world headquarters "sought 'to be a ruling and controlling power.'" The "Study" document was correct in its use of that inspired material. But it was dead wrong when it claimed that what happened in the late 1800s "is a world away from the situation today."<sup>89</sup> It was actually the same situation and dynamic, with a few people in their decision-making capacity controlling information and events. As a result, from the perspective of Ellen White's writings, we do not have a voice of God vote from the world church in 2015. Instead, we have the same old manipulation and kingly power approaches that she detested in 1888 and the 1890s.

And the manipulation was not merely of data, but also of process. Here one example

must suffice. The General Conference documents uplift the Acts 15 conference "almost as much for its *process* as for the theological decision that resulted," but that appreciation was not evident in San Antonio. For one thing, the General Conference documents do not describe the Acts 15 process. Rather, they infer that the process was voting to be followed by mandatory obedience.<sup>90</sup> But Acts 15 outlines not only the actual process but also the essential tipping point in that process. The breakthrough in Acts 15 truly was based on process and came when Peter was able to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles but came in the same way to both groups (Acts 15:8, 9). Without that evidence there would have been nothing but ongoing divisiveness. With it there was healing and unity. What would have happened in San Antonio if the process utilized in Acts 15 had been used on the day of the vote? There would have been testimonies from people put on the program that demonstrated that the Holy Spirit fell upon the pastoral/evangelistic ministries of women in the same way as for men. Such testimonies were important in the final TOSC meeting and helped lead to a significant majority of the participants, despite their personal position on women's ordination, to approve flexibility in the practice of ordaining women.<sup>91</sup> But the few people who set up the procedure in San Antonio chose not to follow the Acts 15 model, even though the "Study of Church Governance" documents cite that passage to bolster the General Conference's authoritative position.

Much more could be said about the manipulation of data and process in the events related to the 2015 vote. But the illustrations are many and my time is short. The final conclusion is that the vote settled nothing. But it did divide the denomination in ways that are tragic. Here some wisdom from James and Ellen White would have helped. James had written in 1874 that "creed power has been called to the rescue [of church unity] in vain. It has been truly said

that 'The American people are a nation of lords.' In a land of boasted freedom of thought and of conscience, like ours, *church force cannot produce unity; but has caused divisions*, and has given rise to religious sects and parties almost innumerable."<sup>92</sup>

His wife was of the same opinion. "The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions," she penned in 1892, "but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord, but they cannot quench it and establish perfect agreement."<sup>93</sup> From her perspective, only the clear word of Scripture could bring true unity.

Christ made a pertinent point when He proclaimed that he who has ears needs to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 3:22, RSV). I once heard a very wise man say that those who like to quote Ellen White should listen to all she has to say and not just use her to get across their own goals. Here are two selections that have been relevant throughout Adventism's ongoing struggle over authority. In 1895, she penned that *the high-banded power that has been developed, as 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 recommend that the "only safe course is to remove" such leaders since "all ye are brethren," lest "great harm be done."<sup>94</sup>

Another fascinating insight comes from the *Testimonies*.

*One man's mind and judgment are not to be considered capable of controlling and molding a conference. . . . The president of a conference must not consider that his individual judgment is to control the judgment of all. . . .*

Many, very many matters have been taken up and carried by vote, that have involved far more than was anticipated and far more than those who voted would have been willing to

assent to had they taken the time to consider the question from all sides.<sup>95</sup>

In that quotation we find some excellent advice for Adventist decision makers as they approach the 2017 Annual Council.

### So Where Are We in 2017?

Since the problem that has developed in the past few years is over women's ordination, I should briefly comment on the topic.

- It is not prohibited in the Bible.
- It is not prohibited in Ellen White's writings.
- The General Conference *Working Policy* does not stipulate a gender requirement.<sup>96</sup>
- It is not a settled issue because of the suppression of information and the manipulation of the process in 2015.
- Its practice will not stop, because there is no biblical evidence for doing so.
- Its prohibition cannot be settled by a vote alone. Adventist leaders need to refrain from seeking to use policy as if it were Catholicism's Canon Law. We need to remember that Adventism is post-Reformation.

It is true that in 1990 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>97</sup> That vote, we should note, did not claim that the practice was wrong. It was not a theological vote, but one based on the practical grounds that it might cause disunity. That was twenty-seven years ago and the denomination has discovered that unity can be fractured in more than one direction. The plain fact, in 2017, is that the church is seriously divided on women's ordination. But it probably would not be if the conclusions generated by the TOSC committee had not been suppressed at San Antonio, if the process in Acts 15 had been utilized at the session, and if the General Conference leadership would have used the findings of TOSC as a tool to bring unity and healing to the church.

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But that healing approach did not take place. As a result, a small group at denominational headquarters decided to exert what it believed to be its authority in September and October 2016, months that witnessed the apex of the evolution of Adventist ecclesiological authority and the continuation of the problematic results that both James and Ellen White had predicted from the use of such authority. The initial September recommendation, formulated in the presidential offices, utilized the *Working Policy* rulings developed in the 1980s and 1990s to centralize authority. Especially important was B 95, voted into policy at the 1995 session, which authorized the “dissolution” of noncompliant union conferences that were not in harmony with General Conference policy. That initial document, whose basic content was leaked to *Spectrum*, urged the disbanding of the offending unions and reconstituting them as missions attached to the General Conference. That way the union leaders could be removed and replaced and constituency meetings could be called to reverse the ordination votes.<sup>98</sup> My sources, many of whom requested confidentiality in the present intimidating and threatening denominational climate,<sup>99</sup> tell me that the initial proposal, which did not have widespread input, was withdrawn and all copies were collected by the General Conference president.

What eventually came out of a complex process was the document generated by the Secretariat titled “A Study of Church Governance and Unity.” This is not the place to critique that document,<sup>100</sup> but its existence points to an interesting paradox. Namely, that the move by General Conference headquarters in Silver Spring to correct the noncompliant unions is out of harmony with the General Conference’s own policy. Mitchell Tyner, retired Associate General Counsel to the General Conference, brought that issue to my attention. He points out that the denomination’s top administrators in September and October 2016 set about to approve a policy for dealing with noncompliant union conferences, in spite of the fact that such a policy already existed. According to B 95 15, all such moves in regard to noncompliant unions are to be initiated by the division. And if the division executive committee determines that a union conference/union of churches with conference status is in apostasy or rebellion and should be expelled from the world sisterhood

of unions, the division shall refer the matter to the General Conference Executive Committee.<sup>101</sup>

With a clear procedure already in the *Working Policy*, Tyner, with his legal training, wondered out loud why anybody would want to create a new policy. The most likely answer, he points out, “would seem to be that B 95 wasn’t exactly what the initiator(s) of this episode wanted to do.”<sup>102</sup>

*To put it bluntly, the General Conference presidential offices had to step outside of policy to make its case for punishing those it deemed to be outside of policy. After all, the Working Policy spells out in unmistakable language that dissolution of unions must begin at the division level. But if the division is not likely to come up with the “proper” answer, alternatives must be used. The selected alternative, in this case, was for presidential to step outside of policy to accomplish the task. So we have a case of blatant noncompliance with the Working Policy to punish noncompliance.*

Obviously, what is needed is a new policy that allows the General Conference president to initiate actions against anybody deemed deserving of such attention. Such a policy, of course, would be a major step toward papalism and unrestricted kingly power.

Tyner points out that General Conference officers “more than once have chosen to ignore policy if it seems the best thing to do, as though policy is optional, not mandatory. *This is a bit like Richard Nixon’s position that if the president does it, it isn’t illegal.*”<sup>103</sup>

That rather pregnant thought brings us to 2017, during which the Annual Council is to act on the fate of those lower rungs in the organization who are to be dealt with for their own noncompliance on women’s ordination. To put it mildly, the leadership of the General Conference has backed itself into an extraordinary situation in the evolution (or revolution) in Adventist authority.

Perhaps at this point in our story we might benefit from a word from the originator of Adventist church structure, who claimed in 1874 that “organization was designed to secure unity of action, and as a protection from imposture. It was never intended as a scourge to compel obedience, but, rather, for the protection of the people of God.” Interestingly, James White published that exact statement at least twice, but with different comments each time. In 1874, he added that “church force cannot press the church into one body. This has been tried, and has proved a failure.”<sup>104</sup> And, in 1880, he added that



those who drew the plan of our church, Conferences, and General Conference organizations, labored to guard the precious flock of God against the influence of those who might, in a greater or less degree, assume the leadership. They were not ignorant of the evils and abuses which had existed in many of the churches of the past, where men had assumed the position which belongs to Jesus Christ, or had accepted it at the hands of their short-sighted brethren.<sup>105</sup>

And if we need a bit more from his wife, we should recall her statement that the church should think through all the possible consequences of any voted action before legislation is enacted.<sup>106</sup>

With those thoughts in mind we need to remember that the medieval Catholic Church never viewed itself as persecuting anybody. It was just making sure that people were in line with Canon Law, its version of the *Working Policy*.

It has been a long journey, but this paper must be brought to a conclusion. A little bit of history demonstrates that Adventism's ideas on church authority have come a long way in 150 years. James Standish, formerly of the Religious Liberty department of the General Conference, has written that "as a movement, we are drifting very dangerously into the hierarchicalism, formalism and dogmatism that our pioneers explicitly rejected."<sup>107</sup>

Along that line, we need to remember that part of James White's strategy in getting Adventists to organize in the first place was to help them see that the biblical use of the word "Babylon" not only signified persecution, but also confusion. White sold them on the second meaning. But it appears that the denomination is now intent on resurrecting the first. Of course, given the noncompliance of the General Conference with its own policy, perhaps both meanings are in evidence in 2017.

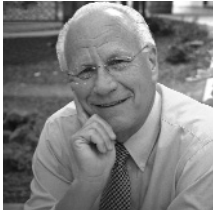
In the spirit of Luther Year and the General Conference president's call to be faithful to the principles of the Reformation, I am offering my own 9.5 Theses (I do not have time for 95). But first I want to point out that there are times for soft

words. But there comes a time, as Martin Luther discovered, for firm ones. Like Luther, I love my church and hope for its reformation. I believe that Luther wrote his propositions with love in his heart. And I can assure you that I do the same. I really desire to see healing. Here are my 9.5.

### 9.5 Theses<sup>108</sup>

1. The only basis for Christian unity is Scripture, trust, and the love of God.
2. The *Church Manual* makes it clear that the General Conference is the "highest authority" for the world church, "under God."<sup>109</sup>
3. It is God who calls pastors. All the church can do is to recognize God's call by the laying on of hands.
4. Ordination is not a biblical topic. (The passages using the word in the KJV generally mean to appoint or consecrate.) From the position of the Bible there is absolutely no difference between ordaining and commissioning.
5. For Adventists the Bible is the only source for doctrine and practice. An appeal to policy is not an appeal to the Bible. A vote by a General Conference session is not equivalent to Bible evidence.
6. On issues not definitively settled in the Bible, James White utilized the only possible way forward in unity of mission when he moved from a hermeneutic that stipulated that practices must be expressly spelled out in the Bible to a hermeneutic that held that practices were permissible if they did not contradict Scripture and were in harmony with common sense. (The new hermeneutic made it possible for the Sabbatarian Adventists to organize as a denomination.)<sup>110</sup>
7. The so-called noncompliant unions are not out of harmony with the Bible.
8. Adventism has moved at times from being a church based on Scripture to one based on tradition and ecclesiastical pronouncements.
9. The General Conference leadership in 2017 is coming dangerously close to replicating the medieval church in its call for the serious

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George R. Knight has served the church as a university professor, pastor, school administrator, and an elementary and secondary teacher. His last assignment was Andrews University where he taught for 30 years. Knight is an avid student of both the Bible and Adventist history. He has written 45 books and edited another 40. In addition to Bible commentaries, including the one for the current Sabbath School lessons on Galatians, he has written on the historical development of Adventist organizational structure and the need for reform within the denomination. His forthcoming book, to be released in late August or early September, is tentatively titled *Adventist Authority Wars, Ordination, and the Roman Catholic Temptation*.

discipline of large sectors of the church on the basis of a non-biblical issue.

- 9.1. The recent General Conference documents and procedures do not reflect faithfulness to the Bible's teachings in Acts 15 or Matthew 18.
- 9.2. Due to the suppression of data and the manipulation of the events surrounding the voting process, I do not believe that the 2015 vote on women's ordination indicated the voice of God.
- 9.3. One of the important functions of the ancient Hebrew prophets was to confront priests and kings over their abuse of authority. One of the functions of Ellen White was to confront conference presidents for similar reasons. And, if there were a prophet in modern Adventism, that prophet would find plenty to do.
- 9.4. The current atmosphere of confrontation in Adventism has not been brought about by the unions, but by the General Conference leadership and its non-biblical and manipulative tactics.
- 9.45. The October 2017 meetings may help the worldwide Adventist Church decide whether it wants to move more toward an Adventist Ecclesiology or toward a more Roman Catholic variety.
- 9.5. The so-called nonconforming unions must stand together, come into line with General Conference demands, or go down one by one. Martin Niemöller, a leading German Protestant pastor during World War II, has written a thoughtful piece: "First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I didn't speak out—because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak out—because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak out."

In closing, two historical recollections are important. First, Peter's words in Acts 5:39: "We must obey God rather than men" (RSV). Sec-

ond, Luther's words at the Diet of Worms: "I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the councils, because it is clear as the day that they have frequently erred and contradicted each other. Unless therefore I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture . . . *I cannot and I will not retract*, for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience. Here I stand, I can do no other; may God help me. Amen."<sup>111</sup> ■

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demands, or  
go down one  
by one.**

18; emphasis supplied.

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76. “General Conference Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report, June 2014,” 3–7. An examination of the committee membership list reveals that a large portion, if not the majority, were not scholars.

77. Secretariat, “A Study,” 41; Secretariat, “Summary of A Study,” 14.

78. As will be noted below, many of the TOSC participants were disillusioned when the General Conference president reversed his opinion on the importance of the committee from its first meeting, when it looked as if it would come up with the “proper” answer, to its last, in which the majority voted against his position.

79. TOSC “Report,” 12.

80. This point needs further investigation into the 13 division reports. Nine divisions in favor of diversity is the lowest number I have come across. Some sources report 11 and others 12 divisions in favor of flexibility.

81. TOSC “Report,” 122, 123. 82.

82. Ibid., 12, 122, 123.

83. Norwegian Union Conference, “A Response to ‘A Study of Church Governance and Unity,’” Oct. 4, 2016; See William G. Johnsson, *Where Are We Headed? Adventism after San Antonio* (Westlake Village, CA: Oak and Acorn Publishing, 2017), 153–161, for a published version of the document.

84. Recollections of several participants who wish to remain anonymous.

85. See, e.g., George R. Knight, “The Role of Union Conferences in Relation to Higher Authorities,” *Spectrum* 44:4 (2016): 40.



86. Secretariat, "Summary of A Study," 14; Secretariat, "A Study," 40, 41; see also Barry Oliver to George R. Knight, Feb. 20, 2017.

87. Johnsson, *Where Are We Headed?*, 1.

88. E. G. White to G. I. Butler, Oct. 14, 1888.

89. Secretariat, "A Study," 34.

90. Secretariat, "Summary of A Study," 5; Secretariat, "A Study," 13; italics supplied. See also Mark A. Finley, "United in Message, Mission, and Organization," *Ministry* (April 2017): 14.

91. Recollections of several participants who wish to remain anonymous.

92. James White, "Leadership," *Signs of the Times* (June 4, 1874); emphasis supplied.

93. E. G. White, "Love, the need of the Church," MS 24, 1892.

94. Ellen G. White, *Special Testimonies: Series A* (Payson AZ: Leaves-of-Autumn, n.d.), 299–300; emphasis supplied.

95. E. G. White, *Testimonies*, Vol. 9, 277–278; emphasis supplied.

96. See *Working Policy*, L 35, L 50. The sexist language in these sections is not a voted policy, but an editorial decision in the 1980s. See Knight, "The Role of Unions," 41; Gary Patterson, untitled critique of the Secretariat's paper on "Unions and Ordination," 1.

97. "Session Actions," *Adventist Review* (July 13, 1990): 15.

98. See, e.g., Bonnie Dwyer, "General Conference Leadership Considers Takeover of Unions that Ordain Women," Sept. 29, 2016, <http://spectrummagazine.org/print/7661>.

99. Most of my sources have requested confidentiality, given the intimidating atmosphere in the General Conference building, in General Conference institutions, and among other denominational employees who have hopes for a future in the upper realms of the denomination. In fact, intimidation and threats in matters related to finances and funding have been in the "air" emanating from Silver Spring. It is no accident that no professors from Andrews University or its theological seminary are participating in this conference. "Kingly power" is alive and well. It is fortunate that those of us who are retired are beyond that intimidating authority.

100. For one perceptive critique, see Norwegian Union Conference, "A Response to 'A Study of Church Govern-

ance and Unity,'" Oct. 4, 2016.

101. Mitchell Tyner, <http://spectrummagazine.org/article/2016/10/10/analysis-use-general-conference-working-policy-case-unions-ordain-women>.

102. Ibid.

103. Ibid., emphasis supplied.

104. James White, "Leadership," *Signs of the Times* (July 9, 1874): 28.

105. James White, "Leadership," *Review and Herald* (June 17, 1880): 392.

106. E. G. White, *Testimonies*, Vol. 9, 278.

107. Quoted in Johnsson, *Where Are We Headed?*, 74.

108. Even a casual reader will discover that, like Luther, I have had a bit of a challenge keeping the number of theses from expanding—thus the 9.1 and 9.2 maneuver, so that I could maintain the 9.5 symbolism.

109. *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 16th ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 27; emphasis added.

110. See George R. Knight, "Ecclesiastical Deadlock: James White Solves a Problem that Had No Answer," *Ministry* (July 2014): 9–13; George R. Knight, "James White finds the Answer," in John W. Reeve, ed., *Women and Ordination: Biblical and Historical Studies* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015), 113–120.

111. E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 160.

**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."**

# “Circumstances Change the Relations of Things” | BY ROLF J. PÖHLER

**DISCUSSED** | Ellen. G. White, continuity and change, twofold nature of truth, historical and cultural context

## Introduction

**H**ow would the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism deal with the present crisis hurting the church? How would they handle the disagreement between General Conference leadership and a number of union conferences on such wide-ranging issues as church structure and authority, unity and diversity, ethics and policy, justice and equality, conscience and coercion? The plain answer is: no one can know for sure. Changing times and circumstances call for, and bring forth, different responses and do not allow us to predict with certainty what the former leaders of the church would do if they were facing our challenges today. Still, we can learn a lot from the past by looking at the principles, values, and convictions that guided the pioneers and by drawing lessons for our time from their accomplishments and failures.

What would Jesus do? In the 1990s, this question became a popular motto of young Christians who regarded Jesus as the definitive role model for everyday life. But it is easier to wear a bracelet or wristband with the engraved acronym “WWJD” than to know what Jesus would actually do if He was living among us as a human being. Didn’t He often enough surprise, and even shock, His disciples by His words and deeds? What makes us sure that we wouldn’t also be stunned or disappointed by Him today? Again, the spiritual and ethical principles He taught and lived transcended His times and culture and serve as guide posts for all later generations.

This applies equally to Ellen White, whose prophetically inspired guidance helped steer the Adventist movement through rough waters for seven decades. What would Ellen White say and do if she was alive today? How would she position herself with regard to the current stalemate? Whoever tries to answer this question should be aware that by doing so he may reveal more about his own view than about the prophet’s position. Often enough, our surmising about the past is more like a look in the mirror than an accurate lesson about history. The attempt to settle controversial issues by pointing to

the prophet entails the risk of cementing one’s own prejudice rather than accurately speaking in her name. Still, the attempt may, and should, be made to gain insights from her life and teaching for overcoming the current impasse between the various duly elected and responsible entities in the Adventist church. By studying Ellen White’s life and legacy, we need to recognize that her views are not all timeless truths, that her actions are not all prescriptive, and that quotations from her writings are not all directly applicable today. She was, after all, just as much a child of her time as were prophets and apostles in biblical times. While the literary bequest of other Adventist pioneers quite obviously reflects their limited contemporary understanding, it is tempting to use Ellen White’s legacy as if it was unaffected by its historical and cultural context. However, before we may use her writings and example as authoritative in a one-to-one manner, we must make sure that the specific situations and concerns of the past are truly comparable to those of today. In drawing lessons from history, it is therefore mandatory to take into consideration the actual context that prompted a particular response. As the prophet once said, “Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relations of things.”<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, we will take a close look at Ellen White’s attitude toward theological and doctrinal continuity and change and its impact on her view on church authority, policy, and structure. By implication, this may also contribute to a better understanding of the options for dealing with the current challenges and tensions in the Adventist church.

## Part 1 – Ellen White on Theological Continuity and Change<sup>2</sup>

Ellen White held a surprisingly dynamic view on “present truth.” “In every age there is a new development of truth, a message of God to the people of that generation.”<sup>3</sup> In the context of the Minneapolis conference of 1888 she wrote, “What would not have been truth twenty years ago, may well be present truth now.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, she could declare that the message of justification by faith as presented by E. J. Wag-



**The hands of Ellen G. White:  
detail from a portrait painted  
in 2015 by Harry S. Ahn, which  
is among the works of art  
in the James White Library at  
Andrews University.**

goner and A. T. Jones was “the third angel’s message in verity.”<sup>5</sup> Prior to that, “present truth” had been regarded essentially as prophetically announced truth, found in the apocalyptic books and passages of the Bible and presently being fulfilled.

In the 1880s and beyond, Ellen White was repeatedly called upon to resolve doctrinal controversies, which tended to divide the church on specific theological issues. Those holding traditional views—apparently sanctioned by the prophet herself—pleaded with her to confirm the historic faith of the church and to reject the new views that seemed to threaten the doctrinal landmarks of Adventism. Ellen White, however, consistently refused to do so, calling upon the church to seriously restudy the controverted points and to remain open to new interpretations of Bible texts, additional doctrinal insights, and possible revisions of erroneous views.<sup>6</sup>

In order to prevent these new views from being taught at Battle Creek College—where A. T. Jones was slated to teach in 1889—a resolution was proposed which recommended “that persons holding views different from those commonly taught by us as a denomination” should first present them to various committees for approval.<sup>7</sup> Ellen White, however, strongly opposed such a restrictive decree because, in her judgment, it would only serve to hinder the progress and advance of truth.<sup>8</sup>

White’s role in the development of Adventist theology may be described as “formative, not normative.”<sup>9</sup> While she contributed significantly to the development, acceptance, preservation, and revision of doctrines, she was not regarded or used by the church—though, sometimes, by some of her ardent followers—as the final criterion and arbiter of truth. Neither did she ever want to be regarded as such. Support for this comes from an analysis of her personal involvement in doctrinal development

As Alden Thompson has suggested in 1981, Ellen White experienced “significant changes” during her lifetime in her “theological development” by which “her theological understanding grew” with regard to several basic Christian teachings. The general direction of this process seems to have led her from a rather discouraging, law-centered position (“Sinai”) to a more encouraging, love-centered attitude (“Golgotha”). In Thompson’s view, “the transition from fear to love in her experience resulted in a remarkable shift of emphasis.”<sup>10</sup> The reactions to these ar-

ticles indicated that the church did not readily accept the idea that Ellen White’s theological understanding evolved significantly over the years. Still, the underlying assumption that Ellen White’s perception of truth developed in time seemed to accord well with her own view. “For sixty years I have been in communication with heavenly messengers, and I have been constantly learning in reference to divine things.”<sup>11</sup>

George R. Knight has noted “three distinct types” of change in Ellen White’s writings related to matters of doctrine and lifestyle. The first involved the “clarification” of vaguely or, perhaps, implicitly held views; in other words, “a change from ambiguity to clarity.” The second type refers to the “progressive development” of new positions or changing emphases on doctrinal and other questions. Such change was progressive, not contradictory, in nature and happened “against the background of the ongoing development of present truth.” Some changes even came by “contradiction, or reversal, of her earlier position.” This happened, for example, with “Ellen White’s changing belief in the shut door” which also involved certain “contradictory aspects,” for “her later understanding contradicted that of her earliest years in the post-1844 period.” In other words, “Ellen White was capable of both believing error and growing in her understanding” of truth.<sup>12</sup>

More than any other of the Adventist pioneers, Ellen White directly addressed the issue of doctrinal continuity and change. Her remarks were scattered through the years but partly collected in the books compiled from her writings.<sup>13</sup> The following brief overview should be undergirded by a detailed historical analysis that interprets the different, and partly conflicting, statements in their respective historical and literary setting in order to determine their proper meaning and point of reference. Such a study cannot be presented here. Still, the following summarizes what appears to be White’s basic approach to the issue of doctrinal development.

### 1. The Twofold Nature of Truth

In Ellen White’s view, divine truth is eternal, changeless, and immovable. At the same time, it is infinite and inexhaustible, capable of unlimited expansion, ever developing and unfolding in its meaning. Because of the progressive and advancing nature of truth, the church should see a continual advancement in the knowledge of truth. While the church is to



teach the fundamental truths of the Scriptures, it must also proclaim present truth, i.e., doctrines fit for the times and embracing the whole gospel.

## 2. The Dialectic Between Continuity and Change

According to White, Seventh-day Adventists must ever remain open and receptive to new light. Such increasing insight into truth usually will be in addition to previous beliefs, providing a clearer understanding of the word of God. At times, however, new light will be in conflict with our expositions of Scripture, with long-cherished opinions and long-established traditions. In other words, though new light does not contradict old light, it does collide with erroneous doctrines and misinterpretations of the word of God.

*We must not for a moment think that there is no more light, no more truth, to be given us . . . While we must hold fast to the truths which we have already received, we must not look with suspicion upon any new light that God may send.*<sup>14</sup>

*The God of heaven sometimes commissions men to teach that which is regarded as contrary to the established doctrines . . . Seventh-day Adventists are in danger of closing their eyes to truth as it is in Jesus, because it contradicts something which they have taken for granted as truth but which the Holy Spirit teaches is not truth.*<sup>15</sup>

*If ideas are presented that differ in some points from our former doctrines, we must not condemn them without diligent search of the Bible to see if they are true.*<sup>16</sup>  
*There are errors in the church, and the Lord points them out by His own ordained agencies, not always through the testimonies.*<sup>17</sup>

*In closely investigating . . . established truth . . . we may discover errors in our interpretation of Scripture.*<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, we need to carefully examine, candidly investigate, critically test, and constantly review our doctrines in the light of the Scriptures and discard everything that is not clearly sustained by the Bible. On the other

hand, satisfaction with the church's present understanding of truth, opposition to a critical and persevering examination of its teachings, avoidance of controversial doctrinal discussions, prejudice against those who present new doctrinal insights, refusal to accept newly discovered truths, and general resistance to theological change betray a "conservative"<sup>19</sup> mind-set which results from spiritual lethargy. Those would-be guardians of the doctrine who prevent the much-needed reexamination for fear of removing the old landmarks are hampering the cause of truth.

At the same time, the pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism have laid well the doctrinal foundation of the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These fundamental principles were firmly established in the early years through careful and prayerful Bible study; they were confirmed by divine revelation; they are based upon unquestionable authority; they have withstood test and trial and are unmovable, indispensable, unchangeable, and irreplaceable. No interpretations or applications of the Scriptures must be entertained that would undermine or weaken these distinctive doctrines, contradict the special points of our faith, unsettle faith in the old landmarks, remove the pillars from their foundation, or move a block or stir a pin from the three angels' messages. Instead, Seventh-day Adventists are to preserve the waymarks which have made us what we are, hold firmly to the fundamental principles of our faith, and stand firm on the platform of eternal and immovable truth.

At first glance, Ellen White's statements on doctrinal continuity and change appear somewhat contradictory. The seeming discrepancies are largely due, however, to the different contexts in which she was expressing herself throughout the years. During and after the 1888 General Conference, she called for openness to theological change in order to counter the reluctance of the church to accept the new light which Waggoner and Jones were presenting on the subject of righteousness by faith.

**Often enough,  
our surmising  
about the past  
is more like  
a look in the  
mirror than an  
accurate lesson  
about history.**

But, when the church seemed to be threatened by heresy and apostasy—particularly in the 1850s, 1880s, and 1900s—White particularly emphasized the doctrinal continuity and identity of the Adventist faith. Thus, her seemingly conflicting statements on doctrinal continuity and change may be seen as actually complementary when interpreted in their respective historical setting.

There is still another, related, reason that may help explain the seeming contradiction in White's statements on theological development. To her, the landmark doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism were central to the message, mission, and self-understanding of the church. Any change with regard to these foundational truths tended, therefore, to jeopardize the very *raison d'être* of the church. Other teachings, however, not directly belonging to the unchangeable platform of Adventist truths, were of secondary importance. Their revision would not constitute a threat to the identity and mission of the church. Thus, they could be freely reinvestigated and possibly be modified significantly.

It should be kept in mind that when such minor doctrinal matters were debated among Adventists, they were often regarded as being closely tied to the old landmarks, making their readjustment look like an attack on the fundamentals themselves. In order to be true to Ellen White's intention, it seems therefore important to distinguish the core doctrines of the Adventist faith from other teachings and practices that are related but not foundational to it.

However, any authentic doctrinal development may and will somehow affect either the fundamental or the distinctive truths of Seventh-day Adventism in some, albeit positive, way. Otherwise, the deepening insight into truth would, in the final analysis, be irrelevant and not worth arguing or even talking about. Ellen White, on her part, held no low view of theological growth. To her, doctrinal progress was of crucial significance for the church. "Much has been lost because our ministers and people have concluded that we have had all the truth essential for us as a people; but such a conclusion is erroneous and in harmony with the deceptions of Satan, for truth will be constantly unfolding."<sup>20</sup>

As only those theological insights which, in some real sense, are related to the central beliefs of the church can be regarded as essential, it follows that, for Ellen White, doctrinal development was not a superflu-

ous or even dangerous process but rather an indispensable aspect of the spiritual growth and theological maturation of the church.

## The Twofold Process of Theological Development

An analysis of Ellen White's view on theological development reveals two major aspects which, to her, were involved in this process. They reflect the balance she sought between the need for substantial doctrinal continuity and the demands for authentic doctrinal change. On the one hand, truth develops through restoration and rediscovery; on the other hand, it involves reinterpretation and recontextualization.

### Restoration and Rediscovery

For Ellen White, doctrinal development was first and foremost a process in which old truths were rediscovered and restored to the church. "There are old, yet new truths still to be added to the treasures of our knowledge."<sup>21</sup> What appears to be new light is, in reality, "precious [old] light that has for a time been lost sight of by the people."<sup>22</sup> After all, no doctrine must be taught in the church which cannot be shown to be contained in the word of God. But there are many "precious rays of light yet to shine forth from the word of God. Many gems are yet scattered that are to be gathered together to become the property of the remnant people of God."<sup>23</sup>

*Gems of thought are to be gathered up and redeemed from their companionship with error . . . Truths of divine origin, are to be carefully searched out and placed in their proper setting, to shine with heavenly brilliancy amid the moral darkness of the world . . . Let the gems of divine light be reset in the framework of the gospel. Let nothing be lost of the precious light that comes from the throne of God. It has been misapplied, and cast aside as worthless; but it is heaven-sent, and each gem is to become the property of God's people and find its true position in the framework of truth. Precious jewels of light are to be collected, and by the aid of the Holy Spirit they are to be fitted into the gospel system.<sup>24</sup>*

### Reinterpretation and Recontextualization

Obviously, then, there is something really new about new light. While truth itself is eternal and unchangeable, the understanding of its meaning and the realization of its full significance may grow constantly in the church. Taking Christ as the model and norm of theological progress and doctrinal

advance, White repeatedly pointed out that His work consisted in recontextualizing and reinterpreting divine revelation. New meanings resulted from placing old truths in different and proper settings. The true significance of Bible teachings can, at times, only be seen when they are related to new scriptural contexts or changing situations which make old truths appear in a different, new light. Correcting misinterpretations of the Bible and properly reinterpreting old truths, new doctrinal insights reveal new facets and the true import of divine revelation.

*Great truths which have been neglected and unappreciated for ages will be revealed by the Spirit of God and new meaning will flash out of familiar texts. Every page will be illuminated by the Spirit of truth.*<sup>25</sup>

*When the mind is kept open and is constantly searching the field of revelation, we shall find rich deposits of truth. Old truths will be revealed in new aspects, and truths will appear which have been overlooked in the search.*<sup>26</sup>

*Some things must be torn down. Some things must be built up. The old treasures must be reset in the framework of truth . . . Jesus will reveal to us precious old truths in a new light, if we are ready to receive them.*<sup>27</sup>

## Summary

Ellen White exerted a significant influence on the development of Adventist doctrines, being involved in the formation, preservation, and revision of the teachings of the church. She actively participated in various types of change, encompassing not only theological maturation and doctrinal growth but, at times, even doctrinal readjustments and revisions. To a considerable degree, she shared in and even fostered the process of theological growth and doctrinal development which the Seventh-day Adventist Church experienced in her lifetime.

At the same time, Ellen White's concept of doctrinal development appears to have surpassed that of her fellow believers not only in depth of understanding but also in striking a

delicate balance between the need for theological continuity and substantial identity, on the one hand, and the possibility of theological revision and doctrinal change, on the other. Tirelessly she warned her church against both the careless rejection of precious old light and the stubborn resistance to much-needed new light.

This concept may still provide guidance to the church faced by the twin dangers of theological immobilism and doctrinal revisionism. Seventh-day Adventists may do well to emulate the example of their prophet who served both as a strong factor of doctrinal continuity and a constant catalyst of doctrinal change. Her concept of theological development is perhaps best expressed in the following quotation which is worth pondering for its rich implications.

*[Christ] promised that the Holy Spirit should enlighten the disciples, that the word of God should be ever unfolding to them . . . The truths of redemption are capable of constant development and expansion. Though old, they are ever new, constantly revealing to the seeker for truth a greater glory and a mightier power. — In every age there is a new development of truth, a message of God to the people of that generation. The old truths are all essential; new truth is not independent of the old, but an unfolding of it. It is only as the old truths are understood that we can comprehend the new . . . But it is the light which shines in the fresh unfolding of truth that glorifies the old. He who rejects or neglects the new does not really possess the old. To him it loses its vital power and becomes but a lifeless form . . . Truth in Christ and through Christ is measureless. The student of Scripture looks, as it were, into a fountain that deepens and broadens as he gazes into its depths.*<sup>28</sup>

## Part II — Ellen White on Church Authority, Policy and Structure

What can we learn from Ellen White's view on theological continuity and change for church leadership, authority, organization, structure, and policy? What insights can we derive from her position on doctrinal development, which are applicable to the issues currently engaging the church? How did she herself apply these

**White's role in the development of Adventist theology may be described as "formative, not normative."**

principles in different situations? What implications may we draw, what applications may we make from both her teaching and her actions? While the answers cannot claim to be comprehensive or exhaustive by any measure, they should be informative, representative, and significant. I see, in the main, three aspects that have a direct bearing on the ongoing struggle about “unity in mission” in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### 1. Organizational Readjustment

According to Ellen White, divine truth is eternal and unchanging, but the understanding of truth is subject to development and change. Moreover, there is truth particularly relevant at a certain point in history—“present truth” or truth for today. What pertains to church teachings will, by implication, also hold true for church policies and organizational structures. They, too, may be changing and in need of readjustment. Just as ecclesial traditions are not dependable guides to “present truth,” so traditional policies or structures may become outdated and obstructive—even when sanctioned by an authority in the past. Therefore, the church should be amenable to changes regarding its policies and structures, just as it should remain open to new doctrinal insights. In many cases, the new is a deepening and unfolding of the old. At times, however, it stands in contrast to previous church teaching, policy, or practice. Learning and understanding is progressive, making a conservative stance a possible hindrance to the advance of the church.

This does not mean that everything is subject to change or revision. To the contrary, the foundational truths of faith remain, while secondary teachings are more easily reconsidered. In a similar manner, the basic three-tier (local, regional, global), threefold (pastor, elder, deacon), and representative structure of the church has stood the test of time and proved highly effective in protecting unity and fostering mission. At the same time, structures and policies should be treated dynamically and not be regarded as unchangeable. As there is a kind of hierarchy with regard to truth, with core beliefs being distinguished from, and superior to, peripheral views, so we must also admit to a certain hierarchy of policies and procedures, where the application of foundational principles is dependent on tangible needs and particular circumstances.

This inference from Ellen White’s view on theological continuity and change is supported by the following statement from the prophet’s pen: “The place, the circum-

stances, the interest, the moral sentiment of the people, will have to decide in many cases the course of action to be pursued.”<sup>29</sup> This calls for openness and flexibility on the part of the worldwide Adventist church with regard to its rules and regulations, policies and practices, organization and structure. They must not be treated like a “*Codex Iuris Canonici*” and invested with quasi-divine authority. The following statement bears repeating: “Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relations of things.”<sup>30</sup> In a multicultural world and community, this insight is essential for the unity of purpose and the accomplishment of the mission of the church. Organizational structures and policies should serve the church, not vice versa, as the following underlines.

### 2. Situational Re-evaluation

In 1875, Ellen White wrote a testimony to a strong-willed brother who was inclined to act independently of the church. “God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for in so doing he despises the voice of God.”<sup>31</sup>

Later in the same year, she wrote, “I have been shown that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to any one man. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered.”<sup>32</sup>

What may primarily have pertained to the General Conference in session<sup>33</sup> was, in the years following, applied to the General Conference administration. About the latter, President G. I. Butler claimed, “It is the highest authority of an earthly character among Seventh-day Adventists.”<sup>34</sup> Likewise, President O. A. Olsen regarded the General Conference as “the highest organized authority under God on the earth.”<sup>35</sup> Ellen White, however, became increasingly concerned about the centralization of power in the hands of a few administrators. In the 1890s, she began to criticize the “kingly power” usurped by the leaders in Battle Creek, fearing that it would ultimately lead to “a state of insubordination.”<sup>36</sup> She denied that the General Conference was the legitimate voice of God.<sup>37</sup> “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 should be the voice of God, but it is not.”<sup>38</sup>

After the far-reaching and decentralizing reorganization



of 1901 had put a kind of stop to leadership by “dictation,” Ellen White again expressed confidence in the General Conference by reiterating, in 1909, the view she had expressed back in 1875. However, she continued to warn leaders against exercising “kingly power.”

*I have often been instructed by the Lord that no man's judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any other one man. Never should the mind of one man or the minds of a few men be regarded as sufficient in wisdom and power to control the work and to say what plans shall be followed. But when in a General Conference the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence contrary to the decision of the general body.<sup>39</sup>*

In each case, Ellen White expressed herself clearly and forcefully, though in a seemingly contradictory and antithetic manner. But new situations and developments were calling for a different response. When people acted independently of the church or relied too much on individual leaders, she emphasized the importance of the collective will of the church as expressed by the General Conference in session. But when the leadership of the church abused their authority by acting in a dominant manner, White would stand up against them, calling them to refrain from exercising dictatorial power. Her statements, made in a particular setting, would become misleading or even wrong when applied indiscriminately to other situations.<sup>40</sup>

It may be argued that the apparent tension between Ellen White's various statements on the role of the “General Conference” is due, not to a change of mind on her part, but rather to two different meanings of the term “General Conference.” In 1875 and 1909, she referred to the General Conference in session, while the negative statements about “kingly power” etc. from the 1890s were directed towards the Gen-

eral Conference administration, consisting of only a few men. Granted that there is truth in this observation, it still remains quite difficult to separate the two and treat them as independent entities. After all, what happens at a General Conference in session is strongly influenced by the top leadership of the General Conference. Decisions made by the assembled delegates usually are in concurrence with the will of the administration. Thus, Ellen White's critical remarks about “kingly power” exerted by some top leaders may still apply, even when decisions are reached in a General Conference Session. Which of the contrasting statements of the prophet are, then, applicable today? That depends on which of them corresponds more closely to the current situation in the Adventist church. What would Ellen White possibly write to those union conferences who resist what they see as a misuse of power by General Conference leadership? What, on the other hand, would she most likely tell those leaders who reject the appeal to conscience and the fundamental beliefs of the church? No one can know for sure, for we all are tempted to use, if not abuse, the prophet as a spokesperson for our own views. The church will be wise not to quote Ellen White one-sidedly or out of context in order to bolster up a particular view against other legitimate perspectives. Insights drawn from a particular setting need to be balanced by those gained under different circumstances. Together they form a treasure trove of experience that can be a continual blessing to the church.

### 3. Conscientious Nonconformity

Shortly after the General Conference was founded in 1863, Ellen White wrote to a discontented church member: “You should have submitted to the judgment of the church. If they decided wrong, God could take hold of this matter in His own time and vindicate the right.”<sup>41</sup> There are two important insights contained in this statement. Firstly, decisions made by a majority should be accepted even when one personally

**Because of  
the progressive  
and advancing  
nature of truth,  
the church  
should see  
a continual  
advancement in  
the knowledge  
of truth.**

disagrees with them. Never should a minority impose its will on the church at large. Secondly, majority decisions may be wrong and may, therefore, need to be corrected. While even God himself bears with unwise and erroneous decisions, He may also work toward correcting them when He sees fit. Such revisions do not come by heavenly fiat but in the same manner as the initial vote; namely, by proposal, debate, and voting.

This calls for a mature attitude that respects the result of a vote and, at the same time, remains open to possibly correct it later. While the “losers” need to submit to the majority opinion—a humbling experience, at times—the “winners” must not regard the outcome as sacrosanct. They too need humility by recognizing that they may have been wrong after all and need to submit their personal conviction when the Spirit leads the church into new directions. “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21 NIV), Paul wrote. What pertained to husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves in Ephesus equally applies to superiors and inferiors or to “higher” and “lower” entities in the church today. The summons to submission and Christlike humility is not a one-way road of communication.

But what about a situation in which more is at stake than personal opinions and preferences, divergent views on church policies, or disagreements about the filling of leadership posts? What if contentious points become a matter of conscience and of faithfulness to biblical principles and the fundamental beliefs of the church? Are there times when it becomes a right or even a duty to voice dissent against church councils and decisions? This question is not new to Adventists.

In 1877, the General Conference in session voted that its “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>42</sup>

Ellen White concurred that no doctrine must be taught in the church which cannot be shown to be contained in the word of God. She also be-

lieved that God sometimes commissions people to go against what seems to be the established position of the church.<sup>43</sup> To her, following one’s conscience was the epitome of faithfulness toward God. “The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”<sup>44</sup> Describing Martin Luther’s appearance before the Diet of Worms, Ellen White spoke in high terms about his “unwavering firmness and fidelity” in view of state and church authorities that expected him to submit his conscience to church traditions, councils, and decrees.<sup>45</sup>

But it was not only in theory and in view of an apostate church that Ellen White allowed for dissent in matters of conscience involving established church rules and practices. While she fully supported the idea that the tithe should be given to the church and not be spent according to one’s own liking, at times she withheld tithe and used it for causes she felt were unduly neglected by the church. Her counsel was unequivocal:

*Let none feel at liberty to retain their tithe, to use according to their own judgment. They are not to use it . . . as they see fit, even in what they may regard as the Lord’s work . . . The minister should, by precept and example, teach the people to regard the tithe as sacred. — Cannot you see that it is not best under any circumstances to withhold your tithes and offerings because you are not in harmony with everything your brethren do? . . . I pay my tithe gladly and freely.<sup>47</sup>*

Although Ellen White “normally ‘paid her tithes in the regular way into the conference treasury’ . . . at times when there was inadequate funding for ordained ministers working among African-Americans she paid some of her own tithe directly to their employer, the Southern Missionary Society . . . And apparently Ellen White agreed to pay a partial salary for some



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literature evangelists in different territories ... These exceptions were not, however, her regular practice."<sup>48</sup> Neither did she justify her behavior by referring to her prophetic authority. Rather, it was the suffering of the workers and the injustice being done to them that caused her to deviate from the principle she herself had laid down.

This example serves to illustrate what may be called "conscientious nonconformity." While accepting and following the rules, there may be exceptions due to special circumstances and needs that justify variant actions grounded in a moral necessity that overrules the normal practice. This does not imply a lack of loyalty or a rebellious spirit refusing to act in harmony with church policy and practice. To the contrary, it is exactly out of loyalty to biblically grounded beliefs and values that such dissent, at times, is legitimate and even called for. Exceptions are not questioning the rules but confirming their basic validity. However, when policy and authority is used in a way that conflicts with the mandates of a conscience grounded in the word of God, submission to the latter takes priority over and against compliance with the former.

Ellen White's course of action with regard to tithing marks off the legitimate parameters of nonconformist behavior in the church: it is not an act of defiance, but one of loyalty; it is not an expression of individualism, but one of solidarity; it is not a matter of self-exaltation, but of conscience. Such behavior is justified only when conformity to the rules conflicts with the core teachings and principles of the word of God. "The Lord has shown you what is good. He has told you what he requires of you. You must treat people fairly. You must love others faithfully. And you must be very careful to live the way your God wants you to" (Micah 6:8 NIRV).

## Conclusion

When being criticized by some for having changed her mind on certain issues, Ellen White referred to the many lessons she had learned in the years and decades of her life-

long ministry. "For sixty years," she wrote, "I have been constantly learning in reference to divine things."<sup>49</sup> To change one's mind may therefore not be a sign of weakening faith, but rather an evidence of personal and spiritual growth. What applies to divine messengers also holds true for dedicated leaders. The longer they serve, the more teachable they become under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often" (J. H. Newman). The following quote pertains, therefore, not only to matters of doctrine and theology, structure and policy, but equally to each of us personally. "Some things must be torn down. Some things must be built up."<sup>40</sup> ■

## Questions for Discussion

1. What light does the teaching and example of Ellen White shed on the current impasse between the General Conference and the union conferences that are out of line with respect to ordination?
2. What role should biblical precedents, established church structures, and sociocultural conditions play in deliberations about *organizational readjustment*?
3. What, if anything, could justify a *situational reevaluation* of the authority of the General Conference—comprising the Executive Management, Committee, and Session—in your judgment?
4. What criteria need to be fulfilled before acts of *conscientious nonconformity* should be considered by any church member or entity?

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1. Ellen G. White, Report of an Interview / Counsel on Age of School Entrance (St. Helena, CA, 1904), Manuscript 7, 1904, EGWE; White, *Selected Messages*, Vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 217; idem, Manuscript Releases, 21 vols. (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981, 1987, 1990, 1993).
2. The following is based on the chapter "Prophetic Authority and Doctrinal Change: An Analysis" in my dissertation, published in *Continuity and Change in Adventist*

**Those would-be guardians of the doctrine who prevent the much-needed reexamination for fear of removing the old landmarks are hampering the cause of truth.**

While truth

itself is

eternal and

unchangeable,

the under-

standing of its

meaning and

the realization

of its full

significance

may grow

constantly in

the church.

*Teaching: A Case Study in Doctrinal Development* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000), 225–244.

3. Ellen White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900/1941), 127.

4. Manuscript 15, 1888, EGWRC, AU, Berrien Springs, MI.

5. Ellen White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946/1970), 190.

6. The debate on the law in Galatians and on “the daily” are illustrations of this.

7. “S. D. Adventist General Conference,” *Review and Herald* (13 November 1888): 714. A similar resolution had been adopted already by the 1886 General Conference saying that “doctrinal views not held by a fair majority” of Adventists should not be taught or published until they had been “examined and approved by the leading brethren of experience.” “General Conference Proceedings,” *Review and Herald* (14 December 1886): 779.

8. “When the resolution was urged upon the conference that nothing should be taught in the college contrary to that which has been taught, I felt deeply, for I knew whoever framed that resolution was not aware of what he was doing.” Ellen White, Manuscript 16, 1889, EGWRC, AU, Berrien Springs, MI. “Instructors in our schools should never be bound about by being told that they are to teach only what has been taught hitherto. Away with these restrictions. There is a God to give the message His people shall speak. Let not any minister feel under bonds or be gauged by men’s measurements. The gospel must be fulfilled in accordance with the messages God sends. That which God gives His servants to speak today would not perhaps have been present truth twenty years ago, but it is God’s message for this time.” Manuscript 8a, 1888, EGWRC, AU, Berrien Springs, MI. In 1896, White wrote, “The God of heaven sometimes commissions men to teach that which is regarded as contrary to the established doctrines.” *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923/1962), 69.

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10. Alden Thompson, “From Sinai to Golgotha—Nos. 1–5,” *Adventist Review* (3–31 December 1981): 4–6, 8–10, 7–10, 7–9, 12–13.

11. Ellen G. White, *This Day with God* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1979), 76. Cf. idem, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 686.

12. George R. Knight, “Adventists and Change,” *Ministry* (October 1993): 12–13 (10–15).

13. See esp. *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1946), 28–54; *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945), 258–261; *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, *The Great Controversy* (Battle Creek, MI: James White, 1858), 168–173; *Selected Messages*, Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 160–162, 185–191, 201–208, 383–388, 401–405, 406–416; *ibid.*, Vol. 2, 387–391; *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, 24–32, 105–111; *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1948), 297–310; *Christ's Object Lessons*, 124–134; and *Testimonies*, Vol. 5, 698–711. The following summary outline is based mainly on her published writings; all references can be found in Pöhler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching*, 236ff.

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15. *Testimony to Ministers*, 70–71.

16. Ellen White, “Candid Investigation Necessary to an Understanding of the Truth,” *Signs of the Times* (26 May 1890): 307 (305–307).

17. *Selected Messages*, Vol. 2, 81.

18. Ellen G. White, “Treasure Hidden,” *Review and Herald*, (2 July 1898): 438.

19. “Although the words conservative and conservatism occur in Ellen White’s published writings some 30 times, they are always used in a negative sense.” David Thiele, “Is Conservatism a Heresy?” *Spectrum* 23:4 (1994): 12–15.

20. Ellen White, “Candid Investigation Necessary to an Understanding of the Truth,” *Signs of the Times* (26 May 1890): 305–306.

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22. *Selected Messages*, Vol. 1, 384; cf. *ibid.*, 401.

23. *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 35.

24. Ellen G. White, “Truth to Be Rescued from Error,” *Review and Herald* (23 October 1894): 657. See also idem, “Be Zealous and Repent,” *Review and Herald Extra* (23 December 1890): 1–2.

25. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1938), 35.

26. Manuscript 75, 1897, EGWRC, AU, Berrien Springs, MI.

27. Ellen G. White, “Minneapolis Talks,” 88–89; see also *Selected Messages*, Vol. 1, 355, 409.

28. *Christ's Object Lessons*, 127–128.



29. "To Ministers of the Australian Conference," 11 November 1894; GC Bulletin (1901): 70.

30. Ellen G. White, Report of an Interview / Counsel on Age of School Entrance (St. Helena, CA, 1904), Manuscript 7, 1904, EGWE; idem, *Selected Messages*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 217; idem, Manuscript Releases, 21 vols. (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981, 1987, 1990, 1993), 6:354.

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37. Ellen G White, "Board and Council meetings," n.d., MS 33, 1891; "Relation of the G. C. Committee to Business Interests," n.d., MS 33, 1895; "Concerning the Review and Herald Publishing Association," 12 October, 1895, MS 57, 1895; To Men Who Occupy Responsible Positions, 1 July 1896; To Brother and Sister Waggoner, 26 August 1898, Letter 77, 1898; comments in the 1901 GC Session, in "General Conference Proceedings," *General Conference Bulletin* 4, Extra, No. 1 (3 April 1901): 25; "Consumers, but not Producers," 25 April 1901, MS 35 and "Talk by Mrs. E. G. White in College Library, 1 April 1901," MS 43, 1901.

38. MS 37, April 1901; cf. MS 35, 1901, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 17, 250.

39. *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 260. "God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority. The error that some are in danger of committing is in giving to the mind and judgment of one man, or of a small group of men, the full measure of authority and influence that God has vested in His church in the judgment and voice of the General Conference assembled to plan for the prosperity and advancement of His work" (ibid, 260ff.).

40. While written with regard to health reform, James White's description of the difficulty his wife was facing in leading the church to a balanced position may apply here: "She makes strong appeals to the people, which a few feel deeply, and take strong positions, and go to extremes ... What she may say to urge the tardy, is taken by the prompt to urge them over the mark. And what she may say to caution the prompt, zealous, incautious ones, is taken by the tardy as an excuse to remain too far behind." "To a Brother at Monroe, Wisc.," *Review and Herald* (17 March 1868): 220.

41. Ellen White to Brother and Sister Scott, 6 July 1863, Letter 5, 1863.

42. "Sixteenth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists," *Review and Herald* (4 October 1877): 106.

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# General Conference *Working Policy*: The Challenge of Enforcement

DISCUSSED | *Working Policy*, diversity, organizational mission, governance and authority documents

## Introduction

Policy is not often viewed as a glamorous topic for discussion. News, politics, weather, stock markets, and people rank much higher in conversational preference. Policy questions surface when there is tension—and then, only out of necessity. We are in one of those moments in our collective life as a worldwide Church. We can, and must, make the best of it.

This Conference was convened to consider the cross-currents that are impacting people and denominational units today with respect to ministry and leadership positions requiring ministerial ordination. That this should be called a “Unity Conference” is no accident. Throughout our worldwide Church, the subject of ministerial ordination, and who is eligible for it, awakens sharply differing views and convictions.

The question has been under consideration for more than a century.<sup>2</sup> In recent decades, several commissions have studied the matter of ministerial ordination. Reports and recommendations have been made to General Conference Sessions. Those Sessions have not embraced the idea of ministerial ordination being available to females, even if they have qualifications like those required of males. These decisions have not settled the matter. Instead they may have amplified it. A rather strong polarity of views persists. Some unions have already implemented inclusive ministerial ordinations (inclusive here meaning male and female). Such actions have added a new dimension, ecclesiastical authority, and considerable emotion to the whole discussion.

The official studies thus far have largely focused on the theology of ordination in the hopes that the Bible would provide clarity in the matter. The biblical text has been examined from virtually all angles and viewpoints. Rather esoteric nuances have been advanced in support of one view or the other. Yet, the result of these studies yields at least two strongly held opinions. Each side feels that there is sufficient evidence to warrant its conclusions. Both sides concede that neither the Bible nor the writings of Ellen White provide explicit instruc-



...policy  
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and then it  
matters  
a lot.<sup>1</sup>

tion regarding the ordination of women as pastors. However, there is some level of agreement on the theology of ordination.

Relatively less emphasis has been given to ordination policy and practice. If a conclusive answer is elusive in theology, would there be value in considering ecclesiology and its body of policies and practices? It is the assumption of this paper that a review of policy can provide important insights that may help in creating a path forward to the preservation, even enhancement, of unity in the worldwide Church.

I apologize for being unable to address this topic in a coldly detached and purely objective manner. I am a member of the Church, enthusiastic about its mission, protective of its global structure, and keenly devoted to its polity and organizational ethos. I also have firm convictions about ministerial ordination. I trust that the reader will excuse the interference that my personal views may cause in the endeavor to understand the way that policy can help us in this situation.



## Underlying Assumptions

Several assumptions, that need to be exposed, lurk in the background of this presentation.

1. Further theological study on the question of ordination will not result in consensus regarding ordination. The Church will have to live with widely divergent views. This does not need to threaten unity since the Church already recognizes diverse practices in other matters and has agreed to varying practices regarding the election and ordination of women as local church elders.
2. The Gospel message is meant for the whole world and every culture. In its mission to reach every culture with the Gospel, the Church will need to engage increasingly with questions of unity and diversity. The process by which such questions are addressed will be as important as any decision that is reached.
3. Unity and diversity are not necessarily conflicting concepts; they can co-exist in meaningful partnership. Di-

versity of sound in a choir or orchestra does not ruin the music. Any organization with the size and global presence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church must make room for differing practices even while rigorously protecting its unity.

4. Policy development is as important as policy enforcement, perhaps more so, in maintaining a sense of organizational unity and relevance in a rapidly changing world with its very diverse social environments.

## The Need for Policy

Every organization requires structure and a system of authority to survive and function effectively. History underscores the importance of organizational structure. Though the church is different from other organizations (government, army, business) there is no debate about its need for policy, systems, and a pattern of authority. The question will be what is the role of policy and how does authority operate in a faith-based community that considers Jesus as its head?

The Bible provides ample evidence of organizational dynamics connected with the work of God in this world. The Old Testament books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy might be thought of as a policy manual for the covenant people of God. There were rules and guidelines for the community's worship as well as for its internal and external relations.

Several passages in the New Testament offer insights on how Church organization, processes and authority should function.

- Jesus spoke about the authority of His church: Keys of heaven given... whatever you bind... (Matthew 16:19, 18:18, John 20:23) How is this to be understood? The authority of the church can only be exercised under submission to God, not in the place of God.
- Admonition from Jesus about how to deal with an erring brother (Matthew 18) underscores the idea of group decisions rather than one person's decision concerning the fate of another individual.
- Following the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) leaders "... delivered decisions of apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey" (Acts 16:4). The decision of the Council permitted different practices in some things while calling for a uniform stance in others.
- Paul advised the church in Corinth to act decisively concerning a person whose immoral behavior harmed the whole congregation: "... hand this man over to Satan" (1 Corinthians 5:5).
- Paul urged Titus to deal with divisive persons (Titus 3:10).
- Jesus prayed that His followers might demonstrate unity (John 15 and 17).
- Paul urged the Ephesian church to walk in unity (Ephesians 4).
- The whole world is the mission field of the Church (Matthew 28:18–20, Acts 1:7–8, Acts 10–11).
- The Church is to acknowledge differences and have a process for their resolution (Acts 6, 15, Galatians 3:26–29, Philippians 2).

We observe then that policy, system, structure, and authority are appropriate elements in the life of an organization committed to living and proclaiming the Gospel. How then should one think about the purpose of policy?

## The Purpose of Policy

Policy outlines or describes, and sometimes prescribes, a course of action designed to perpetuate the organization and facilitate accomplishment of its objectives. If the first purpose of policy is to preserve stability of the organization, the second purpose is to translate an organization's vision and mission into effective action. This overarching purpose of policy contains several nuances particularly for large organizations.

1. Policy protects the organization from autocratic and erratic leadership. From time to time leaders forget the servant nature of leadership and are caught up in a mindset that resorts to the use of power for personal purposes. An abundance of anecdotes illustrates the damage inflicted on organizations by leaders who use the organization for self-serving purposes. Eugene Peterson's observation is pertinent: "Because leadership is necessarily an exercise of authority, it easily shifts into an exercise of power. But the minute it does that, it begins to inflict damage on both the leader and the led."<sup>3</sup>
2. Policy protects an organization from merely reactive decision making. It facilitates systematic planning and the shaping of structure around collective purposes. Policy expresses the collective wisdom of the Church for the continued conduct of essential functions through successive changes in leadership.
3. Policy assists an organization in establishing similar patterns of action across a widespread geographic territory. It links separate parts together into a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. Policy thus contributes to an organization's brand and reputation. It enables leaders to address organizational mission and administrative issues in a context larger than their immediate and local setting.

Policy, then, serves to maintain stability, collective focus, and integrity—the same ethos and organizational culture throughout all parts of the whole. Because organizational life is dynamic, policy must also be dynamic and responsive to new realities and environments. Policy must always be the servant of organizational identity and mission. Otherwise policy risks becoming irrelevant and an impediment to the organization and its accomplishment of mission.



## The Dynamic Relationship Between Policy and Organizational Mission

Policy is an instrument to enable and sustain collective energies applied to mission. This does not mean that policy is the basis for mission. Rather, the consideration of mission needs and opportunities gives rise to policy. The articulation of policy generally follows the thoughtful assessment of new opportunities, new developments (internal or external), and new perspectives in mission.

Examples from denominational structure illustrate the dynamic and complementary relationship between policy and mission. Policy is the servant of mission not its master. In general, the circumstances of mission informed the development of policy while in other instances policy facilitated mission.

1. The development of unions preceded the policy for unions. When church leaders began to recognize the value added that union structures brought to organizational supervision and administration they crafted policy to standardize this feature of denominational structure.
2. The structural re-organization decisions of General Conference sessions in 1901 and 1903 came as a response to developments taking place in various parts of the world as well as the realization that a revised structure would better serve the purpose of worldwide mission. In this re-organization, certain aspects of authority were dispersed while other aspects were concentrated.
3. The 1973 Annual Council received a report from the Council on the Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church (also known as the Camp Mohaven report). One of the main questions under consideration was whether women should function in local church offices that required ordination. No policy existed explicitly permitting or prohibiting the ordination of women as elders. As part of its response to the Camp Mohaven Report the Annual Council voted, "That con-

tinued study be given to the theological soundness of the election of women to local church offices which require ordination and *that division committees exercise discretion in any special cases that may arise until a definitive position is adopted...*" and "That in areas receptive to such action, there be continued recognition of the appropriateness of appointing women to pastoral-evangelistic work, and that the appropriate missionary credentials/licenses be granted them."<sup>4</sup>

4. The Annual Council of 1987 voted, "To record that if world divisions choose to select a term which applies to individuals who carry major responsibilities or who are placed in leadership roles which do not ordinarily lead to ordination as a gospel minister, the division may request the General Conference to approve the establishment of the Commissioned Minister category for denominational workers in its territory."<sup>5</sup>
5. In 2001, the Annual Council adopted a policy, "Variations in Administrative Relationships."<sup>6</sup> It begins, "For the purpose of fulfilling the mission of the Church, division administrations are authorized to recommend modified organizational structures and or administrative relationships..." The policy was adopted after several organizations had already adopted some variations in administrative relationships.
6. A new policy describing Structural Flexibility was approved in 2007.<sup>7</sup> This policy outlined alternative organizational patterns available under special circumstances. The alternative patterns now approved in policy, though few, were already in existence. The realization that these organizational patterns could improve mission accomplishment lead to the development of a new policy.
7. In 2009, the General Conference Annual Council adopted a "Roadmap for Mission." This document recognized that "In some situations, Seventh-day Adventist mission may include the formation of transitional groups (usually termed Special Affinity Groups) that

**If the first purpose of policy is to preserve stability of the organization, the second purpose is to translate an organization's vision and mission into effective action.**

lead the people from a non-Christian religion into the Seventh-day Adventist Church...<sup>8</sup> Though this document is inserted prior to the Working Policy of General Conference *Working Policy*, it functions as if it were policy. The provision for Special Affinity Groups came into being only after years of frontline experience and experimentation regarding mission among the followers of religions other than Christianity.

8. For many decades, the General Conference Annual Council approved a General Conference Wage Scale that was designed to be used worldwide. This is no longer the case. The General Conference *Working Policy* contains a philosophy of remuneration and a set of guidelines which divisions are expected to follow in establishing their own wage scale, remuneration, and benefit structure.
9. It would be misleading to conclude from the above illustrations that practice always precedes policy or that policy only responds to, rather than facilitates, mission. The resource-sharing policies of the Church (tithes, offerings, and international service employees—often described as “missionaries”) were created to advance mission.

Perhaps it is best to see “policy” and “mission” as having a symbiotic relationship. The relationship is essential and beneficial though without continued monitoring to adjust policy in response to circumstances encountered in mission the relationship can become less than beneficial. Policy can function as facilitator and controller—but both functions need to be exercised in the interest of mission. The breadth of diversity reflected in the policies above have not had an adverse effect on unity. Rather, unity has been big enough to embrace the need for diversity.

## Policy Expressed in Governance and Authority Documents of the Church

Despite the anti-organizational bias of our founding fathers, the Church has developed a broad framework of policy or governance documents.

### 1. Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs

These statements, and their periodic revisions, expressing Seventh-day Adventist beliefs have been approved by the General Conference Session—the highest organizational authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Proposals for additions or amendments to the Fundamental Beliefs

must go through a lengthy and rigorous period of study involving the worldwide Church before maturing as a recommendation to a General Conference Session.

### 2. The *Church Manual*

The development of the *Church Manual* represents the first effort of Seventh-day Adventists to codify policy for the organization. In the early years of the Church, General Conference Sessions met annually and adopted various decisions affecting church order and church life. But these were not necessarily compiled and circulated as policy. The General Conference Session of 1882 reflected a growing realization that effective and harmonious functioning of a growing organization required a common understanding of procedures. Thus, the Session voted to have prepared “instructions to church officers, to be printed in the *Review and Herald* or in tract form.”<sup>9</sup> However, the 1883 General Conference Session rejected the idea of creating a permanent form for these articles and instructions.

Although the Church resisted the idea of adopting a formal document of instructions (policies), various leaders took the initiative from time to time to assemble in booklet form the generally accepted rules for church life and operation. A notable case is the 184-page book, published in 1907 by J N Loughborough, entitled *The Church, Its Organization, Order and Discipline*.<sup>10</sup>

The growth of the church worldwide increased the sense of need for a manual to guide pastors and lay members. In 1931, the General Conference Committee voted to establish a church manual which was published in 1932. The preface of the first edition stated, “it has become increasingly evident that a manual on church government is needed to set forth and preserve our denominational practices and polity.”<sup>11</sup>

The *Church Manual* “describes the operation and functions of local churches and their relationship to denominational structures in which they hold membership. The *Church Manual* also expresses the Church’s understanding of Christian life and church governance and discipline based on biblical principles and the authority of duly assembled General Conference Sessions.”<sup>12</sup>

As time passed, the *Church Manual* has experienced numerous changes reflecting the need for order in the worldwide work of the Church. The 1946 General Conference Session voted that “all changes or revisions of policy that are to be made in the *Manual* shall be authorized by the

General Conference Session."<sup>13</sup> Consequently, a new edition of the *Church Manual* is published following each General Conference Session. *It is essential that the most recent edition of the Church Manual be used when one desires to know current policies and procedures that apply to the local church.*

### 3. General Conference *Working Policy* (and corresponding Division *Working Policy*)

General Conference *Working Policy* is the compilation of policy decisions adopted by the General Conference Executive Committee. The first compilation of General Conference working policies was published in 1926 and contained a digest of decisions by the General Conference Executive Committee and General Conference Sessions.

In connection with the ongoing debate about ministerial ordination there have been some voices claiming that the General Conference Session has no role or right in making policy decisions. These voices assert that the General Conference Session has delegated policy-making authority to the General Conference Executive Committee and thus the Session must refrain from determining any matters of policy. While the delegation of responsibility is true<sup>14</sup> this does not mean that the General Conference Session is thereby deprived of any right to make or influence policy decisions. The General Conference Session is regarded as the highest authority in the Church. It is therefore rather strange to claim that the authority of the General Conference Executive Committee supersedes or can thwart the authority of a General Conference Session. The ordination of women to ministry became a General Conference Session item because it was referred there by the Executive Committee. The Session did not initiate the matter.

The first publication of General Conference *Working Policy* included General Conference Session decisions. Subsequent iterations of the publication have reflected directly or indirectly the decisions of a General Conference Session as well as those of the General Conference Ex-

ecutive Committee.<sup>15</sup>

In practical terms, General Conference *Working Policy* represents a collective decision-making process. It is the “family code of conduct.” *Policy is the result of the collective pursuit for unity, not the cause of it.*

Policy making must be a continuing exercise in light of a growing organization and the rapidly changing/diversifying environments in which the Church carries on its work. When tension exists on the interpretation or application of policy the family must come together to forge new understandings of mission-sensitive policies.

### 4. Constitution and Bylaws (for conferences and institutions) and Operating Policy (for units with “mission” status)

These documents, adopted by organizational units and based upon model documents in General Conference *Working Policy*, define an entity’s purpose and its relationship to other parts of denominational structure. In addition, the operational procedures outlined are designed to ensure that leadership is accountable to a constituency session.

These four internally-developed policy documents address the ethos, polity, and administrative or supervisory functions of denominational structure. However, there is yet another governance authority established by the Church—the Law of the Land. It is easy to overlook the authority of government and its relation to church life. Freedom of religion is highly valued by the Church and sometimes this idea translates into the perception that local government can have no role whatsoever that affects the Church.

General Conference *Working Policy* clearly acknowledges the domain of earthly government:

... In the event laws/changes in the laws governing a country seem to render compliance with denominational policies a violation of the law, the organization shall act in harmony with the law, provided the following:

a. Counsel has been sought from the General Conference officers (president, secretary, and treasurer/chief financial officer) and it is established that denomina-

**Further theological study on the question of ordination will not result in consensus regarding ordination. The Church will have to live with widely divergent views.**

*tional policies do indeed violate the law.*

*b. Compliance with the law does not constitute a violation of scriptural principles.<sup>16</sup>*

Unfortunately, the Church has experienced some painful moments in its relation to local laws. In some instances where compliance with law was not voluntarily expressed, court decisions have obligated the Church to change policies and practices and to repair past errors. It may be helpful to review a situation that developed out of the United States Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VII of that Act speaks about equal pay for equal work.

It had been a long-standing practice for the Church and its institutions to provide differing remuneration to men and women. Men, generally classed as “head of household” would receive a higher salary/wage than women doing the same work. This situation was challenged by two female employees of Pacific Press Publishing Association in the 1970s.<sup>17</sup> When rebuffed by administration on the request for equal pay the matter escalated to court. The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission became involved as a plaintiff against Pacific Press.

Church leaders presented arguments to the court that all employees were, in a sense, ministers; therefore, the matter of remuneration should be an ecclesiastical decision—and thus beyond the reach of government legislation. The court disagreed. One of four cases settled out of court. The plaintiff (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) prevailed against Pacific Press in the other three. The ripple effects lead to substantial changes in remuneration policy.

### **The Administration of Policy: Compliance, Enforcement, and Development**

What is the use of having a policy if there is no way to enforce it? The question sounds very pertinent. Sanctions and penalties for lack of compliance are a normal part of any regulatory environment.

The Church has a rather comprehensive policy structure as evidenced in the Fundamental Beliefs, the *Church Manual*, General Conference *Working Policy*, and Constitutions and Bylaws. What about sanctions and penalties? What are the disincentives to non-compliance?

The concept of enforcement, though present, is not a prominent part of denominational life. *The process of policy creation is designed to involve broad consensus and thus minimize the*

*need for enforcement measures.* However, policy is not silent about compliance and enforcement.

A local church has two disciplinary or enforcement options available: placing an individual under censure (designed for remedial purposes), and removing a person from membership. Either one requires a decision of the church family in a formal church business meeting.

With respect to employees, including leaders, employing units must follow the employment laws of the jurisdiction in which they operate. Some areas of the world function within an “employment-at-will” doctrine. This refers to the presumption that employment is for an indefinite period and may be terminated either by the employer or the employee. In other parts of the world the discharge of an employee can be a very difficult and complex matter. The legal environment of the country/region places demands on the church in regard to employment practices. Jesus recognized that people live in two kingdoms, though obviously the kingdom of God is paramount. “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”<sup>18</sup>

Employees who hold elective office can be removed from office under disciplinary proceedings documented in the employment policies of their unit. Further, the governance model in the Seventh-day Adventist Church stipulates that election to office is not indefinite. Persons may hold office from the time of their election up to the time of the next constituency meeting. Leaders are accountable to a constituency and the prospect of not being re-elected to a subsequent term can be a powerful incentive to appropriate behavior.

The ethos of Seventh-day Adventist members, their relation to the Church, and the relations among denominational entities is so heavily mission-centered and weighted towards collaboration that non-compliance, discipline, sanctions, and penalties are often viewed as peripheral matters. Policy expects compliance because policy decisions come out of a collective process of deliberation.

We have recognized disciplinary provisions for church members, employees, and elected officials. What about organizational units? Policy is rather sparse in this regard. It provides for one disciplinary measure—dissolution or dismissal of an organization from the Seventh-day Adventist family of organizations. There are no intermediate sanctions. Compliance is assumed by virtue of belonging to the family.<sup>19</sup>



The negative connotations of enforcement measures in an organization based on voluntary participation can be catastrophic. There are other reasons that make policy enforcement a very difficult challenge. One of those reasons is that authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is widely dispersed throughout denominational structure. One cannot find a location in denominational structure that has final authority in everything. Final authority, of one type or another, exists at every level of church structure: local church; the executive committees and constituencies of local conference, union, division, the General Conference; and the General Conference in Session. These differing types of final authority are all interdependent. No one unit can exist by itself because it depends for its very existence on the proper functioning of all other units.

Further, when a member unit is accepted into the family it is assumed that the relationship is permanent. There is no periodic review or reaffirmation of membership. Perhaps there is great wisdom in the Church never adopting a schedule of intermediate sanctions for denominational units. The shared authority structure of the Church renders policy enforcement decisions against a member unit a double-edged sword.

It is not surprising then that the Annual Council 2016 should have such conflicted views about a proposal to exercise enforcement authority. This is difficult territory and threatens to awaken many unintended consequences.

Policy enforcement is a legitimate tool in organizational structure. How and when it should be employed are very perplexing questions bound to raise sharply differing views. Certainly, it would be expected that all other means of resolution/reconciliation would be exhausted first.

### Finding a Pathway Forward

This presentation takes the view that policy documents of an organization must always be dynamic. An organization's mission, vision, and values may remain unchanged and anchor an entity in turbulent times. Policies are the instruments that enable an organization to pursue its

mission in a stated environment. When that environment changes, fixed and immovable policies become redundant and possibly obstructive. It is for this reason that *policy enforcement needs to be balanced with policy development*.

The remainder of this presentation looks at the question of ministerial ordination from the perspective of policy and practice. The Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) addressed theological considerations about ordination and produced a very helpful Consensus Statement on the Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Ordination.<sup>20</sup> However, TOSC did not address denominational policy and practices in light of the theology of ordination statement.

We shall explore several aspects of policy in relation to ordination practice:

1. Policy safeguards unity while allowing for diversity.
2. Policy currently permits ordination of men and women.
3. Policy reserves certain functions to an ordained minister. These functions are not inherently gender-specific.
4. Policy protects against the abuse of privilege granted by ordination.

### Policy Safeguards Unity While Allowing for Diversity

From its earliest days, the idea of unity has been a high priority to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was a desire for unity that prompted the development of the *Church Manual*, the General Conference *Working Policy* and the Fundamental Beliefs. Unity however, did not require uniformity, as acknowledged by W. A. Spicer, "The details of organization may vary according to conditions and work, but ever as God has called his church together there has appeared in it the spiritual gift of order and of government, the spirit that rules in heaven."<sup>21</sup>

Policy decisions of the Church have addressed both issues of unity and diversity. The following illustrations reveal the importance of preserving unity as well as recogniz-

**Policy must always be the servant of organizational identity and mission. Otherwise policy risks becoming irrelevant and an impediment to the organization and its accomplishment of mission.**

ing the need for flexibility.

In the interest of ensuring unity the General Conference Executive Committee, April 4, 1995, voted "To approve the proposal that those sections of the Model Constitutions and Operating Policies *that are essential to the unity of the Church worldwide* be printed in bold print, and to request unions, conferences and missions to include these sections in Constitutions and Bylaws, and Operating Policies as adopted by their organizations."<sup>22</sup>

As described earlier, the General Conference Executive Committee has also adopted policies that permit diversity in structure—Special Affinity Groups in A 20 Roadmap for Mission, Structural Flexibility in B 10 27, and Alternatives in Organizational Structure in B 10 28.

Another instance of recognizing the need for diversity comes from a 1984 Annual Council action that voted, in part, "To advise each division that it is free to make provision as it may deem necessary for the election and ordination of women as local church elders."<sup>23</sup>

Also in 1984, the General Conference Committee received and approved a report from the Commission on the Role and Function of Denominational Organizations. The report has a section on Preserving the Unity of Church and Message. Eleven points are listed on how the Church preserves unity. Point 8 provides an important nuance concerning unity: "Proper decentralization on various levels and within each level, thus making unity and belonging to the whole more desirable and functional by relating working leadership as closely as possible to local circumstances and to a responsible constituency. Remote control easily becomes a source of frustration and division."<sup>24</sup>

Continued theological study on the question of ministerial ordination only confirms the earlier view, expressed in 1990, that there is no "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>25</sup> The Session went on to express the reason for its decision: "Further, in view of the widespread lack of support for the ordination of women to the gospel ministry in the world church and in view of the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the church, we do not approve ordination of women to the gospel ministry."<sup>26</sup>

The 1990 General Conference Session decision has been rightfully described as a decision against ministerial ordination for women. What is often left out, intentionally or otherwise, is that *the basis of the decision was "the lack of*

*widespread support" and "the possible risk of disunity, dissension, and diversion from the mission of the church..."* The reason that prompted the decision should indicate that any further discussion of the matter must consider the issues of support and unity/disunity. The Church has spent its energies on looking for a theological answer that might ensure unity. That answer has proved elusive. The Church must now determine how it will address unity in the presence of continuing theological differences.

This is where policy development comes to the fore. Numerous illustrations have been given above to demonstrate that, while seeking to preserve unity, policy has made room for diversity in structure, in administration, in licensing/credentialing of employees, and in local church leadership (the ordination of women elders). The development of these policies has not been hostile to unity. Instead, unity has been maintained in the presence of growing diversity.

## **Policy Permits Ordination of Men and Women**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church practices ordination for two offices in the local church structure, deacons/deaconesses and elders, and for selected ministers/pastors. Ordination confirms the faith community's recognition of gifts appropriate for spiritual leadership and the faith community's desire for the person to serve in a leadership role requiring ordination. *There is a hierarchy of service roles but not a hierarchy of ordination.* Ordination does not confer new mystical or spiritual power and authority.<sup>27</sup> Both men and women are already being ordained as deacons/deaconesses/elders. So, the question is not one of female eligibility for ordination. It is a question of female eligibility for certain roles. Denominational policy, by General Conference Session actions, has already resolved the question of female eligibility for ordination even though the ordination of deaconesses and female elders is not practiced worldwide.<sup>28</sup>

We must then turn our attention to female eligibility for office—particularly any office requiring ministerial ordination as currently practiced. The responsibilities of a church elder, male or female, include many of the responsibilities borne by a local church pastor. "In the absence of a pastor, elders are the spiritual leaders of the church and by precept and example must seek to lead the church into a deeper and fuller Christian experience. Elders should be able to conduct the services of the church and minister in

both word and doctrine when the assigned pastor is unavailable."<sup>29</sup> However, an elder functions only in the local church where he/she has been elected as an elder for the current term. Policy recognizes that a man or woman, ordained as an elder, can perform these local church functions that are among the responsibilities of an ordained pastor.

I am indebted to Kevin Burton whose paper cites information provided by the General Conference in 1906, 1916, and 1926 to the United States Bureau of the Census. The following statement appeared under the information about Seventh-day Adventists: "Membership in the conferences or the ministry is open to both sexes although there are very few female ministers."<sup>30</sup> In the context of the document "membership" does not refer to church membership but to leadership roles both in administration and in the ministry. It would appear from this that, at least for a period of time in our history, there were no leadership or ministry roles for which women were ineligible.

**Functions Reserved to an Ordained Minister Are Not Inherently Gender-Specific**

Certain local church functions however, can only be performed by an ordained minister or by a licensed minister who is also elected as an elder and authorized by the employing conference or mission to perform certain roles ordinarily reserved to an ordained minister.<sup>31</sup> The roles reserved to an ordained minister are

- 1. organizing a church,
- 2. uniting churches,
- 3. presiding over a church business meeting in which the business of the meeting involves a matter of church member discipline, and
- 4. ordaining elders and deacons.<sup>32</sup>

In addition, the president of a local mission/conference, union mission/conference, or the General Conference must be an ordained minister.<sup>33</sup> "Inasmuch as the conference/mission/field president stands at the head of the gospel

ministry in the conference/mission/field and is the chief elder or overseer of all the churches, a conference/mission/field president shall be an ordained minister."<sup>34</sup>

The roles restricted to an ordained minister have nothing inherently requiring male gender. Neither are these activities such that a woman is incapable of performing them. Nor can these restricted actions can be performed solely under the ordained minister's individual capacity. Organizing and uniting churches require Local Mission/Conference Executive Committee authorization. Disciplining members requires the participation of the local church membership. Ordaining deacons/deaconesses and elders requires first that they be elected to the respective positions by their local church. All these actions involve a group process rather than independent decision making.

The only reason for limiting roles 1, 2, and 4 to an ordained pastor is that only an ordained pastor is authorized to conduct the ordination of deacons/deaconesses and elders. Such ordinations may be required in organizing churches or uniting churches. The restriction on the leadership functions in these matters is not one of male or female gender. The restriction is that ministerial ordination is required. Since, now, the Church does not approve of ministerial ordination for women it is not permissible for a woman to perform these tasks. It is not a matter of a woman being incapable of such group leadership tasks. The reason is that the Church has not consented to women being eligible for ministerial ordination even though they are eligible for ordination to other offices.

Activity 3 reserved for an ordained minister ensures that a person of considerable experience, and one who is not elected/appointed by the congregation, leads the meeting. The pastor is thus at least some distance removed from the internal political processes that may be present in a business meeting where discipline matters will be decided.

The situation is compounded when one brings credentials and licenses into the picture.

**The negative connotations of enforcement measures in an organization based on voluntary participation can be catastrophic.**

As early as 1975, the General Conference Executive Committee considered implementing a Commissioned Minister Credential.<sup>35</sup> By 1981, the General Conference Executive Committee was issuing Commissioned Minister Credentials to senior leaders who were not ordained to ministry.<sup>36</sup> However, the Commissioned Minister Credential does not appear in General Conference *Working Policy* until 1992. The North American Division<sup>37</sup>, as early as 1980, adopted a policy for Commissioned Minister Credentials—intended for persons serving in spiritual leadership positions (administrative, departmental, and institutional).

In 1987, the Annual Council voted that “if world divisions choose to select a term which applies to individuals who carry major responsibilities or who are placed in leadership roles which do not ordinarily lead to ordination as a gospel minister, the division may request the General Conference to approve the establishment of the Commissioned Minister category for denominational workers in its territory.”<sup>38</sup>

The 1989 Annual Council approved that “*commissioned ministers or licensed ministers may perform essentially the ministerial functions of an ordained minister of the gospel in the churches to which they are assigned.* . . .”<sup>39</sup>

The Commissioned Minister License and Credential was made available “to associates in pastoral care; Bible instructors; General Conference, division, union and local conference treasurers and department directors including associate and assistant directors; institutional chaplains; presidents and vice-presidents of major institutions; auditors (General Conference director, associates, area and district directors); and field directors of the Christian Record Services, Inc.”<sup>40</sup>

Not all divisions use this policy. However, several divisions have adopted this policy and grant Commissioned Ministerial Credentials to women who serve as pastors/associate pastors in local churches as well as in officer/departmental roles. The anomaly is that women with Commissioned Minister Credentials may perform essentially the ministerial functions of an ordained minister of the gospel in the churches to which they are assigned. The only functions they cannot perform are those identified above. It has been shown that there is no reason, other than the ineligibility for ministerial ordination, for the denial of these roles to women. Except for the ordination of deacons/deaconesses and elders, the roles reserved to an ordained minister are not primary functions in pastoral ministry.

## **Policy Protects Against the Abuse of Privileges Granted By Ordination**

This section is important because some who object to women being ordained as pastors are under the impression that ordaining women as pastors in one area of the world imposes the practice elsewhere. It must be admitted that any variation from normal/standard practice may be cited as precedent-setting and used to pressure widespread adoption of similar practices elsewhere. Such issues are not unique to the subject of ordination policy and must be addressed through normal decision-making processes of the Church. The essential message in what follows is that ordination to any office does not constitute license to function independently. The Church has instituted safeguards for the privilege of ordination.

Ordination for local church office (deacon/deaconess, elder) authorizes a person to function as such in the local church in which he/she holds membership and has been elected for the current term of service. The fact of being ordained as a deacon/deaconess or church elder does not give a person the authority to function in this office outside of the local church in which membership is held. However, if an ordained deacon/deaconess or elder transfers membership to another local church he/she may function in the role if elected to do so by that local church. A new ordination is not necessary. “Once ordained, elders need not be ordained again if re-elected, or upon election as elders of other churches, provided they have maintained regular membership status. They are also qualified to serve as deacons.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, *their ordination is valid worldwide while their functioning in such a role is dependent upon their being members in the local church that elected them to serve the current term.*

Denominational policy, under the heading “Ordained to the World Church”, describes ministerial ordination in slightly different, and possibly confusing, terms. “Workers who are ordained to the gospel ministry are set apart to serve the world Church, primarily as pastors and preachers of the Word, and are subject to the direction of the Church in regard to the type of ministry and their place of service.”<sup>42</sup>

What does it mean to be ordained to the world church? There have been some ordained ministers who took this to mean that they could go anywhere in the world, present themselves as ordained ministers and perform any ministerial function without any other permission from anyone.



Several of these situations have resulted in serious damage to the church in the areas where these ministers traveled. Ordination to the world church does not mean license to go anywhere and do anything one chooses. But it does mean that, like ordination for deacons/deaconesses and elders, a minister's ordination is valid worldwide.

The functioning of deacons/deaconesses and elders is controlled by the requirement of election to office in a local church. The functioning of an ordained minister is controlled by the issuance of appropriate credentials by an employing organization. The possession of ministerial credentials indicates that one is employed and therefore accountable to some unit of organization. Ministerial credentials issued by one organization are accepted elsewhere by denominational entities around the world.

Ministerial ordination does not authorize one to travel the world and conduct ministerial functions independently. Credentials are required. The Church has apportioned the world territory to the supervision of divisions, unions, and local conferences/missions. Common courtesy demands that I knock on your door and await your invitation before entering your home. A similar mindset needs to prevail in the activities of persons who have been ordained.

A minister who has been ordained but does not have current credentials is not eligible to function as a minister. "Possession of an expired credential or license gives the person no authority whatsoever."<sup>43</sup>

### **How Then Can Policy Development Resolve the Present Tension Over Ordination?**

In what follows, I present *an illustration of policy development* with respect to ministerial ordination. This is only an example. There may be other paths of policy development on this subject that lead the Church towards resolution and away from conflict. The objective is to illustrate that policy development can be an effective conflict resolution methodology in the present circumstances. The illustration given below is based on

the premise that current policy has prepared the stage for women ministers to perform the full functions of ministry. The rationale that currently reserves certain functions to ordained ministers (males) must be re-examined.

1. Discontinue the practice of ordination altogether. Replace the current ordination service practices with a commissioning service for ministers, elders, deacons and deaconesses, and perhaps other leaders (Sabbath School teachers) in the local church. Doing this would be fully consistent with the theology of ordination while avoiding the unbiblical connotations that have become attached to the term "ordination."
2. Suspend the issuance of ministerial licenses and credentials. In their place use the Commissioned Minister License and Commissioned Minister Credential. Revise policy language concerning the role and leadership functions of individuals holding Commissioned Minister Credentials.
3. Amend gender-specific language in General Conference *Working Policy*, Section L 45 10 and L 50.
4. Clarify the territorial authorization associated with Commissioned Minister Credentials. Approve the worldwide validity of the commissioning service for deacons/deaconesses/elders and those holding Commissioned Minister Licenses/Credentials while re-emphasizing the safeguards that protect the world Church from individual abuse of privilege.
5. Revise *Church Manual* and General Conference *Working Policy* credential requirements for a local mission/local conference president. In a similar manner, revise the General Conference Constitution and Bylaws, Model Constitutions and Bylaws, and Model Operating Policies to indicate that the president shall be a "Commissioned Minister of experience."
6. Amend other policies whose language limits ministerial duties to males.
7. Recognize that permission for women to

**Permissive rather than prescriptive policies have enabled the Church to address complex situations in the past where differing circumstances called for differing practices.**

serve without restriction in ministerial roles does not constitute obligation to do so. The normal selection processes for any employee give discretion to the employing unit. The permissive stance for the ordination of women as local church elders can serve as a pattern for the commissioning of women as pastors.

### Some conclusions

A study of policy and its development through time leads me to the following conclusions:

1. Mission-sensitive practice has generally preceded the development of policy. The Church should not be surprised if this situation continues. The opportunities of mission in diverse settings will require creativity which may not yet be embraced in policy. Therefore, policy development must be an ongoing priority for the Church.
2. Permissive rather than prescriptive policies have enabled the Church to address complex situations in the past where differing circumstances called for differing practices. Church policy must allow some room for diversity of practice if the Church is to function effectively in all the cultures of the world. Diversity that is mission-sensitive need not be a threat to unity.
3. The gradual development of decisions respecting the role of women in Church leadership has been complicated by uncertainty about the meaning of ordination and the culturally accepted roles of women in society. The theology of ordination, though unchanged from previous descriptions, has been more effectively communicated. There is no mystical power in the act of ordination/commissioning. There is no hierarchy of ordination. The ordination of a deacon/deaconess/elder is not qualitatively different in nature from the ordination of a pastor. There is, however, a hierarchy of office.
4. The Church's decision to permit but not require the election of women as elders, to

consent to their ordination, to issue to women Commissioned Minister Credentials with authority to perform virtually all functions of an ordained minister has not inflicted injury to Church unity.

5. Historically, the Church has demonstrated a preference for policy development rather than policy enforcement. Emerging circumstances have been addressed by allowing for creative initiatives even in advance of policy creation. Continuing this kind of approach offers the best opportunity for the Church to maintain its unity and resolve the tensions that exist in the matter of ministerial ordination. ■



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8. General Conference *Working Policy* (2016–2017), 59, A 20 15 Fulfilling the Mission, 5.
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10. See *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 19th Edition, Revised 2015, 15.
11. *Ibid.*, 16
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13. *General Conference Report*, No. 8, (June 14, 1946): 197.
14. See General Conference Bylaws, Article XIII, General Conference Executive Committee.
15. See for example General Conference *Working Policy* (2016–2017), D 05 “The 54th General Conference Session, in its consideration of the Role and Function of Denominational Organizations, pointed out that the constitutions, bylaws and operating policies of all denominational organizations should be consistent with the Seventh-day Adventist concept of the church, its organization, and governance.”
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17. The plaintiffs against PPPA were two female employees, Merikay Silver and Lorna Tobler, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. This ten-year-long and sad chapter in institutional history offers many lessons about how a religious institution relates to employees, to fairness in policy, and to legislation.
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25. Fifty-Fifth General Conference Session, 1990, Session Bulletin #7, 15.
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28. Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual* (2015 edition), 73, 78, 80
29. *Ibid.*, 73
30. United States Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, vol. 2, 23.
31. *Ibid.*, 33
32. *Ibid.*, 36, 39, 64, 73
33. See the respective Model Constitution and Bylaws or Model Operating Policies in General Conference *Working Policy*. The Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual* indicates only that the conference president should be an ordained pastor of experience (31). No mention is made of this requirement for a Division President since divisions do not operate under a Constitution and Bylaws. Division presidents are elected at a General Conference Session, or by the General Conference Executive Committee between Sessions, and it will be the case that the qualifications for a president at other levels of organization will also be applied to the selection of a division president.
34. General Conference *Working Policy* (2016/2017), E 60
35. General Conference Executive Committee Spring Meeting, April 2, 1975 “VOTED, To refer to the available members of the General Conference Committee, the item concerning Commissioned Ministerial Credentials.”
36. General Conference Executive Committee Minutes (January 29, 1981): 81–25
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39. Annual Council Minutes 1989, pages 35 and 36. See also GCWP L 25 on the functions of licensed ministers. (emphasis supplied).
40. General Conference *Working Policy* (1993–1994) D 05 10. The listing is essentially the same in GCWP 2016–2017 E 05 10.
41. Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual* (2015 edition), 73.
42. General Conference *Working Policy* (2016–2017), L 40 Ordained to the World Church.
43. Seventh-day Adventist *Church Manual* (2015 edition), 35.

# UNITY

## Unity in the Writings of Ellen White | BY WENDY A. JACKSON

**DISCUSSED** | Ellen G. White, unity and mission, “being of one mind,” separation from Christ

Successful mission means that the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the twenty-first century “is marked by great diversity in culture, values, traditions, and practices.” While “such diversity has the power to enrich the church” it also “threatens to pull it apart, as its membership reads Scripture through different cultural and experiential lenses. Even within single cultural contexts diversity is growing. With increasing frequency, this diversity contributes to conflicts on theological issues and church practices in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”<sup>1</sup> While the church seeks to maintain unity, approaches to unity often overlook the complexity of the issues involved. Furthermore, most of the discussion fails to even define what is meant by unity and simply assumes that everyone is agreed about what it means.<sup>2</sup>

The Christian church has struggled from its inception with the tension between the declaration that unity is intrinsic to the nature of the church, and the reality that the church is far from united. The difficulties and challenges this tension poses have resulted in many attempts to explain the nature of unity in a way that solves the apparent gap between belief and reality. While such theological exercises may seem pointless, they are in fact fundamental to thinking through questions of praxis, since any consideration of church unity presupposes an understanding of the nature of unity. We cannot consider how unity can be achieved and manifested by the church without first discussing the actual nature of the unity that we are seeking.

This paper will examine the concepts of unity and disunity from the perspective of Seventh-day Adventist prophet and co-founder Ellen White who, in the course of her ministry, wrote extensively on the topic of unity. After stating some assumptions, the paper will begin by noting the importance White placed on the unity of the church. It will then explore the foundational question of what White understood by the term unity and note what she considered were the major causes of disunity. Finally, it will outline her contribution to the topic of how unity of the church can be attained.

### Assumptions

Before immersing ourselves in the thinking of White, three important assumptions need to be stated.

First, as unity of the church is a property of the church, an exploration of unity of the church cannot be viewed in isolation from Ellen White’s wider ecclesiological perspectives, including the function and role of the church’s authority structure, and the relationship of the organization to biblical authority. Too often, single statements on unity are considered in isolation without regard to the complexity of the concept. Such practices leave the writer to interpret the statement in ways consistent with their own ideas rather than understanding what the author originally intended.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full ecclesiology of Ellen White. Nevertheless, it is important that we understand that White’s ecclesiology was primarily functional. Her writings define the church in terms of its







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relationship to God, and its divinely appointed mission. White specifically identifies the church as God's appointed representatives to testify to the love of God and to "win them to Christ by the efficacy of that love."<sup>3</sup> White's understanding of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the end-time remnant extended the representative role of the church. With a specific message to call people back to forgotten truths and a final message of warning to the nations, both the remnant's actions and faithfulness to truth are to be a witness to the character of God and His law.<sup>4</sup>

Further, given her understanding of the church as a voluntary society, White considers representing God is an obligation on all who choose to join the church. Consequently, she expects that all members of the church will prioritise the interests of God at all times.<sup>5</sup>

With regards to the authority structure, White noted that order was essential for the church to function in the way God intended; however, she did not dictate any specific form this order should take even in the face of a need for reorganization in 1901.<sup>6</sup> Organization was to remain flexible enough to serve the mission of the church. The character of its leaders was also important. Leaders were to be humble and accountable,<sup>7</sup> and centralization of power was to be avoided.<sup>8</sup>

The second assumption is that the views of Ellen White are not those of a theologian who is removed from the everyday life, but rather a hands-on leader whose views were incubated in real world crises. Her first statements suggesting brethren press together in the shadow of the Great Disappointment are followed by statements directed to specific crises in the 1850s and 1860s, and find their maturity during the last decade of the nineteenth century as Ellen White dealt with the ongoing conflicts emerging out of the 1888 General Conference and the drama surrounding the controversial figure of John Harvey Kellogg. Her ideas matured and developed over time as she was involved in more crises.

This means we must take care in considering the context of the statements on unity, and explore her ideas in some chronological fashion. In this paper, I will present an overview of the key ideas first, and then consider how they arose chronologically as I build a model of her views.

The third assumption is that any consideration of the theme of unity in the writings of Ellen White also needs to be cognizant of her main themes, particularly her emphasis on the Love of God and the Great Controversy.

With these assumptions in mind, we turn now to discuss what Ellen White says about unity.

### **The Mandate of Unity**

The biblical basis of Ellen White's discussion on unity is found primarily in John 17, Ephesians 4:3-6, Philippians 2:2, and the various biblical metaphors of the church which imply its oneness.

John 17 provides the impetus and mandate for unity since it is in this passage that Jesus Himself explicitly expresses that it is His desire for His followers to be one. Since it is the will of God, the call to unity is to be taken seriously by all who take the name Christian.<sup>9</sup>

Thus in 1894, she asks, "What can I present before my brethren and sisters in Christ, that is more important for their study and practice than the Saviour's prayer for His disciples? The entire seventeenth chapter of John is full of marrow and fatness."<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in 1904, she declares, "The instruction given me by One of authority is that we are to learn to answer the prayer recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John. We are to make this prayer our first study."<sup>11</sup>

And further, in 1906, in relation to the prayer, she writes, "Such oneness as exists between the Father and the Son is to be manifest among all who believe the truth. Those who are thus united in implicit obedience to the word of God will be filled with power."<sup>12</sup>

The prayer in John 17 was also a reminder for White that unity is not an end in itself.

Rather, unity is to be understood as a crucial precursor to the successful mission of the church. Writing in 1906, she states,

*If all would completely consecrate themselves to the Lord and through the sanctification of the truth, live in perfect unity, what a convincing power would attend the proclamation of the truth! How sad that so many churches misrepresent the sanctifying influence of the truth, because they do not manifest the saving grace that would make them one with Christ, even as Christ is one with the Father! If all would reveal the unity and love that should exist among brethren, the power of the Holy Spirit would be manifest in its saving influence. In proportion to our unity with Christ will be our power to save souls.*<sup>13</sup>

The connection between unity and mission is thus considered crucial. Unity is essential for the church to fulfil its mission because it provides witness to the transforming power of the gospel.<sup>14</sup> In addition, White also emphasizes the difference it makes to the spiritual health of both individuals and congregations.<sup>15</sup>

## The Nature of Unity

There are hundreds of passages in the writings of Ellen White that talk about unity, union, harmony, and working together in peace. The frequency with which they occur leaves no doubt that unity within the church was considered important by Ellen White. What is crucial for us to understand, however, is what Ellen White meant when she used the term unity in relation to the church.

Since Ellen White's writings emerge largely from responses to specific crises, there is no nicely formed stand-alone definition of unity in her writings. Consequently, we must attempt to draw out an understanding by looking at the words and phrases she employs when discussing unity, and the implications of her statements about unity. The strong tie between mission and unity precludes White from understanding unity as something that belongs only to the invisible church as some theo-

logians have concluded, or as something that only occurs in the eschaton. Rather, the unity that Christ prayed for was to be a present and visible reality in the historical church. Only a visible unity could testify to the reality and transforming power of the gospel and fit the purpose outlined in John 17.<sup>16</sup>

Unity has been considered by most Christians as an intrinsic or essential characteristic of the church, which exists whether or not it is visible in the historic church. Ellen White clearly embraces the biblical models of the church which recognize the unity of the church, and quotes texts which imply an intrinsic unity due to one baptism and one Lord. However, her discussions do not talk about a unity which already exists in the church. In keeping with her wider functional ecclesiology, Ellen White focuses instead on human responsibility for unity. That is, unity is something that requires our attention and active choice. This prevents excusing one's behaviour, living in complacency, or failing to personally engage in the will of God for His church. In her eyes, all must strive actively to obtain unity.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, White makes it clear that unity requires ongoing daily effort. Thus, she writes to John Harvey Kellogg that unity is something that "must be cultivated day by day."<sup>18</sup>

An examination of the phrases White uses in relation to unity reveals that she does not use a singular expression to describe the nature of unity. Rather, her writings provide a variety of phrases including "unity of purpose,"<sup>19</sup> "unity of action,"<sup>20</sup> "unity of spirit,"<sup>21</sup> "unity of thought,"<sup>22</sup> "unity of faith,"<sup>23</sup> and "being of one mind."<sup>24</sup> At first glance this would seem to portray an array of concepts about unity. Although unity of purpose, unity of action, and unity of the Spirit would seem to be overlapping, the ideas of unity of thought, unity of faith and being of one mind would seem to portray quite a different slant on unity.

The great majority of phrases fall into the first of these groups, with the context of statements about unity of action being similar to

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that of unity of purpose. The idea of uniformity of practice is not envisaged here. Rather, the wish that God's people should live harmoniously and work together to achieve a common purpose. For instance, she writes in 1908,

*In the work of soul saving, the Lord calls together laborers who have different plans and ideas and various methods of labor. But with this diversity of minds, there is to be revealed a unity of purpose. Oftentimes in the past the work the Lord designed should prosper has been hindered because men have tried to place a yoke upon their fellow workers who did not follow the methods which they regarded as the best.*<sup>25</sup>

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Working in harmony not only made pragmatic sense, it harmonized with White's understanding of the church as a voluntary society. In the nineteenth century context, a voluntary society existed for a singular purpose, and those who joined did so for the express purpose of furthering its aims. Thus, White assumed that those who choose to join the church voluntarily would be willing to work together to prioritize the mission of the church.<sup>26</sup>

The terms "unity of thought" and "being of one mind" require more careful analysis. The phrase "unity of thought" arises in three contexts. A call for different ethnic and nationalities to work together under a single sovereign rather than letting national pride prevent united action;<sup>27</sup> working together to find the best methods to mission;<sup>28</sup> and a call to peace and harmony instead of criticizing and tearing other leaders down.<sup>29</sup> In none of these contexts is unity of thought intended to convey uniformity of doctrine or understanding all scripture or all church practices in the same way.

Likewise, examination of the context of the idea of being of one mind reveals four main meanings of the term:<sup>30</sup> working together to do God's work, working in harmony without selfish ambition and fault finding,<sup>31</sup> coming together in humility before God,<sup>32</sup> and teaching the same doctrines. With regard to teaching the same doctrine, she wrote to Dr Kellogg in 1886,

*The soldiers of Jesus Christ must move in concert, else it were better that they do nothing. For if one speaks one thing, and another presents ideas and doctrines contrary to his fellow laborers, there is confusion, discord, and strife. Therefore the apostle charges that all who believe on Christ be of one mind, one faith, one judgment, each moving in concert, influencing one another beneficially, because they are both obedient to the precious truth of the Word of God, attached to one Savior, the great Source of light and truth.*<sup>33</sup>

Several instances of the use of the phrase "unity of faith" also appear to call for a unity in doctrine. For instance, in *Christian Experience and Teachings* she notes that,

*God is leading a people out from the world upon the exalted platform of eternal truth, the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. He will discipline and fit up His people. They will not be at variance, one believing one thing, and another having faith and views entirely opposite; each moving independently of the body. Through the diversity of the gifts and governments that He has placed in the church, they will all come to the unity of the faith. If one man takes his views of Bible truth without regard to the opinion of his brethren, and justifies his course, alleging that he has a right to his own peculiar views, and then presses them upon others, how can he be fulfilling the prayer of Christ? And if another and still another arises, each asserting his right to believe and talk what he pleases, without reference to the faith of the body, where will be that harmony which existed between Christ and His Father, and which Christ prayed might exist among His brethren?*<sup>34</sup>

Yet while calling for unity of faith in relation to what is believed, other passages remind us that this is not uniformity.<sup>35</sup> The diverse backgrounds and experiences that shape individuals may be expected to lead to different methods of working for the Lord.

Furthermore, Ellen White's encouragement that everyone needs to read Scripture for themselves leads to the expectation that variation in understanding of Scripture will occur.



In order to maintain harmony amongst this diversity, White advised that members dwell “upon those things in which all can agree, rather than upon those things that seem to create a difference.”<sup>36</sup>

In summary, the nature of the unity that White envisaged was a visible, lived unity, something that requires personal involvement and choice. It is primarily expressed in harmonious working together to achieve a common purpose; however, some degree of doctrinal unity in relation to landmark truths is also expected.

### Disunity and its Causes

While success in mission is bound up with unity, a lack of unity misrepresents the truth and brings reproach to the name of Christ.<sup>37</sup> The church, as Christ’s representatives with an end-time mission, are to demonstrate the loving character of God. This is negated by a disunited church since a divided church portrays an unloving and divided God who lacks power. Thus, Ellen White suggests that the church actively works against its Lord when it is disunited. At the 1900 GC Conference session she asked,

*Why do those who profess to believe in Christ, who profess to keep the commandments, make such feeble efforts to answer the Savior’s prayer? Why do they seek to have their own way, instead of choosing the way and will of the Spirit of God? Those who do this will one day see the harm done to the cause of God by pulling apart. Instead of co-operating with Christ, instead of laboring together with God, many who occupy positions of trust are working in opposition to Christ. The Lord has presented this to me in a most decided manner to present to his people.<sup>38</sup>*

Her words were equally strong at the 1903 General Conference session where she equated disunity with sin. “There is a great and solemn work to be done for Seventh-day Adventists, if they will only be converted. The great trouble is the lack of unity among them. This is a sin in the sight of God, —sin which, unless God’s people repent, will withhold from them his

blessing. . . .”<sup>39</sup>

The consequences of disunity included distraction from mission,<sup>40</sup> negative impact on personal spirituality,<sup>41</sup> and weakness of the church.<sup>42</sup>

So what did Ellen White identify as the causes of disunity? Ellen White does not focus on doctrinal differences as a cause for disunity. Disagreements about doctrine are only surface matters that portray a much deeper issue. Disunity is at its core is a sign of disconnection from Christ. Writing against the unequal treatment of some groups of believers, White declares “The reason of all division, discord, and difference is found in separation from Christ.”<sup>43</sup> She continues, “Christ is the center to which all should be attracted; for the nearer we approach the center, the closer we shall come together in feeling, in sympathy, in love, growing into the character and image of Jesus. With God there is no respect of persons.”<sup>44</sup>

Her other stated causes of disunity also have a strong relational focus and flow directly from being disconnected from Christ. These include attitudinal problems such as stubbornness, pride, unwillingness to listen to others, and lack of love as causes for disunity.<sup>45</sup> She also posits unbelief about the foundations of Christian belief,<sup>46</sup> and a failure of Christians to shoulder any responsibility for the mission of the church as causes of disunity,<sup>47</sup> and an unwillingness to allow the Holy Spirit to work.<sup>48</sup>

### How Can Unity Be Attained?

These causes of disunity become the basis for White’s discussion about how unity can be attained. Consequently, union with Christ takes prime position in her discussion of the attainment of unity.

Writing in 1904, she claims, “The cause of division and discord in families and in the church is separation from Christ. To come near to Christ is to come near to one another. The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a superhuman effort to overcome difficul-

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ties—though there will be much of this to do—but union with Christ.”<sup>49</sup>

The nature of the connection between union with Christ and unity of the church was described by White using the metaphor of a sun and its sunbeams.<sup>50</sup> Beams of light are closest together at the centre of the sun, whereas they become more and more widely spaced the further they are from the sun. So, as believers remain close to Christ, they will also demonstrate a love and closeness for other believers. In fact, White states that “they must of necessity be drawn close to each other, for the sanctifying grace of Christ will bind their hearts together.”<sup>51</sup> However, as believers move further from Christ, so they find themselves struggling to remain close to others. Thus, White can confidently claim that “True religion unites hearts, not only with Christ, but with one another, in a most tender union.”<sup>52</sup>

Using John 15 as the backdrop of her discussion about connection with Christ, White considered individual Christians must be united with Christ just as branches are united to the vine.<sup>53</sup> Such a union provides both a new identity and the means by which spiritual growth can occur.<sup>54</sup> As union with Christ occurs, the Holy Spirit is enabled to transform the life of the individual. Consequently, the life will show evidence of the fruit of the spirit as a more Christlike character is formed.

Of particular importance in the discussion of union with Christ, was the need for maintenance of the relationship. For Restorationist Alexander Campbell, union simply occurred at baptism, but for White, union with Christ was more than a profession of faith. It was something dynamic which needed to be maintained and preserved lest disconnection occurs. Like other human relationships, both partners in the relationship must bear some responsibility for the maintenance of relationship. While the initiative and work that makes this bond possible comes from God, the relationship cannot work if only one partner is interested in its maintenance.<sup>55</sup> The individual is

therefore called to preserve the bond by continual communion<sup>56</sup> and “earnest prayer.”<sup>57</sup>

In addition to union with Christ, Ellen White describes five other factors to attaining unity.

A second factor in the attainment of unity is having the correct attitudes. White’s written responses to individuals involved in conflict, particularly General Conference President G. I Butler, and J. H. Kellogg, frequently put the emphasis on right attitudes. Even when they held beliefs which differed significantly from others, or which White herself considered were wrong, she generally devoted more space in her writing to the need for humility and the correct attitudes than she did to the condemnation of the beliefs of the person.

The most essential attitudes for unity were those of love,<sup>58</sup> humility,<sup>59</sup> and teachableness,<sup>60</sup> whereas attitudes of pride, self-centredness, and selfish ambition provide obstacles to unity.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, when looking for unity of the church one of the first steps is to examine your own heart. White writes,

*Whether superiors, inferiors, or equals, your work is to begin with your own heart. Humble yourself before God. Come into right connection with Him by yielding to the creating power of the Holy Spirit. Then will be seen in the church the unity that is of value in God’s sight. There will be sweet harmony, and all the building, fitly framed together, will grow up into an holy temple in the Lord.<sup>62</sup>*

Indeed, she suggested that if all believers had a teachable heart, there would be no divisions between them.<sup>63</sup>

It must be noted, however, that right attitudes are only obtained by connection with Christ and by our recognition that we are sinners dependent upon the mercy of God. Humility before fellow believers grows out of our understanding of ourselves as sinners who are often wrong. It is to be demonstrated by a willingness to listen to the ideas of others, and weigh their counsel in the light of scripture and experience rather than just

pushing person opinion.<sup>64</sup>

The third factor White identifies as important to attainment of unity is ensuring that Scripture is the rule of faith and practice. The Bible itself was to be the only creed for Christians, and the bond of union between members.

*When God's Word is studied, comprehended, and obeyed, a bright light will be reflected to the world; new truths, received and acted upon, will bind us in strong bonds to Jesus. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow down to this Holy Word will be in harmony. Our own views and ideas must not control our efforts. Man is fallible, but God's Word is infallible. Instead of wrangling with one another, let men exalt the Lord. Let us meet all opposition as did our Master, saying, "It is written." Let us lift up the banner on which is inscribed, The Bible our rule of faith and discipline.<sup>65</sup>*

While this quote is from 1885, it is representative of her earliest thoughts about unity after the Great Disappointment. That is, that the bond which tied the small discouraged remnant of believers together was their commitment to the authority of the Bible.

In choosing Scripture as the guide and authority for the Christian life, the individual is necessarily drawn towards both Jesus and fellow believers, while at the same time being brought to a place where truth can be discovered.

As the only rule of faith, White considered the Bible was both a sufficient and unerring guide for the believer, and the means to determine truth. To move away from an explicit "thus saith the Lord" was to risk not only moving away from truth, but total separation from Christ.<sup>66</sup>

The fourth factor to the attainment of unity was the avoidance of non-essential issues.<sup>67</sup> Instead of focusing on controversial and minor issues, leaders were encouraged to focus on core or vital truths which were clearly understood and with which everyone agreed.

In practice, the identification of which truths fell into these categories was not straight forward. Ellen White's lists of vital truths (also

identified as pillars of the faith, landmarks, or waymarks) are not always consistent. However, the truths seem to be able to be divided into two main categories. Those which are foundational for Christianity as a whole, and those which she considered the Spirit had led the Seventh-day Adventist Church to understand. These truths included, but were not limited to, inspiration, salvation, incarnation, atonement, the perpetuity of the law, Sabbath, creation, the Three Angels' messages, the non-immortality of the soul, the cleansing of the sanctuary, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.<sup>68</sup>

The fifth key to the attainment of unity was to be found in organization, or gospel order. In 1853 she wrote,

*There is order in heaven. There was order in the church when Christ was upon earth; and after his departure, order was strictly observed among his apostles. And now in these last days, while God is bringing his children into the unity of the faith, there is more real need of order than ever before. . . . 'The church must flee to God's word, and become established upon gospel order which has been overlooked and neglected.' This is indispensably necessary to bring the church into the unity of the faith.<sup>69</sup>*

Ellen White's earliest recommendations regarding order were limited to choosing suitable individuals to teach and preach, along with means of appropriate recognition of these individuals by churches. While ordination of other church officers would follow later, the fact that other officers of the early church are not discussed at this time suggests that White was not calling for an exact replication of the New Testament system of order as Alexander Campbell and the Restorationists had done, but, rather, an application of the principles of order demonstrated in the New Testament. Thus, the principle of orderliness appears to be more important than a specific system of order.

The final key to attaining unity had to do with maintaining the right relationship with the church. In this area, two means of right re-

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lationship are highlighted.

First, White emphasized the need for believers to take personal responsibility for the success of the church in accomplishing its mission.<sup>70</sup> Practically this meant being personally involved in the mission of the church and prioritizing the needs of the church over personal desires.<sup>71</sup> When members work for the prosperity of the church it focuses them on mission rather than the issues which divide them, thus promoting unity. Consequently, in 1881 White writes, "That church whose members feel that they are not responsible for its prosperity will fail to show to the world the unity, love, and harmony that exist with the true children of God."<sup>72</sup>

The second way in which church members were to maintain a right relationship with the church was by yielding their opinions to the voice of the church unless the issue was of vital importance.<sup>73</sup> This instruction, as difficult as it seems, reflects several of White's core beliefs: that God reveals truth to multiple individuals in His church,<sup>74</sup> that the church has been delegated authority by God,<sup>75</sup> and that the true Christian will be sensitive to the feelings and opinions of others.<sup>76</sup> Thus we find statements such as "God has bestowed the highest power under heaven upon His church. It is the voice of God in His united people in church capacity which is to be respected."<sup>77</sup>

Since White believed there was more truth to be uncovered, individuals are still called to search for truth. However, any new insights should be subject to investigation by mature Christians who are to prayerfully consider the matter in the light of the rest of Scripture.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, leaders and mature Christians are expected to exercise their authority responsibly and prayerfully.

### **Chronological Development of White's Views on Unity**

When we look at Ellen White's ideas on unity in a chronological fashion we find that her emphasis moved from a primary understanding of

unity in terms of doctrine prior to formal church organization, to a primary understanding of unity of action and purpose in the wake of denominational organization. This did not mean that doctrine was no longer important; simply that it did not form the center of her mature definition of unity. While existing as loosely organized congregational bodies, doctrine was one of the few features each congregation had in common, and therefore naturally would be seen as a uniting factor. However, after the formal creation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a degree of unity in doctrine was already implied by membership of the church. White's supposition that the church was a voluntary society led her to believe that anyone who joined the church already agreed with its core beliefs, therefore this no longer needed to be emphasized to members who were by choice committed to the same beliefs. Rather, focusing on a unity of action and purpose in this context allowed the church of likeminded individuals to fulfill its missional purpose.

Thus, the earliest factor identified as necessary for unity is the use of the Bible as the rule of faith and practice. This was followed closely by the need for order and organization. The context helps us understand why these issues figured prominently. Between 1850 and 1860 there were no safeguards against visiting preachers presenting conflicting ideas and personal opinions. New converts were beginning to be admitted as the church moved away from the understanding of the shut door.<sup>79</sup> These converts had not experienced the specific leading of the Spirit in the same way as those who had been through the Great Disappointment. In addition, 1854 saw the rise of the first formal schism in the breakaway of the Messenger Party.<sup>80</sup> Organization and faithfulness to biblical teaching were thus crucial for the survival of the Advent groups. Thus, in this period, White calls on believers to focus on maintaining unity through prayerful study of Scriptures, adherence to key doctrinal truths,



obedience to the commandments of God, and the institution of gospel order.

While White also speaks of union with Christ as being essential for unity in her earlier discussion of unity, she makes no direct linkage between union with Christ and these elements of visible unity. Furthermore, the earlier writings are missing any consideration of the role of interpersonal and relational issues in the attainment of unity. These ideas are only developed in the context of the later conflicts of the 1888 General Conference and those associated with John Harvey Kellogg.

The issues of the 1888 General Conference—the identity of the ten horns of Daniel 7, the meaning of the word law in Galatians, and the implications for righteousness by faith—appeared doctrinal.<sup>81</sup> But White did not attribute the discord at the 1888 General Conference to doctrine. Her talks at the conference focused on a deeper cause for the disunity, disconnection from Christ. The un-Christlike attitudes and actions which marred the conference were evidence in her eyes that many of those present were not united with Christ. Every member of the church had a responsibility for maintaining unity, and this was only possible when all remained connected to Christ, who was both the source of truth and the source of unity.<sup>82</sup>

The 1888 General Conference also provided White an opportunity to readdress the role of truth in maintaining unity. All delegates were called to prayerful personal study of the Word so that they would recognize the truth or error of the views presented in the meetings.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, White made it clear that knowing truth by itself was not all that was required of the Christian.<sup>84</sup> Truth needed to be lived.<sup>85</sup> This meant more than keeping the Sabbath and preparing for the second coming of Christ. Lived truth for White meant that every action exhibited the character of Christ, and every word was spoken in kindness. If truth was lived, even those who disagreed about the meaning of the key issues should have been able to work

together without jealousy and accusation. But such was not the experience of those at the 1888 General Conference.

The growing issues with centralization and abuse of power around the same time led White to also reconsider the idea of the authority structure of the church. While White did not believe that the authority structure was the basis of unity of the church, she recognized that authority structures can either aid or hinder unity. Moreover, unity needed to occur within some form of structure. Four features of authority structure were identified as important for maximizing unity: functionality, flexibility to meet the needs of the church, avoidance of centralization of authority,<sup>86</sup> and avoidance of giving too much power to any one individual.<sup>87</sup> Based on her advice to G. I. Butler, Waggoner, and Jones, we can also conclude that White expected leaders to be examples of Christlike attitudes and behavior.<sup>88</sup> They were to spend time prayerfully studying Scripture in order to determine for themselves what was true.<sup>89</sup> However, they were not to stand in the way of new expressions of truth, nor should they consider that their position meant they were infallible in their understanding, or that they alone could determine truth.<sup>90</sup>

### The Big Picture

As we attempt to build a model of White's suggestions for attaining unity we begin with the group within which unity is to occur. Although Ellen White suggests that the prayer of Jesus in John 17 applies to anyone who has taken the name Christian, she nevertheless, only addresses the unity of those which she identifies either as the remnant or lovers of truth. This provides a clear identity of the group within which unity is to occur. Next, we can add the Bible as the rule of faith which provides an agreed-upon authority for the church.

Necessity also suggested that unity occurs with a specific structure. As Barry Oliver said in his paper, although order was important to

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the church.**

Ellen White, it was the principle of organization which took priority over the actual details of structure. Indeed, structure rather than being fixed should be flexible to serve the mission of the church.

Together these ideas—the identity of the group in which unity was to occur, the authority of the group, and the structure in which unity was to occur—provided a tangible basis for unity. However, they are insufficient alone as they do not deal with the core and essentially intangible issues relating to unity which center on understanding the relationships of the Christian.



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With these tangible elements established we can add the invisible foundation of unity, which Ellen White understood as union with Christ. In White's earliest writings on unity it is unclear how union with Christ related to the tangible elements of unity. This connection would become clearer as she wrestled with the crises from 1885 forward. As White focused more on Jesus, connections started to become obvious. She recognized that a living connection with Christ impacts all a believer's relationships in a way that promotes unity. Union with Christ promoted the fruit of the Spirit and the development of a Christlike character as the Holy Spirit did its work. Amongst this fruit would be a transformation of attitudes so that pride and self-centeredness were replaced by love and humility. At the same time, union with Christ would impact the relationship between the Christian and the church. As following Christ became a priority, the Christian would give precedence to the mission of the church over their own desires. This in turn would impact their relationships with other Christians, exhibiting itself in a willingness to submit to one another for the sake of harmony. Union with Christ was also expected to help the Christian to understand "truth as it is in Jesus." Being right in our interpretation of Scripture must be accompanied by a humility and love for others where

we "practice truth as it is in Jesus."<sup>91</sup>

The foundation connecting union with Christ with its practical results highlights three major understandings required for unity: what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be a church, and the ability to recognize truth as it is in Jesus.

These in turn impact willingness to accept the Bible as the rule of faith, willingness to work within the structure of the church, and identity formation. The identity of those who are called to unity is transformed. It is still the remnant defined in Revelation, but it is the remnant who understands truth in the light of Jesus. It is a remnant whose identity is forged through understanding one's relationship to Christ, one's role as a member of the body of Christ, and faithfulness to truth as it is in Jesus. Thus, White's view of unity in the Adventist Church also emphasizes identity in Christ.

### Strengths of White's Views on Unity

This mature thinking on unity is complex, with multiple interactions. But it has a number of important strengths.

1. It demonstrates a clear connection between union with Christ and Christian unity, while at the same time, clearly delineating both divine and human roles in the process of attaining church unity.
2. It recognizes the biblical principle that connection with Christ does not leave individuals unchanged.
3. It focuses on authentic Christianity. While White saw unity as occurring between those who loved truth and displayed the characteristics of the remnant, the foundation of her model requires individuals to be authentic Christians first and foremost.
4. It recognizes the impact of sin on relationships; in particular, the human tendency to pride, selfishness, and thirst for power or control. Consequently, it places emphasis on correction of attitudes and

relational problems through connection with Christ.

5. It recognizes that relationship is at the heart of unity. Unity of the church is impacted by multiple relationships including the relationship with Christ, the church, truth, and other people.
6. By including active involvement in the mission of the church, White enables members to focus on something outside of themselves. When focus is persistently directed internally, differences of opinion become more prominent.<sup>92</sup> But when focus is upon a common goal outside of themselves, members are led to focus on their common identity in Christ rather than the issues which divide them.

### **Weaknesses of White's Views on Unity**

Three major weaknesses of White's view also need to be mentioned as we think about the relevance of these views on unity.

1. First, the intangible and personal nature of union with Christ makes it difficult to discuss or work with as an organization. Any judgment in relation to the status of an individual's connection or disconnection from Christ is likely to be met with a defensive response from the individual concerned.
2. The understanding that Christians who come to scripture with a teachable spirit and a willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit would always come to the same conclusions does not seem to be borne out in practice. White's solution was to label individuals who do not come to the expected consensus as disconnected from Christ. But how should we determine which group is disconnected from Christ? There is no clear answer here.
3. While organization aided unity by creating order, and streamlined communication between diverse geographic areas, it also risked creating disunity by the abuse of power and centralization of power.

### **Application in the Adventist Church in 2017**

In conclusion, let's focus on the lessons we can learn that are applicable to our situation today.

1. Unity is at its heart personal, and therefore cannot be manufactured or constructed by leaders wielding their authority or attempting a forced consensus.
2. Unity of purpose and action does not require nor endorse uniformity of practice. Rather it recognizes that various practices and methodologies are needed in different places and contexts to achieve the one purpose.
3. Authentic unity of the church can only occur between authentic Christians who are united in Christ and are being transformed by His power.
4. Unity involves a variety of relationships within the church: the relationship with God, with doctrine, with individuals, and with the church as a whole. Emphasizing one type of relationship without the others is not sufficient to achieve a visible unity. Rather, all forms of relationship must be nurtured and developed.
5. We need to take personal responsibility for our own attitudes and actions. The importance of personal attitudes of humility and kindness are often overlooked in discussions as each side attempts to establish that their own view is the correct one. White clearly reprimanded those who considered being right was more important than displaying the character of Christ, and truth as it is in Jesus.
6. Our focus should be directed at Jesus who is both the foundation and the creator of unity. Our tendency is to focus directly on the creation of unity, but the reality is that unity is not created by us or our plans. While believers should strive to be united, unity can only occur if we are connected to Christ. ■

**When members work for the prosperity of the church it focuses them on mission rather than the issues which divide them, thus promoting unity.**

**Our tendency**

**is to focus**

**directly on the**

**creation of**

**unity, but the**

**reality is that**

**unity is not**

**created by us**

**or our plans.**

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**The un-Christ-  
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and actions  
which marred  
the conference  
were evidence  
in her eyes  
that many of  
those present  
were not united  
with Christ.**

2:501.

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**While White  
did not believe  
that the author-  
ity structure  
was the basis  
of unity of the  
church, she  
recognized  
that authority  
structures can  
either aid or  
hinder unity.**

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## FREE Prophecy Booklet

*How will the world end?  
Where will the Antichrist  
be destroyed?*

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of his palace between the seas in the  
glorious holy mountain; yet he shall  
come to his end, and none shall help  
him." (Daniel 11:45)**

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## Celebrating The Word A Biblical Feast

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# What is Jesus Saying in John 17? | BY ROY ADAMS

**DISCUSSED** | *logos*, prayer, glorification, sanctification “in the truth,” reunion

I interpreted my assignment (of John 17) as an invitation to break through the static and the noise, and get at the heart of Jesus’ burden in this strategic prayer.

So setting aside, as best I could, my own presuppositions about the chapter, and without relying on the views of theological or biblical experts, or the positions of dictionaries and commentaries, I tried over several days to listen—just listen—to what the text itself is saying—to read the chapter as if for the first time, asking how the ordinary person would understand Jesus’ words, if they happened upon them in some deserted place, away from commentaries, sermons, or notes of any kind. Reading the chapter in the original language (an exercise which forces a slower pace) also contributed to this listening process.

This as-if-for-the-first-time reading of the text quickly disabused me of a longstanding preconception I had of the chapter—namely, that the subject of unity was its dominant theme. Instead, I came to see that the subject of unity, while very present, *does not* dominate the passage, but that the prayer covers a variety of themes.

John does not record Jesus’ Gethsemane supplication mentioned in the Synoptics. In John, the event in chapter 17 is Jesus’ final prayer before the cross.<sup>1</sup> In this prayer Jesus unburdens Himself before God in a manner unprecedented in the other gospels. And of the burdens that came to the fore, I’ve identified six: *glorification, revelation, protection, sanctification, unity, and reunion.*

## Glorification

Evidently, then, Jesus’ prayer was offered while He was still at the location of the Passover meal, where John, together with the other disciples, would have heard it. Jesus would have wanted them to witness this unvarnished unburdening of His soul to His Heavenly Father. And now, more than half a century later, and facing the crosswinds of events in the church and in the world around him, John returns to the famous prayer, the Holy Spirit guiding his mind toward its most salient features.

Jesus began His supplication in a way that is alien to us—with a focus on the idea of glorification. “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son (δοξασον σου τον υιον/*doxason sou ton*

*uion*), that your Son may glorify you” (verse 1).

What all did Jesus have in mind here? What’s behind this idea of glorification? What form was it to take?

John places considerable emphasis on the notion of glorification in his gospel. His opening pronouncement is on this theme—chapter 1:14: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. *We have seen his glory* (την δοξαν αυτου), *the glory of the one and only Son*, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Even without fully understanding what all John had in mind here, the mere reading of those words transports the mind to a sublime place, filled with excitement and wonder. It was a glory “shining through the veil of his flesh.”<sup>2</sup>

Other passages pick up the theme. By changing water into wine at a wedding celebration in Galilee, John says, Jesus “revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him” (2:11); Lazarus’ resurrection, Jesus Himself observed, was “for *God’s glory*, so that the son of God may be glorified through it” (11:4, NRSV); in vision, John said, Isaiah “saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him” (12:41).

“Bringing glory” is what children do to their parents when they perform well in school, excel in sports, or stand out in some other praiseworthy endeavor. We glorify (or bring glory to) God when we do God’s work, when we obey God’s word, when we act in such a way as to enhance the divine values or mission in the world. Jesus echoes this notion in John 17:4.

Addressing His Father, He said, “I’ve brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.”

The glorification idea intensifies in John’s gospel as Jesus gets closer and closer to the cross. We see this in Jesus’ response to certain God-fearing Greeks who appeared in the crowd around Him during Passion Week, asking for an audience. Apparently, He saw in their request a broader yearning for the salvation He’d come to bring, a salvation possible only through the cross, now merely days away. As if oblivious to the specific request (and the passage leaves us wondering whether the desired audience ever materialized), images of that impending cosmic moment flashed upon His mind, evoking those somber words we find in John 12:23, words that anticipated the great





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**glorification.**

prayer of chapter 17 still to come: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”

That glorification would involve (for Jesus) the ghastly experience of the cross. But, as He described it, the seed, if it is to multiply and feed the multitude, must first die. And (mixing metaphors) only as the Son of Man is lifted on a tree, experiencing the death of a planted seed, would He have the power to “draw all people” to Himself, including the multitude represented by those enquiring Greeks in His audience that day (12:32, NRSV). And thus He braced Himself for that dreadful moment: “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, *glorify* your name!” (12:27, 28a). God’s answer was immediate, like rumbling thunder above the din and hubbub of the crowd: “I have *glorified* it, and will *glorify* it again” (12:28b).

Buttressed by this assurance, and inching ever closer to the cross, Jesus is all about glory and glorification after Judas, bent on his dark mission, left the supper room that Thursday evening. According to John, “when [Judas] was gone, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man is *glorified* and God is *glorified* in him. If God is *glorified* in him, God will *glorify* the Son in himself, and will *glorify* him at once” (13:31–32).

So as He comes to the opening sentences of His prayer in chapter 17, He picks up this running theme a final time. And the fact that He refers again to the idea of “the hour” having come (verse 1) gives further evidence that He was looking ahead to the cross, and that that glorification had something to do with His impending death and the resurrection to follow (although the resurrection is never explicitly mentioned in the chapter).

A prominent theme “of Johannine high christology,” says Paul N. Anderson, “is the *glorification of the Son of Man*.... Such passages as 1:51; 3:14; 6:62; 8:28; 12:23–36; 13:1, 13a all refer to some aspect of the Son of Man ... ascending, being lifted up or being glorified. This is in keeping with the descent/ascent schemas of the christological hymns (Phil. 2:5–11; Col 1:15–20; Heb 1:1–4). But in John, [says Anderson] glorification is paradoxically

connected with the cross.”<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps Jesus’ most intriguing statement about glorification comes in verse 5, where He asked God to “glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” Here He takes the idea of glorification to a different level. I struggled with how to understand *παρά σεαυτώ* (*para seauto*), translated by the NIV and other modern translations as “in your presence” or “in your own presence.” If the reflexive pronoun *σεαυτώ* means “thysel” or “yourself,” how did we arrive at the idea of “in your presence”? Especially when linked to *para*, a complicated preposition, requiring more than two pages of fine-print explanation in Arndt’s and Gingrich’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*!<sup>4</sup>

It brought to mind a statement I’d read a few weeks earlier—about how historians, coming up against the mysteries of religion, sometimes have to realize that their methodological “instruments are too clumsy to handle the evidence” in front of them.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps biblical interpreters face the same difficulty from time to time. For here one gets the sense that Jesus probably meant something much deeper than the translators are able to manage—that He was probably asking God to glorify Him (Jesus) *with God Himself*, in a way too complex for human words. Suffice it to say that at the very least it was a plea for the reinstatement before the heavenly intelligences of Jesus’ divine honor and prerogatives, voluntarily relinquished for the sake of His incarnation.

Finally, if we’re not reading too much into the text, it would appear that that relinquishment occurred not when Jesus entered Mary’s womb, but “before the world existed” (verse 5, NRSV). A mind-blowing thought, if correct, showing that the provisions of divine grace anticipated the fall, predating the creation of the planet itself.

So the idea of glory, introduced by John at the beginning of his gospel (“the word became flesh...” and “we have seen his glory”) reaches its climax in the major burden with which Jesus begins His prayer. Notwithstanding the darkness involved, it was a note of triumph, filled with pathos and paradox.

## Revelation

Following His emphasis on glorification, Jesus' burden shifts to *revelation*—that is, making God known in the world, and Jesus Christ whom God has sent (verses 3–9, 25, 26). “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world” (verse 6). Lenski notes that “the aorist [εφανερωσα, *ephanerosa*, “I have revealed”] records the accomplished fact,” and ultimately means “more than ‘to teach.’” It has “the sense of ‘to reveal.’”<sup>6</sup> In other words, “Jesus is the emissary of God . . . who through his words and deeds brings revelation.”<sup>7</sup>

As John remembered Jesus' prayer in the closing years of the first century, he would have done so in dynamic relation to the contemporary context, a context shaped by a number of contrarian philosophies inimical to the Christian faith. The presence of Gnosticism, for example, with its esoteric approach to the whole concept of knowledge and revelation,<sup>8</sup> with its claim to “secret revelation” was combined with “a dualism of spirit and matter, mind and body,” and all this linked with ideas of “determinism or predestinarianism.”<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps not all these ideas were fully developed as John wrote his gospel late in the first century. But it seems evident that he was writing with a distinct consciousness of this and other aberrant philosophies. As one reads the Synoptics, the use of expressions like “word” and “knowledge” comes across as ordinary and pedestrian (except perhaps for Matt. 13:11 and Luke 8:10, where Jesus talks about the “knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” as having been given to His disciples; or Mark 12:24, where He charges Jewish leaders with “not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God”).

But as one comes to the Gospel of John, the “word,” the *logos*, seems to take on heightened significance. One gets the sense that something in the air, something in the culture, is jogging John's memory in the direction of highlighting a certain kind of knowledge, a special focus on the concept of *logos*, as if conscious of confronting an alien species of these ideas in the culture. Hear how he begins his first epistle, for example:

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us (1 John 1:1, 2).*

The knowledge John recalled Jesus enunciating in His prayer, unlike that promoted by the Gnostics, was based on the revelation of God—not detached or esoteric, but connected to a person, the Person of God and the Man, Jesus Christ—the *logos* who “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).

As His farewell discourse was coming to an end, Jesus spoke about His impending departure, stressing God's love for those who'd left all to follow Him: “[T]he Father himself loves you,” He said to them, “because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father” (16:27, 28).

Impressed, the disciples offered their own confession. “Now we can see,” they said, “that you know all things. . . . This makes us believe that you came from God” (verse 30). *Yes!* Jesus thought, and He could not hold it back: “You believe at last!” (verse 31). Moments later, Jesus would refer to that shining confession in His prayer: “I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me” (verse 8).

The revelation had been successful. And that was critical. Critical because of what Jesus had spelled out with unmistakable gravity near the beginning of His prayer: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (verse 3).

So important is this revelation, this knowledge of God, that Jesus returns to it as He ends the prayer: “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and

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And after more than 2,000 years, one can still hear the pathos, the urgency, in Jesus' voice as He pleads for the security of His followers: "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name..."

will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them" (verses 25, 26).

One cannot "listen" to Jesus' prayer without coming to the conclusion that He wanted that revelation (of God and God's Son) to spread to the entire *oikumene*. And if (as is logical to believe) He anticipated that the laborers would always be few (see Matt 9:37; Luke 10:2), then it would be theologically irrational for Him to envision any curtailment of the workforce of His followers by a blanket disqualification of one gender that, in every age, has constituted more than half the church.

### Protection

The picture Matthew draws of Jesus' followers in the world is that of "sheep among wolves" (Matt 10:16). And Paul invoked the same metaphor when he warned the elders of the Ephesus church that after he was gone, "savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock" (Acts 20:29). Jesus does not use that language in His prayer (nor does the gospel of John carry the particular metaphor), but it is clear that the believers' need for protection features prominently in the sentiments of John 17. So that even in the absence of that specific language, one can sense Jesus' burden for the protection of the followers He was leaving behind, followers He repeatedly refers to as sheep in his discourse in John 10.

With more than 25 percent of the verses of the chapter devoted to this theme, notice the intensity and solicitude with which Jesus commences the segment in verse 9: "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. . . . I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, *protect them by the power of your name. . . .*" (verses 9–11).

The verb in verse 11 is the imperative τηρησον (*tereson*), from τηρω (*tereo*), translated "keep" in the KJV, which is proper. But we understand what Jesus is saying even better when we look at other possible meanings of the term, namely, to "keep watch over, [to] guard."<sup>10</sup> Or, as I'm inter-

preting it here: "to protect."

The pain of leaving a flock of vulnerable sheep behind in the world comes through as Jesus unburdens Himself on this point: "While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe. . . ." (verse 12). But because of the work still needed to be done after He was gone, Jesus prayed not that God would "take them out of the world but that [He would] protect them from the evil one" (verse 15), who'd dogged His footsteps all His life.

In this plea for protection, one hears echoes of His assurance-laden promise in chapter 10: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand" (10: 27 28). What He promised in chapter 10 formed a huge portion of the burden of His prayer in chapter 17. And after more than 2,000 years, one can still hear the pathos, the urgency, in Jesus' voice as He pleads for the security of His followers: "Holy Father, *protect them by the power of your name. . . .*" (verse 11).

Here Jesus draws from His extensive knowledge of Old Testament Scripture, where "the name" stands, among other things, for the person himself or herself. And where God's name, in particular, is a force to reckon with. The psalmist knew this when he wrote, "May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may *the name of the God of Jacob* protect you" (Ps 20:1). And the Book of Proverbs says that "*the name of the Lord* is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." "Holy Father, *protect them by the power of your name. . . .*"

Listening to the prayer, the disciples would have received enormous comfort in knowing that as they would live and operate in a dangerous world, they could count on the protection of the highest power in the universe.

And as we see our church in grave danger at this present hour, may we plead for that divine protection to shield us.

### Sanctification

The idea of sanctification appears in verses 17–19, occupying a place in the prayer that cannot be ignored: "Sanctify them in the truth; your



word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth" (NRSV).

The word "sanctify" is *bagiazo*, meaning "to make holy, to consecrate, to purify, to sanctify."<sup>11</sup> Of persons, the word usually means to "consecrate, dedicate, sanctify, i.e., [to] include in the inner circle of what is holy...."<sup>12</sup>

In reference to people, this is not a common word in the gospels—or in the New Testament, for that matter. Its only use in the gospels referring to people is in the passage before us—used twice in verses 17–19. In Ephesians, Paul speaks of Christ loving the church and giving "himself up for her to make her holy [the verb is *bagiazo*], cleansing her by the washing with water through the word" (Eph 5:25, 26). And in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul offers a prayer that "God himself [would] ... sanctify [*bagiazo*] [the recipients of his letter] through and through," and that their "whole spirit, soul and body [might] be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Absent any elaboration in John of the meaning of the experience requested in Jesus' prayer, the assist from other New Testament writings seems wholly in keeping with the sense of Jesus' request in John 17. "Sanctify them in the truth; your *word* is truth" (John 17:17) matches perfectly the Ephesians idea of sanctifying the church "by the washing with water *through the word*" (Eph. 5:25, 26). We get another perspective from the apostle Peter, who admonished believers to "set apart [*bagiazo*] Christ as Lord" in their hearts (1 Pet 3:15). And yet another from the author of Hebrews, who intimates that "Jesus ... suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify (*bagiazo*) the people by his own blood" (Heb 13:12, NRSV).

To move from being sanctified "by his blood" (Hebrews) to being sanctified "in the truth" (John 17) represents an intriguing shift in perspective, which cannot be followed up here. But here again, as John recalls Jesus' prayer, we detect echoes of philosophical ferment in the culture of the late first century. "Sanctify them in the truth," John represents Jesus as saying, and then following up with a

definition meant for the listening disciples—and, from John's perspective, meant to stabilize his potentially restive readers: "Thy word is truth."

In a critical development in front of Pilate in John 18:36–38, Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.' 'You are a king, then!' said Pilate. Jesus answered, 'You are right in saying that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to *the truth*.'"

Then John records Pilate's flippant response: "What is truth?" And without waiting for a response, the distracted governor returns to the anxious Jews gathered outside the judgment place.

But John answers the question—in gospel and epistle. Staying with the gospel, he remembered Jesus saying in His prayer: "[God's] word is truth." It applies to the written word, but even more to the living *logos* "who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14), and who said with all appropriate arrogance: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Much more could be said, but I end this presentation with a couple of insightful observations from John Ashton. He notes that "Jesus' determination to consecrate himself on behalf of his disciples (17:19), unquestionably [is] an allusion to his approaching death...."<sup>13</sup> And as He encourages their own sanctification, He expresses His intention to send them into the world, just as He Himself had been sent. "The implications are momentous," Ashton says. "The role of the community is plainly the same as that of Jesus himself."<sup>14</sup>

## Unity

The subject of unity first surfaces in verse 11 of the chapter, where it is connected to the idea of protection: "I will remain in the world no longer," Jesus said, "but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one." Not protect them so

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they might be physically safe, as would be the natural inference; but protect them “that they may be one as we are one.”

Having uttered those sentiments, Jesus seemed to drop the subject. But as he transitioned from His concern for those original followers to the part of the prayer dealing with “those who will believe in me through their message” (verse 20) (that is, believers to the end of time),<sup>15</sup> He returns to the subject of unity with full vigor, mentioning it four times in verses 21–23. His language is concentrated and focused, conveying the weight of the burden He carried on this issue. For His followers in succeeding decades and centuries, He prayed “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (verse 21, NRSV).

Perhaps the fundamental thing to notice here is that the unity Jesus envisioned is patterned after the unity of the deity—“as you, Father, are in me and I in you.” This places Jesus’ expectation on a level far above that conceived in names like, say, “the United States” or “the United Kingdom.” In a way of speaking, these are human-made enterprises and confederations. Jesus, however, described His vision of unity in language meant to disabuse us of the notion of any human origination.

Four times in the short passage this divine orientation is repeated. We led with the mention in verse 21. Further down in the same verse, Jesus indicates that this unity is possible only when His followers are “in us” (ἐν ἡμῖν ὡσιν). The third iteration of the idea comes in verse 22: “... that they may be one as we are one.” Then for good measure, Jesus repeats the idea a fourth time, in verse 23: “I in them, and you in me, that they may become completely one...” (NRSV).

So the model for this unity is Deity itself. The Godhead. This suggests that it is not an artificial or humanly-engendered reality; not something created by committee actions, council resolutions, or church pronouncements; not something that can be administratively manufactured or contrived. Nor is it a condition to be controlled or enforced.

Divinely construed and deep, it comes by each of us, and all of us together, submitting to the infilling of God, through Jesus Christ. “I in them and you in me.” In this sense, it is a mystery—the mystery of the divine indwelling in God’s followers, individually and corporately.

Lenski is correct in regarding this unity as a “mystical oneness,” resembling “the essential oneness of the divine Persons”—“absolutely the highest type of oneness known.”<sup>16</sup> “Our oneness is not merely placed beside the oneness of the divine Persons as though all that exists between them is a likeness.” No, Lenski argues, “the two are vitally connected.... We believers can be one with each other only by each of us and all of us being one with the Father and Jesus.”<sup>17</sup> And although that divine unity “cannot be duplicated” in the human sphere, says Lenski, “yet it can be imitated.”<sup>18</sup>

So how to visualize this unity? What shape was it to take? How was it to be manifested?

On these questions, opinions diverge. “Being spiritual and mystical,” says Lenski, surprisingly, “this unity is of necessity invisible and does not consist in any form of outward organization.”<sup>19</sup> Another scholar, Wayne Grudem, believes “that such unity does not actually require one worldwide church government over all Christians.” “In fact,” he says, “the unity of believers is often demonstrated quite effectively through voluntary cooperation and affiliation among Christian groups....”<sup>20</sup>

But however we spin the idea of unity, Jesus in John 17 seemed to be speaking about a unity visible enough to be noticed, and strong and attractive enough to bring conviction to an observing world. It would be hard to make the case that the world could be persuaded by something it could not see. Jesus said: “... may they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (verse 21); and “may they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me” (verse 23).

Unity was a critical burden of Jesus’ strategic prayer in the upper room that night, two thousand years ago.

*So what are some of the implications of Jesus’ prayer—for*

**Yes! Jesus**

**thought, and**

**He could not**

**hold it back:**

**“You believe**

**at last!”**

*the state of unity in the church at large and in the Seventh-day Adventist Church?*

As some Christian thinkers see it, notwithstanding a host of theological, ecclesiological, and regional issues and tensions over the centuries, the Christian Church, with all its spiritual flaws and shortcomings, stayed generally (though imperfectly) united for centuries, the first major break coming in A.D. 1054 over the *filioque* controversy, when the Eastern (now Orthodox) church broke away from the Western (Roman Catholic) church.

Then came the Reformation of the sixteenth century, leading to the splintering of the Western church into a multitude of denominations as an unintended consequence. Describing the denominational divisions in his own country, the United States, theologian Martin Marty, citing statistics from the late 1980s, referred to “well over 200 separate contending denominations, most of them Christian, each of them somehow suggesting that they possessed the truth...”<sup>21</sup>

Somewhere in this global denominational maelstrom are Seventh-day Adventists, some twenty million strong, in a sea of 2.8 billion Christians, and in a world population of some 7.5 billion. A miniscule 0.3 percent of the world population we are, and about 0.7 percent of the Christian population.

Yet, with a deep-seated belief that we have been commissioned with a special, end-time message for the entire planet, including brothers and sisters in other Christian communions. It’s a staggering and, from a human standpoint, insurmountable task, notwithstanding clichéd reports about the message spreading by “leaps and bounds.” If Adventists really believe in the imminence of the parousia, and have even a partial understanding of the magnitude and complexity of the mission, then there could be no question about the need to engage every able-bodied person, every willing talent in the task. To understand the magnitude and complexity of the mission, and at the same time try to erect theological or ideological barriers to full participation in the church’s mission, whether on the basis of class, or race, or age, or gender is nothing short of theological malpractice.

So as Jesus prayed, He was looking down the future to dangers facing His followers. With prophetic vision, He would have seen the immediate crisis to face them in the period surrounding His death and immediately following His departure—the crisis in Jerusalem, leading to the initial scattering of believers, mentioned in Acts 8:1. He would have seen the doctrinal and theological tensions, as His followers passed through the period of theological transition from the Old Testament period to the New—problems involving a multitude of Jewish practices and observances that would need sorting out to determine their continuing validity. There would be problems involving salvation (the role of circumcision and the law); problems involving race (the status of Gentiles); problems involving class (the status of slaves); and problems involving gender (the standing of women), etc.

In regard to gender and other illegitimate causes of tension within the church, the apostle Paul could not be more in keeping with the oneness Jesus called for in His prayer: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:27, 28). And as a church, we will be judged by what we allow to divide us.

For most of His earthly ministry, Jesus was surrounded by twelve close-knit followers. But as He spoke that critical prayer in the upper room that evening, only eleven were present to hear it. The departure of Judas on his dark mission represented the first rift in the unity of the group, a development that had to be uppermost in Jesus’ mind as He prayed in the hour that followed. Decades later, John still remembered how it felt. “It was night,” he said (13:30), cryptically describing the kind of darkness apostasy brings.

Consider the enormity of Judas’s act that fateful night in Jerusalem. And compare that with what we allow to divide us today. The role of women in ministry, for example. What we have here, after all, is a group of people simply wanting to join their male counterparts *in the mission of God’s church*, and, in all fairness—and in keeping with common human decency—be fully and

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equally recognized for it. That's all. And to allow *that* to divide us is obscene.

Here are five questions to consider:

1. In John 17, Jesus prayed, among other things, for unity among believers. How should we assess whether that prayer was or was not answered? What are the prospects for the future?
2. To what extent should the Ecumenical Movement be seen as an attempt to fulfill Jesus' prayer for unity? And how do we regard (or justify) the Seventh-day Adventist Church's stance in connection to the Movement?
3. As you consider the matter of unity in John 17, how relevant or irrelevant is the contemporary controversy in the Seventh-day Adventist Church over the equality of women in ministry?
4. As a church, are we coming closer together, or is the idea of unity a theological mirage?
5. In the light of John 17, how do you visualize church unity? And what needs to happen—practically, ecclesiological, or theological—to bring it about? Or is unity, by its very nature, purely a work of God?

I go out on a hermeneutical limb as I close.

In John 13:35, Jesus points to love as the critical identifying mark of His followers. Everyone will know that you are My disciples, He said, "if you *love one another*." In John 17, He issues another identifier, not one by which to recognize His disciples this time, but one that would identify *Him* before the world, one that would tell the world who He is. The world will know that God has sent Me, He said, when my followers "*are brought to complete unity*" (verse 23), emphasizing what He'd already said in verse 21.

We probably should not see these two markers as standing in competition. In essence, they're complementary. Yet theologically, one precedes the other. For as important as it is for the world to recognize us as Christ's disciples by our love to one another, that in the end carries no intrinsic significance if people don't know who Jesus is. But to

know Jesus as Messiah, as the One sent from God, carries eternal consequences. That was a critical assertion of His prayer: "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (verse 3, NRSV). The first identifier (the world recognizing us as disciples) can function on the theoretical level, as an intellectual curiosity even. But the second one (knowing Jesus as Messiah—"knowing" Him in the biblical sense of the word) is personal, experiential, and carries with it eternal life.

And if *the unity of believers* is a marker that points to Jesus as the One sent from God—the Messiah, the Redeemer, the Savior of the world—then unity in the gospel of John (and in the prayer of Jesus) supersedes even love itself.

## Reunion

Throughout his gospel, John has been stressing Jesus' close affinity with His followers. When, speaking plain truth to the multitude, He saw large sectors of the people deserting Him, Jesus turned to the twelve, His closest earthly companions, with the plaintive query: "Do you also wish to go away?" (John 6:67, NRSV). Or, as the New International Version puts it: "You do not want to leave too, do you?" An answer in the affirmative would have devastated Him. What a relief it must have been to hear Peter's response on behalf of the twelve: "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68, 69).

In chapter 10, Jesus describes Himself as "the good shepherd [who] lays down his life for the sheep" he loves (verse 11). And in chapter 13, John says of Jesus that "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (verse 1, NRSV).

Although we cannot speak of Jesus' farewell discourse as "His final words" in the common sense (as if He would die and remain deceased), it is probably correct to say that Jesus' words in chapters 13–17 (even beginning as early as chapter 12) carry a distinctive note of finality about them. They represent Christ's last concerns be-



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fore the cross—concerns for His followers and for His work in the world going forward.

As John sets up the scene in chapter 13, for example, he indicates that as Jesus faced the upcoming Passover Festival, it was with a sense “that the hour had come,” the hour “for him to depart from this world and go to the Father” (John 13:1, NRSV). “Jesus knew,” John said, “that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God...” (13:3). It was for Him the end of a journey; and in 13:33 He made it clear to the little company gathered in the upper room, that He’d be with them “only a little longer.” Prompting Peter to put the question: “Lord, where are you going?” To which Jesus was pleased to point out that Peter and the others “will follow later” (13:36).

Chapter 14 continues the going-away theme, Jesus intimating that He’s going to God’s house “to prepare a place” for them, but “will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2, 3). The same sentiment continues in chapter 16 where, in verse 5, He says that “now I’m going to him who sent me...” and in verse 28: “I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.” Reluctantly, He was leaving them, so that the Spirit might come (John 16:7); but not even the coming of the Spirit could squelch His insatiable desire to be with them again.

So in chapter 17, as He heads down to the closing lines of His supplication, He prays for what He’d promised in chapter 14: “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory...” (17:24).

This is the great reunion Jesus has always longed for. That hope and that promise are not conditional. It’s a date He will keep. What a reunion that will be! ■

## References

1. In the words of Andreas J Köstenberger, the prayer is “strategically placed immediately prior to his arrest, which would trigger in rapid succession the various events

surrounding [His] crucifixion.” *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 246.

2. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1961), 1159.

3. Paul N Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International), 266.

4. Arndt & Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 609–611.

5. John McManners, ed., *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 6.

6. *Ibid.*, 1128, 1129.

7. Rudolf Bultmann, paraphrased in John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 53.

8. Allan Richardson, ed., *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, s.v. “Gnosticism.”

9. *Oxford Illustrated History*, 26.

10. Arndt & Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 814.

11. *Ibid.*, 8.

12. *Ibid.*

13. John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 491.

14. *Ibid.*, 510.

15. “This reflects Jesus’ vision of spiritual multiplication and reproduction.” Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel*, 248.

16. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel*, 1155.

17. *Ibid.*, 1165.

18. *Ibid.*, 1137.

19. *Ibid.*, 1157.

20. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Zondervan; 1994), 877.

21. Martin Marty in *Oxford Illustrated History*, 387.

**As a  
church, we  
will be  
judged by  
what we  
allow to  
divide us.**

# Toward a Theology of Unity | BY JOHN BRUNT

**DISCUSSED** | unity, diversity, ἀνακεφαλιωσασθαι, the great “un-Babel,” eating with Gentiles

## The Basis for Unity

If you go to a synagogue service you will be sure to hear the following words sung, probably more than once: *Shema Yisrael adonai elohenu, adonai echad*. “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” This is the central affirmation of the Jewish faith, found in Deuteronomy 6:4.<sup>1</sup>

The “oneness” of Yahweh is the basis for unity, for, unlike other ancient religions where the national god was seen as one of many gods, each of whom ruled over its own nation, the Hebrew Scriptures teach that Yahweh is not only Israel’s God, but is the God of all and the Creator of all. If God is one, and the creation is one, God’s universe should be a perfect unity.

According to the Scripture, however, the unity of God’s creation was disrupted by human failure and rebellion against God. Human sin led to alienation and violence, as seen when Cain murdered Abel. The disruption of unity is portrayed in the account of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. In their pride and arrogance, the people tried to build a great tower to make a name for themselves. God chose to scatter them, as we read in Genesis 11:5–9.

*But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”*

*So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.*

The Hebrew Scripture is largely the story of God’s faithfulness in the face of human failure. God formed a special covenant with the descendants of Abraham, yet there was no question that the whole world was still in God’s view. Notice Exodus 19:4–6, where God instructs Moses to tell the people,

*You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*

God is God of the whole earth, but Israel was chosen to be a kingdom of priests who would mediate God’s love and will to the rest of the world. God’s goal was the reunification of all people and of all things so that the entire creation would again express the oneness of God and the harmony of creation. Over and over again, human failure got in the way of this purpose. Throughout the history of God’s dealing with Israel the vision continues to reappear. God wants to restore the unity of creation.

## The Mystery of Reunification

When it appeared that God’s plan would never come to fruition, for the people of God were ruled by Rome and were in disarray, Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, came to unveil the “mystery” or “secret” of God’s plan. In the language of the New Testament the term “mystery” is not something that cannot be known, but is known only to those who are in on the secret. Ephesians 1:8–10 lets the world in on God’s secret, revealed in Jesus Christ:

*With all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (NRSV)*

The word translated “to gather up” is one of the longest words in the Greek New Testament (eight syllables) and is difficult to translate in a way that captures the full beauty of the term. The Greek word is ἀνακεφαλιωσασθαι (*anakephalaiosasthai*). It is a combination of the preposition *ana*, which in combination means “up” or “again,” and the word for “head.” Literally it means to sum things up under one head. The word’s only other occurrence in the New Testament comes in Romans 13:9, where Paul says that all the commandments are “summed



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up” under the one word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” God’s secret plan, now made known in Christ, is to unify all things in the universe, both in heaven and on earth, in Jesus Christ. This includes both the human world and the natural world, as Paul emphasizes in Romans 8:20–23:

*For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.<sup>2</sup>

The rest of the book of Ephesians gives witness and detail to this plan of unification. In the early part of chapter 2 we find that not only is Jesus Christ seated in the heavenly realms, but we, too, are there with Him. The latter part of chapter 2 proclaims that the walls that stood between peoples, especially Jew and Gentile, are now shattered in Christ, who has become the “peace” that brings both groups together (2:11–14).

In chapter 3 Paul prays that all Christians will be able to grasp the seemingly incredible dimensions of God’s love in Christ.

Chapter 4 begins with the admonition that Christians live a life worthy of this amazing good news, which means being humble, gentle and patient with each other. Then Paul tells Christians to make “every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond peace” (Ephesians 4:3). The word translated “unity” (*henoteta*, ενοτητα) is only used twice in the New Testament, here and ten verses later in verse 13. It comes from the word for “one” and simply means “oneness.” According to verse 13, it is in coming into unity that believers reach maturity, which is nothing less

than the full stature of Christ.

Verses 4–6 of the fourth chapter set forth the essential elements of unity in the church: one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God over all. Here we find that theological unity is clearly an aspect of this oneness. The New Testament presents different perspectives. Witness the difference between Paul and John’s use of the term “flesh,” or James and Paul’s use of the word “faith.” Yet a core of beliefs is essential to Christian faith. For example, Paul speaks of how dangerous it is to deny the resurrection of Christ and of the believers (1 Corinthians 15), and John shows the danger of denying that Christ has come in the flesh (2 John 7). Theology is important because ideas have consequences. “One hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God over all” draws the church to theological unity in these essentials.

In chapters 5 and 6 we discover that unity also has implications for how Christians live in individual households. They are to be mutually subject to each other out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21). This mutual subjection includes husbands and wives, parents and children, as well as slaves and masters.

Throughout Ephesians we find a variety of metaphors and images to help communicate the shape of this unity.<sup>3</sup> In Ephesians 2:19–22 the church is compared to a family or household; to a building, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ as the chief cornerstone; and to a temple in which God comes to dwell, where members are the individual stones in the structure. All these images imply unity. Unity is also the focus in the metaphor of the body of Christ where each member serves as an indispensable part of an organism whose head is Christ (Ephesians 4). This image is worked out in more detail, of course, in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.

One might get the idea from Ephesians that this idyllic portrait of unity in Christ came easily and naturally in the early church. We must remember, however, that Ephesians is one of the least “occasional” letters in the New Testa-

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or for all

situations.



ment. When we turn to Acts and the letters that are more specific in addressing real life problems within individual churches, we find that unity came through struggle. It was forged amid conflict, controversy, and compromise at both the local and worldwide level.

## The Struggle for Unity

### Worldwide Unity

The post-resurrection experience of the early church begins with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2. In a sense, this is the great “un-Babel.” The Spirit works to undo the disunity of Babel. As God confused the languages in Genesis 11, the Spirit now allows the message of good news to transcend the various languages so that all can understand, whatever their language might be. The Spirit brings unity to a diverse collection of nationalities gathered in Jerusalem.

This unity, however, was not easily achieved in the new church. It would have been quite possible for early Christianity to divide into two totally separate communities, one of Jewish Christians and the other of Gentile Christians. No one was more committed to holding these two together than the apostle Paul, as we find both in his letters and in Luke’s account of his ministry in the book of Acts.

Paul’s fundraising activity provides a particularly vivid example of his work to hold the Jewish and Gentile Christians together in unity. Over a period of years he took up a collection throughout the Gentile churches to help the financially disadvantaged church in Jerusalem. He collected funds in Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia, and was not above using the example of giving in one place to encourage Christians in another place not to be outdone (see 1 Corinthians 16:1–4 and 2 Corinthians 8).

In Romans 15, we discover what this collection represented to Paul. According to verses 23–26, Paul’s plan when he wrote from Corinth was to travel to Spain, via Rome. But

first he was taking a little detour to Jerusalem to deliver personally the money he had collected. In other words, he was going 780 air miles in the opposite direction (and he didn’t fly) for the sake of this collection. That’s how important it was to him. And it was important not only because Jerusalem needed the money. It was important as a theological symbol of the unity of the church, as we see in verses 25–27:

*At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them; for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things. (NRSV)*

Through a kind of financial interdependence, Paul sought to hold the Jewish and Gentile Christians together in one body. This is evidence that for Paul unity meant more than local fellowship. He envisioned a worldwide unity that embraced all Christians from Jerusalem to Asia Minor to Greece to Rome and, as he hoped, even on to Spain. The financial collection provided a tangible symbol of this worldwide unity.

Earlier in this same chapter (Romans 15:7–13), Paul reveals the clue to the origin of this vision for unity. It goes back to his reading of the Scriptures. Through the patriarchs, prophets, and psalmists, God revealed the plan for unifying all creation by including the Gentiles. Within the flow of this passage, Paul quotes from 2 Samuel 22:50, Psalm 18:49, Deuteronomy 32:43, Psalm 117:1, and Isaiah 11:10, all of which shout to him that God’s plan for unity was not a recent novelty, but was revealed through the Scriptures to anyone who read with eyes of faith. Paul says,

*Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on*

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behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

**“One hope,**

*“Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name”;*

**one Lord, one**

*and again he says,*

*“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”;*

**faith, one**

*and again,*

*“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him”;*

**baptism, one**

*and again Isaiah says,*

*“The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope.”*

**God over all”**

**draws the**

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (NRSV)*

**church to**

**theological**

This vision of unity between Jew and Gentile drove Paul in his evangelistic activity, his theological reflection, and his practical action. Unity between Jew and Gentile was so vital that Paul was willing to travel close to 2,000 miles out of his way for it. He was willing to stand up and refuse to allow Titus to be circumcised for it (Galatians 2:3–5). He was willing to rebuke no less than the apostle Peter, face to face, to preserve it (Galatians 2:11–14). He was willing to endure the hardships of beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, and prisons for it (2 Corinthians 11). He was even willing to accept James and the elders’ suggestion that he go to the temple and sponsor a vow when he went to Jerusalem, even though he knew the danger, and ended up being arrested and spending the next five years as a prisoner (Acts 21:24).

### **Local Unity**

Although Paul’s vision of unity in Christ had a worldwide perspective, it took particular shape in the nitty-gritty of daily life at the local level, where Christians of diverse backgrounds wel-

comed each other by worshiping together, praying together, and eating together in peace and joyful fellowship. Unity in Christ broke down all the barrier walls that separated people and inhibited the joy of mutual fellowship. Christ brought a new equality that sought to include all people in one new reality in Christ, the *anakephalaia* of Ephesians 1. It included Jews and Greeks, men and women, slave and free (Galatians 3:28), as well as Scythian and barbarian (Colossians 3:11). It was for “all” who believed (Romans 1:16). Each one cared for the other so that when one suffered all mourned and when one was honored all rejoiced (1 Corinthians 12:26; Romans 12:15).

This fellowship was important from the very beginning of the church. According to Acts 2, the first believers met in the temple daily, not only for prayer and worship, but also for fellowship. Paul uses this word (*κοινωνία, koinonia*) no less than a dozen times in his letters. This unified fellowship is directly tied to mission as well. We read in Acts 2:47 that as believers met in unified fellowship, their numbers grew and many were added to their number daily. Unity is vital for mission.

### **Diversity within Unity**

Some, if not many, in the early church believed that the only way to hold the church together and achieve this unity was to have complete uniformity of practice in all areas of Christian life for the entire body of diverse early Christians. If some Christians were circumcised, for example, all had to be circumcised. Peter, Paul, and James opposed this view at the Jerusalem Council, recorded in both Acts 15 and Galatians 2.<sup>4</sup> The Council agreed there could be one church that embraced both Jew and Gentile, but allowed Jews to continue practicing circumcision and Gentiles to become Christians without circumcision or becoming Jews first. It is hard for us in our culture to comprehend what a huge decision this was and what far-reaching implications it brought. *It achieved unity by allowing for diversity.* It maintained unity of purpose by allowing for

diversity of practice. In other words, it achieved the unity of inclusive fellowship by allowing for diverse practices that took into account the ethnic, cultural, and geographical diversity of the early church. Had the early church demanded unity in all practices and policies, it probably would have meant at least two different Christian churches, separate from, if not at odds with, each other.

For Paul, this allowance for diversity was not merely a pragmatic decision, however. It was a well-thought-out theological conviction. It had to do both with his ecclesiology and his theology of mission. He sets it forth in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, in the middle of a discussion about food offered to idols, which we will view in detail later.

*For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.*

*I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings. (NRSV)*

Paul is not saying, “Anything goes.” What comes in the parentheses is vital. Allowance for diversity does not mean really being under the law, on the one hand, or being lawless toward Christ, on the other. Diversity does not mean that all is relative.

One way to give shape to this interplay between unity and diversity is to look at several case studies within the New Testament where Paul and Peter deal with controversies and threats to unity. How do they come to grips with them? What does this teach us about unity and diversity?

## Threats to Unity—Case Studies

Inclusive, egalitarian fellowship was then and is now a fragile thing. Threats raised their ugly heads whenever Christians acted in ways that failed to embrace fully inclusive fellowship in Christ. Inclusiveness and egalitarian fellowship were absolutely essential ingredients in God's vision for unity. Whenever they were threatened, globally or locally, Paul was stirred to action. He could not stand idly by whenever real-life fellowship, acceptance, and welcoming of each other gave way to a prejudice that made any Christian, in any way, a second-class citizen.

Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the occasion in Antioch when Peter was eating with Gentiles, but then withdrew when certain people came from James, the brother of Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem. Paul says they did this for fear of the “circumcision.” Eating with Gentiles could have made life difficult for Jewish Christians, who might find it awkward to continue table fellowship with their non-Christian relatives. It was probably a complex situation for many of them. For Paul, however, the issue was clear. Peter's refusal to eat with Gentiles, and Barnabas' decision to follow suit, was, for Paul, “hypocrisy” (Galatians 2:13), and Peter “stood condemned” (Galatians 3:11).

Peter's actions went against the important “all” of Romans 1:16. The exclusion of any from that “all” threatened the very heart of the gospel. That is why Paul was willing to say that anyone who preached a different gospel, even if it were an angel from heaven, was “anathema” (Galatians 1:8–9). The “different gospel” was condemned because of its existential implications, namely the disruption of inclusiveness and egalitarian fellowship.

We see the same kind of concern in Paul's treatment of divisions in the church in Corinth. In the first chapter of 1 Corinthians he speaks of the various factions that divided the church, and in chapter 11 he gives us a hint as to what this factionalism meant in the lived experience of the community. Again, it involved a lack of table fellowship. Each fac-

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**“Hear O Israel,**

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**Lord is One.”**

tion ate separately and refused to share their food, so that some had plenty and others were hungry (1 Corinthians 11:21). This breakdown in Christian unity was so abhorrent that Paul calls it “contempt for the church of God” (1 Corinthians 11:22).

That this unity did not mean uniformity of all practices is demonstrated when Paul tackles a question put to him by the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 8–10). What about eating food offered to idols? In the first-century world, meat markets were generally adjacent to pagan temples and portions of most of the meat had been a part of pagan sacrifice. Paul’s answer to their question was neither a “yes” nor a “no,” but an “it depends.” He takes three chapters to work out the factors upon which “it depends.” Only at the end of chapter 10 does he get down to the specifics.

In the first part of chapter 10 Paul makes an important caveat. Christians are never to participate in the idolatry or the sexual immorality of pagan worship (1 Corinthians 10:1–23). This would violate God’s law. No amount of “it depends” would ever justify such behavior. However, Christians didn’t need to worry about what was sold in the meat market. They could eat it. And if invited to a non-Christian’s house for dinner, they didn’t need to ask questions about whether the food had been offered to an idol. But if a sensitive host pointed out that they might not want to eat certain food because it has been offered to an idol, out of sensitivity to the host, one should avoid it. And if eating would be a stumbling block and hurt another person for whom Christ died, the Christian with knowledge, in the position of power, should be willing to give up even legitimate rights for the sake of that more vulnerable person who might be injured.

Paul’s allowance for diversity on this issue is especially remarkable because, according to Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council, in which he participated, voted to forbid eating food that had been offered to idols, without offering any

exceptions (Acts 15:20, 29). Surprisingly, Paul never mentions the Council or its decision in this three-chapter discussion, even though 1 Corinthians was definitely written after the Council. The issue is complicated, but it appears that Paul was willing to go against the voted action of the Council. Perhaps he felt that this voted policy was not necessary for all time or for all places or for all situations. In this case, for Paul, good sense appears to trump adherence to voted policy.

When Peter followed the prompting of the Holy Spirit in Acts 10 and baptized the uncircumcised Cornelius and his household, Peter also had to know that this was hardly within the established practice of the early church at that time. This was before the Jerusalem Council. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that Peter received criticism, as we see in Acts 11:2–3:

So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

Peter seemed to convince the critics, however, that his actions were justified when he told them (in verse 17), “Who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?” He heard the Spirit speaking and felt compelled to follow, in spite of the current practice of the church.

Paul’s viewpoint is seen in another discussion involving food, found in Romans 14–15. Here there is no reference to food offered to idols, but to the fact that some eat only vegetables and some eat meat.<sup>6</sup> There is also some kind of dispute involving days, perhaps fast days.<sup>7</sup> In Rome, people seem to be arguing about what to eat and when to eat it.<sup>8</sup>

Paul refused to give a single “right answer” to these Christians, but allowed for diversity of practice. He says that believers should be fully convinced in their own minds (Romans 14:5). Probably some would have been concerned that this was precisely the problem. The Roman house churches needed Paul to tell them what practice was correct. They needed him to give them the “right” answer; to get



them all doing the same thing; to bring them into “unity.” But he didn’t do it. He told those who were “more strict” (probably the meaning of “weak” in his context)<sup>9</sup> to stop judging the “less strict,” and he told the “less strict” not to look down with scorn on the “more strict.” Each could continue their own practice. In fact, those who were “more strict” were not to violate their convictions and do what they did not believe was right. And the less strict were not to act in a way that hurt the “more strict.” This diversity of practice was not to be a deterrent to unity, for unity did not mean everyone doing it the same way, but it did mean welcoming each other even when they acted differently.

Paul’s commitment to freedom of conscience was too great for him simply to give a “right answer” for everyone. Convictions were important and Christians needed to be free to follow them. The key word in the discussion is “welcome” (προσλαμβάνω). Paul begins in 14:1 by commanding, “Welcome each other.” In verse 3, he proclaims that God has welcomed them. At the end of the discussion in 15:7, he concludes, “Welcome each other as Christ has welcomed you.” They need not have all the same convictions. They need not have the same practice. But it was vitally important that they have the same welcoming spirit of fellowship and mutual caring.

According to Paul, Christians must be free to follow their convictions, as long as those convictions are within the framework of God’s will. Idolatry, adultery, bigotry, and prejudice are never within that framework. But the framework could include a significant diversity of practice as long as love, mutual respect, and reverence for each other prevailed. As he says in the middle of this discussion,

*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. (Romans 14:17–18)*

Of course, there were limits to inclusiveness within the community as well. If a person stubbornly and willfully flouted God’s law and even the standards of the pagan world, such as the man who was living with his father’s wife in 1 Corinthians 5, the community needed to cut off fellowship. But this was an extreme exception, and was for the purpose of awakening the individual and bringing him back to his senses.

In the normal experience of the church, however, the mystery of God’s plan for unity was actualized and became reality when Christians welcomed each other, respected each other, and ate with each other, even when practice, policy, and preference differed

### **Conclusion—Toward a Theology of Unity**

The elucidation of a full theology of unity is beyond the scope of this paper. But we should note several elements that this study concludes must be part of any theology of unity.

First, a theology of unity must give witness to the unity of God and all of creation. God created a unified world filled with diverse life forms who lived harmoniously within one ecosystem, and although this unified world was disrupted by human failure, the story of God’s continuing faithfulness that permeates all of Scripture, both Old and New Testament, must be at the heart of any theology of unity.

Second, a theology of unity must take into account the New Testament teaching about God’s mysterious plan to unite all things in Christ, as well as Jesus’ desire to see His disciples united as one.

Third, a theology of unity must attempt to understand Paul’s principled conviction, outlined in 1 Corinthians 9, that true unity could only be achieved by allowing for diversity. This is a great irony. Paul knew that trying to force all Christians, both Jew and Gentile, into one mold would ultimately destroy any real chance for unity. It would cause separation. A theology of unity will maintain this ironic tension.

Fourth, a theology of unity must take account of the actual, lived experience of the early

**Diversity  
does not  
mean that all  
is relative.**



John Brunt, a New Testament theologian and prolific author, recently retired from the pastoral ministry at Azure Hills SDA Church in Grand Terrace, California, and moved to Washington to be near his children and grandchildren. He had not been there long before the conference president asked for him to pastor a church that had recently lost their minister. Now he is a part-time pastor at the Edmonds Adventist Church. Before he went to the Azure Hills Church, he spent 31 years in academic work, including being the Academic Dean at Walla Walla University where he also taught theology. Among the numerous books that he has written are *A Day for Healing: The Meaning of Jesus' Sabbath Miracles, Now and Not Yet*, a reflection biblical eschatology, and *Romans: Mercy for All*.

church. How were these early Christians able to live together even when policies and practices differed so widely? And what were the kinds of issues that threatened to destroy their living together in peace? How were these threats overcome? Good theology is never merely theoretical. It learns from real experience.

Fifth, a theology of unity needs to include the analysis of our present life together in Christ. What are the elements that threaten our unity? What elements in our culture are analogous to issues like idolatry and adultery where Paul does not allow for diversity, and what elements are analogous to issues such as circumcision and food where he vigorously defends diversity?

Sixth, a theology of unity must explore the concept of freedom in Christ. Paul admonishes the believers in Rome who have different behavioral standards not only to welcome each other, but also to allow each to follow their own convictions. He teaches that it is wrong to violate one's convictions or to attempt to force others to violate their convictions. A sound theology of unity will also include a theology of respect for freedom of conscience.

Seventh, a theology of unity will struggle with the tension between individual integrity and communal identity. How do we live together in unity, uphold the community's identity, and maintain our own integrity? Perhaps stories from our own Adventist history can help us reflect on this dilemma.<sup>10</sup>

Eighth, a theology of unity should explore the relationship of financial interdependence to unity in the church. Paul gave high value to the collection of funds from the Gentile world for the poor in Jerusalem. Is financial interdependence still important today, and if so what forms should it take?

Finally, a theology of unity will benefit from exploring the many metaphors for the church found within the New Testament. These rich images speak to a part of us that goes deeper than words and should help us intuit the depths of Christian unity.

Each of these issues would warrant a paper in itself (if not a book). They are presented in the hope that this paper will be a catalyst for future study.

As we reflect on all these elements, we must always remember two verses:

*Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One (Deuteronomy 6:4).*

And:

*With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to anakephalaiosasthai all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:8–10).*

## A Final Story

Since I'm a preacher, I have a hard time concluding without a story. Please indulge me this pastoral quirk.

When I pastored the Azure Hills Church in California we had the largest Adventurer Club in the North American Division. Over 200 four to nine year olds. Can you imagine taking all of them along with their parents camping? Our leaders did it twice every year. One annual weekend trip was to a beautiful campground on the beach about three and half hours' drive from the church. A group of 300 to 400 would camp from Friday through Sunday.

I couldn't go for the whole weekend but, when I finished preaching on Sabbath morning, I would hop in the car with a sack lunch and drive in time to be there for supper, sundown worship, and s'mores around the campfire.

Families in the group had quite different convictions about Sabbath activities for the kids. Before I came to the church they had worked out a plan. They decided that everyone should be able to follow their convictions, and no one should be judged, scorned, or pressured. They agreed that there would be options on Sabbath afternoon, and parents would

decide which option their family would follow. Some would go down to the beach and let their kids go into the water. (The beach was down a cliff from the camp and not immediately visible.) Others would go on a hike. Others would play active Bible games. Every family could choose its option. No one would criticize anyone for the option they chose. And at the end of the afternoon, they all came together for supper, and ate together in joyful fellowship.

The people worked all this out among themselves. They did it without pastoral involvement. And it worked. It has continued to work over a period of almost twenty years. I can't help but wonder, might the broader church organization learn from the wisdom of these faithful people in the local church? ■

## References

1. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version* unless otherwise noted.
2. For a comprehensive and insightful treatment of the theme of the significance of the natural world in Paul's thought, see Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Letter to the Romans: Paul among the Ecologists* (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2016) in the Earth Bible Commentary series.
3. For an exhaustive study of the metaphors and images used for the church in the New Testament see Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, forward, Leander E. Keck (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004). For an excellent Adventist treatment of the subject see John K. McVay, "Biblical Metaphors for the Church and Adventist Ecclesiology," *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 2, (2006): 285–315.
4. Some scholars hold that Acts 15 and Galatians 2 refer to different events. This is unlikely, but such a position would not detract from the point we are making if we (and I do) accept Acts 15 as a reliable account. There is one intriguing question, however. In Acts 21:25, why does James seem to tell Paul about the Council as if he had never heard of it?
5. This nuanced approach to the question about food offered to idols showing that the answer "depends" on various factors that influence its moral significance seems to have been lost completely in the early church, as I attempt to show in: John Brunt, "Rejected, Ignored, or Misunderstood? The Fate of Paul's Approach to the Problem of Food Offered to Idols in Early Christianity," *New Testament Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (January 1985), 113–124.
6. Several factors seem to preclude the idea that Paul is again addressing the question of food offered to idols as he did in 1 Corinthians 8–10. None of the specific words for food offered to idols occurs in Romans. There is also no warning about the problem of idolatry or the sexual immorality of pagan worship. Nor do the Corinthian slogans such as "all things are lawful" and "we have knowledge" appear.
7. For evidence that Paul is referring to fast days rather than worship days, see Raoul Dederen, "On Esteeming One Day Better Than Another," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 9:1 (1971): 16–35, and Max Rauer, *Die "Schwachen" in Korinth und Rom nach den Paulusbriefen*. *Biblische Studien* (Freiburg: Herder, 1923).
8. For a series of articles on whether or not Paul is addressing a specific situation in Rome, see Karl P. Donfried, ed., *The Romans Debate: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1991). I am convinced that Donfried is correct and Paul is addressing a specific situation.
9. There is a story in Horace, *Sermones* 1:9:60–78, where the phrase "somewhat weaker brother" seems to be synonymous with "more scrupulous."
10. Numerous examples of interesting stories can be found in Gilbert M. Valentine, *The Prophet and the Presidents: Ellen White's Influence on the Leadership of the Early Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2011).

**Paul's  
commitment  
to freedom  
of conscience  
was too great  
for him simply  
to give a "right  
answer" for  
everyone.**

# LIBERTY OF C

## Liberty in Messiah: The Steep and Narrow Path to Unity | BY OLIVE J.

DISCUSSED | conscience, *elutheria*, Sarah and Hagar, “lady liberty,” faithfulness of Jesus Messiah

The multi-ethnic, multi-convictional nature of the early church, steeped in Greco-Roman religious-philosophical ferment, defied efforts at uniformity of practice. So strong were the consciences of particular groups that, in spite of the Church’s ruling at the Jerusalem Council on certain practices, there remained resistance. The Council ruled that Gentiles do not need to be circumcised, but it continued to be a factious issue. The Council ruled that Gentiles should not eat meat offered to idols as they used to before their conversion, but that, too, remained a factious issue.

Similarly, the Seventh-day Adventist church in a General Conference session voted against the autonomy of any region of the world church to ordain women; but it still remains a factious issue.

Apostle Paul addresses these divisive issues not by appealing to the ruling of the Jerusalem Council, but by appealing to the Abrahamic Covenant through which God brings liberty. He strongly opposes enforcement of uniform practice on matters that have no spiritual virtue in and of themselves (“weak and beggarly rudiments” [Galatians 4:9]), calling such practices enslavement to the flesh (Galatians 4:21–31; 1 Corinthians 3:3) or capitulating to a “weak” conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7). Paul explains that to live in covenant is not about rituals and traditions, but about love for one’s neighbor, i.e., fair and equitable relations in community fostering the bond of faith (Gal. 3:28; Romans 13). Like Jesus of Nazareth, Paul’s purpose is to reinforce this fundamental ethic of the kingdom of God vis-à-vis rituals and traditional practices. By this careful ethical instruction of factious communities such as Galatia, Corinth, and Rome, he calls the church to the liberty in Messiah that enables it to embrace, without rancor, diverse practices in the faith.

In Galatians, Paul writes, “For freedom Christ has set you free. Stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke

of slavery.” This statement is a climactic point in a conversation on freedom of conscience which constitutes the letter to the Galatians. I will discuss the question of liberty of conscience in the context of this statement as it addresses factious issues in the early church, and reinforces the fundamental ethic of the Kingdom of God as the only path to unity.

My thesis today is this: The New Testament teaching on unity is a call to enter the new covenant experience of liberty that frees the community from the need for conformity to rituals and regulations that have no spiritual value in and of themselves, but serve to keep it enslaved.

I will in many places use the term “Messiah” instead of “Christ.” Both terms mean the same, i.e., anointed specifically to mediate God’s liberating justice. However, the general consciousness tends to recognize “Christ” as a name rather than as the function that it is—messianic function.

Further, it becomes necessary to clearly explain the use of the term “love” (*agapē*) in this paper. I use it synonymously with justice—liberating or delivering justice. *Agapē* is not at all rooted in emotion; but neither is it “sacrificial” as many denote it. The late Glen Stassen, renowned ethicist and my mentor at Fuller Theological Seminary, calls it “delivering love” which creates a just community.<sup>1</sup> According to him, the label “sacrificial” “seems to misunderstand the significance of Jesus’ death. Jesus did not sacrifice himself on the cross for the sake of self-sacrifice. He died for the sake of delivering us from the bondage of sin into community”<sup>2</sup> so that we too may practice delivering love.<sup>3</sup> Love is the theme of the Sermon on the Mount which Jesus identifies as doing to others as you would have them do to you (Matt 7:12)—the very demonstration of love for God (Matt 22:39; 1 John 4:20–21). It is the outworking of justice, towards community well-being—shalom—the focus of Hebrew prophecy.



# ONSCIENCE

HEMMINGS



It is that which makes the believing community perfect as God is perfect (Matthew 5:48). In the Johannine writings, it is the new commandment (John 13:34–35; 1 John 2:7–11) which makes believers one, and demonstrates who God is—nothing else. In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, it is the narrow road that leads to life—the central theme, as we shall see—of John, where Jesus calls for unity.

### **For Freedom Messiah Has Set You Free**

“For freedom Christ has set you free. Stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”

This statement is the response call to Paul’s thesis: “a person is not justified by works of law, but through faith in Jesus Messiah” (Galatians 2:15). His teaching on “righteousness” or “justification” in Galatians (and Romans) is his radical assertion that Gentiles who do not subscribe to Jewish rituals and traditions have a right to membership in the covenant community—the community of the righteous. We so often use the term “righteousness by faith” when speaking of Paul’s soteriology, and contrast that to “works of the law”; and we do so with reference to personal sins. However, Paul’s message is to a community, about how it conducts itself interrelationally as people of the covenant. It is a message of inclusion and freedom of conscience. Five hundred years of Reformation has silenced this conversation. However, the late 1970s saw the rise of the New Perspective on Paul (NPP) with the publication of E.P. Sanders’ *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.<sup>4</sup> While the NPP may have sunk into the background, it has heralded a new look at Paul’s conversation on “justification” through the lens of scripture, rather than through the lens of the Reformation. Thereby, today, strict biblical theological approach reads Paul’s argument in the context of Second Temple Judaism, the nature of the Jesus Movement, and the actual issue he addresses.

In light of this context, let me define these key, often misunderstood, terms in Paul’s conversation—“righteousness,” “faith,” and “works of law.”

### **First, “Righteousness”**

The Greek terms which English translations render “righteous” (*dikaios*), “righteousness” (*dikaiousunē*), and “justify” (*dikaioō*) actually mean “just,” “justice,” and “give justice,” respectively, as in liberating justice. *Dikaiousunē* is the

Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *tsedakah*. *Tsedakah* is the Hebrew prophetic plea against oppressive structures—corruption, greed and the exploitation of the vulnerable. It is a call for right relations in community as in doing to others, so that all may live in peace and freedom. This is the focus of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, summed up in the golden rule (Matthew 7:12): hence his call “seek first the kingdom of God and his justice” (Matthew 6:33).

This is how Paul uses the term in his discussion of what many understand as “righteousness by faith.”

### **Second, “Faith”**

The term which translations render “faith” (*pistis*), actually means “faithfulness.” (In Greek argumentation, the *pistis* is the proof of, or faithfulness to, one’s claim). The phrase “faith in Jesus Christ” (*pistis tou Iesou Christou*), both in the Greek and in the context of Paul’s discussion, literally reads “faithfulness of Jesus Messiah.” God’s people receive justice through the faithful mediation of Messiah; and this is the actual meaning of the Abrahamic covenant in the context of Jewish Messianic expectation.

### **Third, “Works of Law”**

Jews believed that only practicing Jews were heirs of the Abrahamic promise, and as the covenant community, they were inherently free (John 8:31). To access that freedom, one had to become a practicing Jew—signified by the ritual purity of circumcision with its accompanying rituals and regulations. Paul calls these “works of law.” The conviction about circumcision remained entrenched among Jewish Jesus followers, including Peter, whom God confronted in a radical vision to convince him to enter the house of an uncircumcised Gentile (Acts 10). In fact, even after the Church at Jerusalem Council ruled that Gentiles did not have to receive circumcision, Peter was still so intimidated by the seemingly influential “circumcision faction” that upon their arrival in Antioch where he used to eat with the Gentiles, he led other Jews, including Paul’s ally Barnabas, to withdraw from eating with Gentiles, perhaps for fear of losing his own influence. And Paul calls him out on his hypocrisy (Galatians 3:11–14).

One may further understand this entrenchment in light of the fact that the early church was a Judaic community; it was not a different religion. The Jesus Movement was another rabbinic school, and Paul a rabbi doing his work of instruction.

## Unity in Diversity – the Path to Liberty

Paul does not dismiss the validity of his own Jewish tradition (“Do we then overthrow the law...?” [Romans 3:31b]); rather, he advocates the right of Gentiles to the Abrahamic promise without having to conform to Judaic tradition (“...he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith” [Romans 3:30]). Gentiles who resist the very ritual that ratifies the Abrahamic Covenant have a right to that Covenant, because it is not ritual and legal regulations but a spiritual experience—“circumcision of the heart” (Romans 2:29)—that produces just relations within a diverse community. If they were to coerce the consciences of these new believers, that would prevent the community from entering into the covenant experience of liberty.

Both the coerced and the coercer are enslaved to the flesh—the rudimentary elements of this world—and that cannot bring true liberty.

A close examination of the context of the use of the term “liberty” will demonstrate the extent to which Paul (and as we will see, Jesus) opposed the coercion of conscience in the interest of “unity.”

### Liberty

The term *Eleutheria* (“freedom” or “liberty”), goes as far back as the Ancient Greek city-state Athens<sup>5</sup> around the eighth century B.C.E. Its fundamental significance rests in whether one is living free (*eleutheros*) as opposed to being a slave (*doulos*).<sup>6</sup> The *doulos* is someone else’s possession and lives according to the dictates of someone else’s will and conscience, while the *eleutheros* is their own person.<sup>7</sup> *Eleutheria* was a major issue in the Hellenistic Roman age and fundamental to the religious and philosophical zeitgeist of the era. First-century Apocalyptic Judaism asserts freedom through the Abrahamic Covenant, and this liberty comes to full realization in a coming Messianic age. Many Greeks sought, through the pursuit of knowledge, liberation of the spirit from the corruptible material world—the flesh (Paul uses the term “flesh” to indicate slavery to rules and regulations that have no inherent spiritual

virtue). The use of the term in Greek philosophy<sup>8</sup> heralded an era that sought an alternative to authoritative government and compulsive and ethically bankrupt religious traditions and rituals.

First-century Jewish Rabbis—Jesus of Nazareth, the great scholar/professor Gamaliel, and Paul of Tarsus, for example—all drew upon both the Hebrew prophetic and the Greek philosophical traditions.

In a certain sense, *Eleutheria* (liberty) in Greek philosophy goes hand in hand with justice (*tzedakab/dikaiounē*) in Hebrew prophecy. Both Jesus and Paul sought to reform the tyrannical legalistic/ritual-centric element of their own religious tradition by drawing upon these two traditions. In their use of the terms *eleutheria* (liberty) and *dikaiosunē* (justice) one observes the confluence of Greek philosophical and Hebrew prophetic traditions in the quest for liberty.

So in this context, liberty does not stand alone. It is inextricably connected to this very important concept in the Hebrew scripture—justice

### Liberty and Justice

The statement “For freedom Messiah has set you free...” is a declaration of God’s justice through Messiah. Paul uses the allegory of Sarah and Hagar (4:21–31) to indicate the extent to which obsession with rituals and legal regulations enslaves the community, and the extent to which unconditional acceptance for the other believer of different conviction liberates it.

You will of course remember that Hagar represents the Old Covenant experience that marks off boundaries, and assumes that God’s vindication comes only to a specific group identified by their traditions. Sarah on the other hand represents the new Covenant experience that frees the non-Jew to stand before God with the assurance of God’s faithfulness to the Abrahamic Covenant. Here is an important understanding: Paul depicts Sarah as *hē eleuthera* (the free woman) by quoting the Septuagint version of Genesis 21:10 where Sarah says to Abraham, “Cast out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not inherit with my son Isaac.” But the passage he quotes in Genesis con-

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tains neither of the two terms at play in the conversation—*doulos* (slave), and *eleutheros* (free). In fact, the word the Septuagint passage uses for slave is *paidiskēs* (“slave girl” or “maid”). Paul maintains *paidiskēs* in the allegory. However, he omits the phrase “my son Isaac” (Genesis 21:10) and he replaces it with the phrase “the child of the free woman” (Gal 4:30). Here he inserts the term *hē eleuthera* (the free woman) which is not present in the text from which he quotes.

This is a pivotal point in Paul’s application of the Greek philosophical concept of *eleutheria*. Hellenistic consciousness personifies *eleutheria* as “lady liberty,” epitomized in the Goddess Artemis. Artemis is “lady liberty,” who resists conventional boundaries, roles, and rules that restrict her power, and roams the forest with her aides protecting the vulnerable from the tyranny of the powerful.

In this allegory, Paul inserts the Greek idea of *eleutheria*, making Sarah “lady liberty,” the representative of the Abrahamic Covenant.<sup>9</sup> By this skillful rhetoric, the Greek idea of *eleutheria*—liberation from tyrannical rule—becomes the most important element in his conversation about justification. So please understand that Paul’s conversation is not merely about liberty. It is actually about justice. Do not forget this as we move further into this study.

## Liberating Justice

So Paul’s defense of radical diversity in Galatians makes the case that the Abrahamic covenant is a covenant of liberating justice, specifically with regard to the conscience, not only for practicing Jews, but for everyone who accepts its Messianic fulfillment through Jesus of Nazareth. One can understand this covenantal quest for liberty through two major Jewish historical events—the Exodus, and the Maccabean revolt under Syrian rule.

First, when Israel under Egyptian slavery cried out, God heard their groaning and remembered the covenant with Abraham (Ex 2:23–24). And God said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘thus says the Lord: Let my people go, so that they may worship me [emphasis mine] . . .’” This is to say God’s covenant is a covenant of justice: liberation from slavery and oppression, and specifically the release of the conscience from those who assume ownership of it.

Second, in its *primary*<sup>10</sup> context, Daniel 8:14 addresses the Syrian enforcement of Greek culture upon the Jews, and the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes when he offered up a pig to the god Zeus in the temple precinct leading to the Maccabean Revolt. The future passive of the verb

form of *tzedakab* (justice) appears in Daniel 8:14. (Remember, earlier I explained that *tzedakab* is the Hebrew prophetic plea against oppressive systems—corruption, greed and the exploitation of the vulnerable.) The Hebrew text of Daniel 8:14 actually says, “. . . unto 2,300 days then shall the sanctuary be *given justice*” as in “given its rights.” Please don’t pass this by. (The Septuagint uses the word “cleanse” [*katharidzō*], and that is appropriate in light of the desecration of the temple, but it obscures the message of liberating justice in the original Hebrew word from *dikaioō* [“give justice”]). This needs not take anything from the doctrine of the Sanctuary; rather it ought to add depth to it when one understands that in Second-Temple Judaism salvation is about the liberating justice of the Abrahamic covenant mediated by Messiah. Daniel 8:14 primarily applies to God’s Covenant of justice—liberty—freedom of religious conscience.

When Paul, an apocalyptic Jew,<sup>11</sup> encountered the Gospel in the embodiment of the risen Messiah, he became convinced (through an unbiased revisit of the scriptures) that this liberation was not only for practicing Jews. The Sarah/Hagar allegory demonstrates the irony that the very people God sets free by the promise of the Abrahamic covenant are now in slavery (Galatians 4:25), because some believe that enforcing and or conforming to a uniformity of religious tradition and regulation is what defines them as members of the community of the free.

The poignant message in Galatians is that certain practices rest entirely upon the personal convictions of believers, and enforcement of these upon the church nurtures a state of enslavement rather than liberty in Messiah. Paul further develops this idea in explicit terms of liberty of conscience in 1 Corinthians and Romans, regarding meat offered to idols.

## Freedom of Conscience

“For why should my liberty be subject to the judgement of someone else’s conscience?” (1 Corinthians 10:29).

This is a powerful rhetorical question to the Corinthian enforcers of the Jerusalem Council regulation to abstain from meat offered to idols. It suggests that the church’s ruling on a matter that should be left entirely up to the conscience may be more divisive than unifying. What Paul calls for is not conformity to the rule. Rather he appeals to a conscience that transcends the factious convictions regarding the issue by invoking the Covenant ethic as he does in Galatians—that is, liberating justice: love.



It is important at this point to clarify the meaning of conscience in Paul's conversation about liberty.

## Conscience

*Suneidēsis*: Of the thirty times that this term appears in the New Testament, it appears eight times regarding the issue of meats sacrificed to idols. While the word in ancient Greek philosophical understanding denotes an internal guide or judge, this internal guide receives instruction from the external factors that form the totality of one's experience in the world.

We have a tendency to think of conscience as a personal thing, the little angel that sits on your shoulder and whispers to you what is right and what is wrong. But in fact, conscience arises from the socio-historical experience that shapes one's consciousness. Nietzsche, in *The Genealogy of Morals*,<sup>12</sup> traces its origin to the promise between autonomous individuals in the interest of their survival. Sigmund Freud calls it the "superego" which develops from the ethical restraint placed on the individual by its social/cultural/religious upbringing. The conscience arises from what Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau discuss as the "Social Contract" that allows communities/groups to regulate relationship and behavior for the welfare and protection of all.<sup>13</sup> These definitions coincide with the compound structure of the Greek word for "conscience," *suneidēsis*—sun (together) and *eidēsis* (knowing) literally meaning "knowing together" or "common idea." In this sense, appropriate synonyms for "conscience" are "consciousness" or "conviction."

In the case of the believing community, the conscience informs as to what constitutes right conduct before God. The conscience is not necessarily an automatic judge of what is absolutely right or wrong; rather it judges one's decision based on what one understands to be right or wrong, given one's exposure in the world of knowledge and experience. This is why Paul acknowledges both the "weak" conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7) and the knowledgeable (1 Corinthians 8:9) in the issue of meat offered to idols.

## The Weak Conscience and the Knowledgeable

The weak conscience lacks knowledge, and remains bound to its native pagan culture, unable to liberate itself from it in spite of the Gospel teaching that "there is no God but one" (1 Corinthians 8:4). ("It is not everyone who has this knowledge. Since some have become accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. [1 Corinthians 8:4–8]). It is unreflective, lacking the will to examine whether a particular custom "brings us close to God" (1 Corinthians 8:8). Paul says that such people are condemned if they eat because they do not act from faith (Romans 14:23). The knowledgeable conscience disassociates meat from the non-existent idol to which it was offered, (1 Corinthians 8:8, 9). Paul says, "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself: but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean" (Romans 14:14).

Contrary to popular preaching on this issue, Paul does not favor the weak conscience over the knowledgeable. While he asks the knowledgeable to defer to the weak, he also asks the weak not to trample the liberty of those who eat (1 Corinthians 10:29). In Romans 14:2–4, he states it even more forcefully: "Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables,"<sup>14</sup> but whether one eats or abstains, or observes or not observes a day above another, as long as they do it "in honor of the Lord" no one should judge them (Romans 14:1–6). Both the knowledgeable who disregard the sensibility of the weak, and the weak who impose their conscience on the knowledgeable—both of these groups lack spiritual maturity and remain bound to the flesh. ("...I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ...for you are still bound to the flesh" [1 Corinthians 3:2–3]). It is this spiritual immaturity, not the diversity of conviction, that creates the disunity and keeps the church in a state of spiritual bondage.

**This is to say  
God's covenant  
is a covenant  
of justice:  
liberation from  
slavery and  
oppression,  
and specifically  
the release of  
the conscience  
from those  
who assume  
ownership  
of it.**

## The Free Conscience: Knowledge and Love

Regarding the conscience, one can identify two levels of liberty in the conversation about idol meat. The first level is the level of knowledge or awareness. The second level is love. According to Paul, knowledge without love is destructive to the body: “knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” (1 Corinthians 8:2). However, Paul believes that knowledge is an important gateway to spiritual growth and liberty of conscience. Those who lack knowledge he describes as “infants in Christ” who are “not ready for solid food” because they “are still of the flesh” (1 Corinthians 3:2–3). In Galatians, those of the flesh are both the “circumcision faction,” and those who comply. These are “in slavery” to rituals and regulations, so that they will not accept diversity in the faith. Paul aims to give such believers “solid food” when he considers them ready for it (1 Corinthians 3:1–3). And as we can see in his epistles, Paul does deliver the “solid food.”

*“If you let yourself be circumcised, Christ is of no benefit to you” (Galatians 5:2).  
(Is Christ of any benefit to those who oppose women’s ordination?)*

*“If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced, because of that for which I give thanks?” (1 Corinthians 10:30).  
(Why do I denounce those who accept with thanksgiving by the laying on of hands this rich resource of the church?)*

*... In the Lord, nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean” (Romans 14:14).  
(Are we of the New Covenant still bound by ritual purity regarding blood [Lev. 12]?)*

*In the Lord, man is not independent of woman nor woman of man... everything comes from God” (1 Corinthians 11:11–12).  
(Is God the only head? Is human claim to headship a spiritual insight, or is it man playing God?)*

### Solid food.

As Paul notes, not everyone “has ... knowledge,” and not everyone is at the same stage in their spiritual development (Romans 14:1). There will always be diverse practices and convictions in the faith; thus Paul calls the deeply divided Corinthian community to a “more excellent way”—Love (1 Corinthians 12:31–13:13). Based on all that Paul has been saying, this love is not conformity to the loudest voice. Rather it is respect for all the voices of faith. In Romans, he

prefaces his appeal to accept the conviction of the other thus: “Owe no one anything except to love one another... love your neighbor as yourself... love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:8–10). This mirrors his exhortation in Galatians: “...the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Galatians 5:14). This is the context of Romans 2:13–15, where he says that the conscience of the Gentiles who do not possess the law “bears witness to what the law requires”—“love your neighbor as yourself.” As I noted above, the well-being and safety of every person is the root of the conscience. That is why, as Paul succinctly states it, one does not have to have Torah to understand this timeless ethic.<sup>15</sup> This reflects Jesus’ teaching on the Ten Commandments that they are really about love, i.e., liberating justice. And this defines love of God: “. . . the second commandment is like the first: love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39; cf. 1 John 4:20–21). Interestingly, the ancient Greco-Roman world is renowned for its great piety<sup>16</sup>—its love for the gods—demonstrated by elaborate rituals; but the culture was ethically bankrupt.<sup>17</sup> The great philosophers arose to address this ethical void. This same empty piety also existed in ancient Israel, hence prophetic oracles such as,

*I hate and despise your festivals, and take no delight in your solemn assemblies (Amos 5:21).*

*...who asked this from you? ... New moon and Sabbath and calling of convocation ...my soul hates; they have become a burden to me (Isaiah 1:12–14).*

*But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 12–14).*

Love for God depends not on ritual purity but upon the extent to which the faith community accepts and regards with respect each other in serving God through Messiah. This is true liberty of conscience—the only path to Unity.

Now, it is important to understand that the issues of conscience we have been discussing are not issues of morality, but issues of ritual purity or cultic issues. And yet the very fact that they are being forced upon members of the community is itself immoral because it violates the consummate moral requirement—love/justice. Let us examine these cultic issues in light of the issue that now threatens to divide the Seventh-day Adventist church.

## Rituals, Conscience and the Case of Women's Ordination

Paul believes and teaches that some stipulations in scripture may be entirely a matter of conscience, and therefore factious, and especially so because of their purely ritualistic function: "Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own mind. . . . I know and am persuaded in the Lord that nothing is unclean in itself. . . ." (Romans 14:5,14). Nothing in the Old Testament indicates that circumcision is not necessary. But the Church came to terms with the reality of a faith community that was no longer purely Jewish. (This makes the case against a literalistic application of scriptures that to Paul constitutes a fixation to the flesh—a constant diet of milk that impedes spiritual maturity.)

Paul's arguments suggest that a ruling of the church may not produce spiritual fruit because of the factious nature of the issue. When that ruling is factious, i.e., when it violates the conscience of some, the Church must appeal to a higher conscience, which allows everyone to practice the faith according to the dictates of their conscience ("Let all be fully convinced in their own minds" [Romans 14:5b]).

In doing this, it fulfills the law "love your neighbor as yourself" (Romans 13:8). It is vitally important to point out here that the question of women's ordination, like the question of circumcision, is rooted in ritual purity. One is about the foreskin and the other about blood (Lev 12). The latter has bred an age-long misogynous culture that remains consciously and unconsciously entrenched, especially in the religious institution. It is old-covenant consciousness. This is why Paul states in Galatians 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek...male and female. . . ." This is New Covenant liberty in Messiah.

In light of this, the case of the current issue over women's ordination is clearly a question of conscience, and that on two levels. First, if one approaches the scripture from a truly literalistic standpoint, then it seems that the early church in different regions acted according to conscience

regarding the function of women. For example, women in Corinth and Rome functioned as prophets, teachers, and apostles (1 Corinthians 11; Romans 16), while "brethren" in Ephesus wanted them to shut up and go home to their rightful roles as child-bearers (1 Timothy 2). This is one major reason why, after years of Bible study by the Seventh-day Adventist church, there is yet no conclusive consensus to prohibit the ordination of women. Some side with the "brethren" in Ephesus, and some with the sisters and brothers in Rome, based on their cultural inclinations.

If all the lengthy studies commissioned by the church conclude that the Bible does not prohibit the ordination of women, the current issue as it stands need not divide the church. If the early church judged the ritual act of circumcision—a clear scriptural mandate—to have no sanctifying value in and of itself, then even more so the question of women's ordination that has no clear scriptural mandate. The compulsion to conform to the conscience of one faction in the church indicates that the community as a whole has yet to achieve freedom of conscience toward spiritual maturity. In the context of Galatians, this inability to accept differences in this matter of conscience, leaves us in slavery, bound to flesh and unable to fully access the freedom that comes through Messiah. There can be no unity if the conscience of one group is allowed to coerce that of another.

### Liberty and Unity in Christ

Let me now conclude by showing you that Jesus' prayer for oneness among believers in John 17:21 comes in the context of liberty similar to what I have been talking about in the writings of Paul.

According to John, Jesus states, "If you continue in my word you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31). This proclamation emerges from the overarching theme of love in the Johannine writings (John, 1, 2, & 3 John). John couches all the Jesus sayings about truth and love in the context of the Abrahamic Covenant. It is in this context that we get a true understanding of Jesus' prayer that the believing community "be one"

**Based on  
all that Paul  
has been  
saying, this  
love is not  
conformity to  
the loudest  
voice. Rather  
it is respect  
for all the  
voices of faith.**



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(John 17:21). What makes them one is love for one another.

In John, the audience of Jesus' statement on truth and freedom comprises Jews "who had believed in him." Their response is to defend their inherent freedom through the Abrahamic Covenant (John 8:33) but Jesus replies that their actions do not demonstrate that they really grasp the freedom that the Covenant offers: "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but you are trying to kill me (8:40) . . . because there is no place in your heart for my word" (8:37). The central passage in John's writings reflects Paul's interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant in Galatians and Romans: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that anyone who believes . . . may have eternal life" (John 3:16). God's covenant of justice is one of love for all who accept the promise through Messiah, not just for a particular group who lives according to certain rules and regulations. According to John, the truth Jesus speaks of is the truth of God's love and the believer's faith(fullness) to it, namely to love one another.

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. . . . By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34; cf. 1 John 4:21).*

*This is the message that we have heard from him and we proclaim to you, that God is light. . . . Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light (1 John 1:5; 2:10).*

Love brings the believing community into liberating justice and, thereby, it lives out the very faith(fullness) of Messiah. Love is the truth that sets us free.

Jesus prays that the believing community "be one" (John 17:21) as a testimony to the world of the love of God (" . . . so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me" [John 17:23]) In the light of the Abrahamic Covenant, the oneness for which he prays is not conformity to rules that do not

even reflect love. Jesus was killed precisely because rather than conforming to the letter of the law, he taught and lived its spirit—namely love: (" . . . in everything, do to others as you would have them do to you. . . ." [Matthew 7:12]).

Love is the truth that brings true freedom and unites all believers in Christ. Jesus invites the believing community into a deeply spiritual experience—the very Christ experience. According to John, to love is to abide in God (1 John 4:16), to be "begotten from God" (1 John 4:7), and to pass from death into life (1 John 3:14). This is to say that the believing community may also become one with God as Jesus and God are one. This is the "in Christ" experience of true liberty into which Paul invites the church:

*In Christ "there is no longer Jew or Greek. . . slave or free. . . male and female. . ." (Galatians 3:28).*

*In Christ, woman is not independent of man or man. . . of woman. . . all things come from God (1 Corinthians 11:11–12). (God is the only head.)*

*In Christ "nothing is unclean in itself" (Romans 14:14).*

The tendency to strive over these temporal things stems from our earthly limitations. Paul shows the factious community in Corinth a "more excellent way"—love (See 1 Cor. 12:31–13:13), because it is the only thing that outlasts our partial earthly understanding: "For now we see in a mirror dimly. . . now I know only in part. . ." In Christ, fear of uncertainty subsides and we rest in the mystery of God's being: ". . . I put an end to childish ways." Such an experience cannot be voted, legislated, or coerced. It requires spiritual discipline, and instruction in the true spirit of scriptures through responsible Christ-filled exemplary discipleship. It requires a focus on growing members that is at minimum equal to that of growing membership. This is hard, much harder than enforcing conformity to the "elementary rudiments" of our individual consciences. But it is the road on which Jesus Messiah invites the church:



Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

“I know, and am persuaded in” Messiah, that this is the path to freedom. ■

## References

1. See, Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2003), 327–334.
2. *Ibid.*, 330.
3. *Ibid.*, 327–334.
4. E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1977)
5. Ancient Athens distinguished itself among the Greek city-states in its quest for *eleutheria*—democratic freedom—vis-à-vis the total enslavement of the people to the state, as was the case in its neighbor city-state Sparta. Athens became a center of free thinking, the hub of Greek philosophy, and the birthplace of modern democracy. The great philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle lived in Athens. But it is significant to note that the Athenians voted to kill Socrates in 399 B.C.E. because Socrates sided with Spartan oligarchy, placing law over the individual, and opposed freedom of thought in defense of what he regards as unchangeable truth. See, Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” in *Ethics Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 281–301.
6. Mogens Herman Hansen “Democratic Freedom and the Concept of Freedom in Plato and Aristotle,” <https://vitruvianman.wikispaces.com/file/view/greek+freedom.pdf>, 2. Accessed June 6, 2017.
7. *Ibid.*
8. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, Philosophy functioned as religion, “especially among the educated.” It “provided a criticism or re-interpretation of traditional religion, and offered moral and spiritual direction” generally absent from ritualistic and cult-centered religion. See, Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapid, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 300. In general, Greek philosophy functioned in the same way as Hebrew prophetic tradition.
9. One even wonders whether the correspondence between the Hebrew Heroine Sarah and the Greek Goddess Artemis in Paul’s use of Isaiah 51:1:4 (“... the children of

the desolate woman will be more than the children of her that is married...”) is merely co-incident. According to the myth, Artemis, who chooses to remain an unmarried virgin, is the goddess of childbirth.

10. The original audience of Hebrew prophetic oracles—ancient Israel—understand these oracles in their own immediate (*primary*) historical messianic expectations/situations. The early church applies these oracles to the Messianic event of the life of Jesus of Nazareth in what is called *typology* (*type* in Israel’s history fulfilled by *antitype* in Jesus Messiah). Matthew’s gospel, for example uses this typology to demonstrate divine purpose and providence. This same typology applies to the 2,300 days prophecy.

11. Foundational to Jewish apocalyptic understanding, especially in the period of the second temple, was the coming in of a new age of God’s reign through Messiah, the arbiter of justice who liberates God’s people from oppressive principalities and powers.

12. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals (Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 1887), trans, Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Press, 1967).

13. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_contract](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_contract). Accessed, June 12, 2017.

14. Paul is not speaking of eating in terms of health, but in terms of cultic superstition.

15. Emmanuel Kant calls this higher conscience “natural theology” vis-à-vis “revealed theology.” He believes that Jesus’s teachings stimulate an inner sense of justice—“natural theology”—which is antithetical to the “revealed theology” of “coercive laws.” See Emmanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1960), 87–128.

16. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 300.

17. Bart D. Ehrman, *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: OUP, 2013), 22–24.

18. As explained on page 118, above.

**The compulsion  
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ward spiritual  
maturity.**

# Religious Freedom: Some Historical Perspectives and Present Applications<sup>1</sup>

BY REINDER BRUINSMA

DISCUSSED | religious liberty, the Radical Reformation, Calvin and Luther, academic freedom

## Introductory Remarks

**F**reedom is a precious commodity. It is at the heart of the Christian message and is the basis for a Christian way of life. Jesus stressed that freedom is a vital aspect of discipleship. *He is the Truth.*<sup>2</sup> And we are told that as we follow Him, “the Truth [i.e. Jesus Christ] will set us free.”<sup>3</sup> But what is this true freedom that people can experience through their relationship with Christ? It clearly has an important spiritual component, but must also have practical implications. How does the freedom that Christ gives translate in how we live our faith and in how we relate to others who practice their faith differently from how we do?

Our modern understanding of religious freedom is embedded in our conviction that all human beings share some basic, inalienable rights. These have been codified in the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights* (1948). It was agreed by most nations on earth, that all men, women, and children have these universal rights, regardless of where they live, and irrespective of their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and political or religious persuasion. Since then, several other pieces of international legislation have been added, dealing more specifically with certain individual rights.

These human rights documents cover a wide spectrum. There are security rights that stress the sanctity of the human body and protect people against such crimes as murder, massacre, genocide, torture, and rape. Political rights guarantee the liberty to freely participate in political activities, the right to express oneself freely, and the right to take part in protests. Other rights ensure that each person is entitled to due legal process and cannot be imprisoned without trial or be subjected to abuses of the legal system. In addition, the welfare rights (or economic rights) stipulate that every person must have access to education and must be protected against severe poverty or starvation. The rights that guarantee equal citizenship for all, emphasizing total equality before the law and forbidding every form of discrimination, have come increasingly to the forefront in re-

cent years, especially in Western countries which have experienced an influx of large numbers of immigrants.<sup>4</sup>

In the context of our present discussion, article 18 of the Universal Declaration is of prime importance:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.*<sup>5</sup>

When dealing with freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, a few aspects stand out.

1. The inner freedom that the Christian can experience when he lives “in Christ.”
2. The freedom to believe and worship as one chooses.
3. The issue of separation between church and state.
4. The absence of coercive measures by the church.
5. The absence of coercive measures by the state.

Great progress has been made in ensuring a greater degree of freedom of religion and conscience in most parts of the world. A major step forward was made during the Second Vatican Council when the Roman Catholic Church formally accepted the right to religious freedom of all people.<sup>6</sup> But much remains to be done.

In our present discussion of various aspects of religious freedom we must first of all recognize that our contemporary concept of religious liberty is of relatively recent origin. In ancient times in particular, areas of the world were mostly ruled by a system of theocratic absolutism, in which the rulers were often venerated as divine figures. And we must also accept the tragic fact that ever since Christianity came on the scene “religion and freedom have not been natural allies.”<sup>7</sup> In most of Christian history we see a serious lack of religious freedom. Although through the ages the church regularly insisted that it should be free from all control of temporal rulers, the reality was usually rather different. Free-



dom of the church from the control by the state may be an important part of our modern view of religious freedom, but it was long in the making. Scholars disagree whether political philosophers or theologians were the primary movers in the process of establishing a theoretical framework to undergird freedom of conscience and religion.<sup>8</sup> Fact is, that some religious thinkers did underline the primacy of the individual conscience and this certainly had a major impact on the theories of religious rights that gradually developed.

Often the church's demand of freedom from coercion by the state was not accompanied by a generosity to grant full freedom to individuals to follow their own conscience and to make their own religious choices. For many centuries the church was frequently inclined to organize the suppression and even the persecution of its own dissident members.<sup>9</sup> In theory, the church usually upheld the notion that non-Christians could not be forced to convert to Christianity, but in actual practice this principle was often ignored. The official policy of the medieval church was that Jews should be free to exercise their own religion, but in this respect the practice was often also quite different.

Although a lot has been achieved in defending and safeguarding religious freedom around the world, several organizations—such as the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom—still regularly report numerous infringements and point to dozens of countries where religious freedom remains an illusion.<sup>10</sup> And even in our “free” Western world there is good reason to remain alert, as individuals and organizations may still ride roughshod over the religious rights of individuals or unpopular groups.

Among these introductory remarks, we must also mention that religious freedom is more than *indifference* as to what people believe and goes beyond mere *tolerance*. This is an important point to remember in our twenty-first-century world, in which the attitude of many people towards other religions is at best one of tolerance, rather than of genuine respect for their religious freedom. In many areas in the world the relationship between Christians and Muslims is at best one of (often state-enforced) toleration. But, as Dr. Bert B. Beach, a well-known Adventist champion of religious freedom, once stated: “Tolerance implies that freedom of re-

ligion and belief is not really an intrinsic right, but that society in a spirit of beneficence may grant a privilege to that what is not wholly approved of, or possibly even suspect."<sup>11</sup>

## The Reformation and Religious Freedom

In this year in which the world commemorates Luther's first public step on the path of the Reformation, it is more than fitting to ask the question: *How does our modern view of religious freedom compare with the understanding of the magisterial sixteenth century Reformers?* Let us first briefly look at Luther's thinking about religious freedom.

In 1520 Martin Luther wrote his foundational treatise about man's freedom—*On the Freedom of a Christian*.<sup>12</sup> Although it is clear that Luther felt strongly about the need for freedom from the papal yoke and from the non-biblical teachings of the Roman Catholic Church—which is especially clear in his dedicatory letter to Pope Leo X, that introduces his pamphlet—*On the Freedom of a Christian* is mainly about the *inner* freedom of the Christian. He states two propositions as his point of departure: "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone." Two paragraphs further on he clarifies this, as follows: "We first approach the subject of the inner man, that we may see by what means a man becomes justified, free, and a true Christian; that is, a spiritual new, and inward man."

For Martin Luther the freedom of the Christian is fundamentally *freedom from the law*. The person who is really free, "has no need of works, neither has he need of the law, and, if he has no need of the law, he is certainly free from the law . . . no one should need the law or works for justification and salvation." That does not mean that the Christian has a license to do "bad" things, but "his works are to be done freely, with the sole object of pleasing God." A modern Lutheran author commented, "Here is an early Lutheran document . . . filled, nay, rather bursting at the seams with the universal, law-free gospel of God's mercy and therefore of justification by grace through faith on account of Christ alone."<sup>13</sup>

With regard to the relationship between church and state, Luther built on Augustine's doctrine of the two kingdoms—both of which God created, albeit with different roles. Both church and state have their own spheres, but Luther did not want total separation. The state should provide protection for the believers, while Luther also allowed civil rulers a degree of control over ecclesiastical matters. (Luther himself was provided protection after the Diet of

Worms by Elector Frederick, and remained for some time under an assumed name, Squire George, in the Wartburg Castle.) There is considerable justice in these words: "Defenders of the free-church principle have, with some fairness, concluded that eventually this doctrine of the two realms created a persecuting Lutheran state church."<sup>14</sup>

Lutheranism spread widely in parts of Europe, but not uniformly so. And whether or not one became a Lutheran Christian was, in many cases, not the individual's free decision. Much depended on whether or not the ruler in a particular area had converted to Lutheranism. The Peace of Augsburg in 1531 was concluded between the Emperor Charles V and the Schmalkaldic League (an alliance of German Lutheran princes). Rulers could choose whether their region would be Roman Catholic or Lutheran. This settlement is summarized in the formula: *Cuius Regio, Eius Religio*. Calvinism was not legally recognized until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.<sup>15</sup>

In Germany, Lutheranism had achieved a position of equality alongside Catholicism. But, in the Scandinavian countries, Lutheranism would fully replace Catholicism as the established church. Until recently, almost the entire populations of the Scandinavian countries belonged to the Lutheran State Church.<sup>16</sup> In recent decades, the Lutheran church in the Nordic countries lost this privileged status.

In Calvin's thinking, church and state were also closely connected. The state, Calvin argued, must be subjected to the church and Christian statesmen are to defend true doctrine.<sup>17</sup> However, only in a few countries did Calvinism become the "established" religion, Scotland being the most prominent example.

## A Free Will?

Both Luther and Calvin were opposed to the concept of a free will. When Desiderius Erasmus published his booklet entitled *On the Freedom of the Will*, Martin Luther responded with *On the Bondage of the Will* (1525).<sup>18</sup> Luther denied that man has a free will and can freely choose either good or evil, since sin incapacitates human beings from taking any step towards salvation. It is often not sufficiently recognized that not only Calvin, but also Luther, believed in double predestination, even though Luther did not emphasize it quite as much as Calvin did.<sup>19</sup> Calvin refuted the idea of a free will at length in the second book of his monumental *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.<sup>20</sup> (Adventists feel much more akin to the views about the human free will of the Radical Reforma-



tion<sup>21</sup> and of what would later be called the Arminian tradition.)

The rather intolerant attitude of the Reformers towards the “mother church” that they had left is well known; but we must also note the harsh disciplinary measures against those in their own ranks who held theological positions they deemed heretical. Calvin’s approval for the execution of Michael Servetus in 1553 because of his, in Calvin’s view, erroneous teachings on the doctrine of the Trinity and on the doctrine of baptism, is a sad example,<sup>22</sup> and his refusal to extend freedom of religion to those who preached or practiced “heresies” is likewise well known. Luther’s relationship with the more radical reformer (and his former friend) Andreas Carlstadt, who was to be banished from Saxony by Frederick the Wise, is a clear illustration of Luther’s intolerance with regard to alternative theological views.<sup>23</sup> Luther’s unrelenting anti-Semitism is also well documented.<sup>24</sup> Thus Luther manifested a regrettable inconsistency in his approach to freedom. We would have expected something else from the man who in 1521 stated before the Diet of Worms: “To act against our conscience is neither safe for us or open to us. On this I take my stand. I can do no other. God help me.”<sup>25</sup>

### Mixed Feelings About the Reformers

Seventh-day Adventists are very positive with regard to many aspects of the work of the sixteenth-century Reformers. But Martin Luther, by and large, received a much more positive press in the Adventist Church than John Calvin, even though Calvinism was a much stronger force in American nineteenth-century religion than Lutheranism. Perhaps the clearest illustration of this is found in the way the two Reformers are treated in Ellen G. White’s book *The Great Controversy*.<sup>26</sup> Not only did she devote far more pages to Luther than to Calvin, but she also appears to be much more positive about Luther than about the Reformer from Geneva.

With regard to Calvin, Ellen White states, “For nearly thirty years Calvin labored at Geneva, first to establish there a church adhering to the moral-

ity of the Bible, and then for the advancement of the Reformation throughout Europe. His course as a public leader was not faultless, nor were his doctrines free from error.”<sup>27</sup> A little further in the same book she spoke in no uncertain terms about the “monstrous” Calvinist doctrine of predestination.<sup>28</sup> Compare this with the glowing accolade to Martin Luther: “Foremost among those called to lead the church from the darkness of popery into the light of a purer faith stood Martin Luther. Knowing no fear but the fear of God, and acknowledging no foundation for faith but the Holy Scriptures, Luther was the man for his time.”<sup>29</sup> And when referring to Luther’s appearance before the Diet of Worms, Ellen White comments, “Thus stood this righteous man upon the sure foundation of the word of God. The light of heaven illuminated his countenance. His greatness and purity of character, his peace and joy of heart, were manifest to all as he testified against the power of error and witnessed to the superiority of the faith that overcomes the world.”<sup>30</sup>

But Adventists are critical with respect to a number of the positions of the Reformers. They do, for instance, not support the views of the Reformers with regard to various aspects of freedom. They agree with Luther that we are “free from the law” in the sense that our salvation is *sola gratia*, but they would be hesitant to talk about freedom from the law in the way Luther does. Adventists stress the limitations of the law, but also underline that the law, in Paul’s words, is “holy, righteous and good,” and still plays an important role in the Christian life.<sup>31</sup>

Another area where Adventists find it difficult to appreciate these magisterial Reformers is in the area of their understanding of man’s free will, as we already noted earlier.

Likewise, when we use our modern concept of freedom of conscience and religion as the standard for measuring the approach of the Reformers, we must conclude that they fall far short of our ideals. Some have maintained that Luther replaced Catholic religious persecution with Protestant oppression and persecution. We already referred to the classic example of Calvin’s intoler-

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ance—the case of Servetus—but his harsh enforcement of very strict discipline in Geneva is also a far cry from what we would call religious freedom.

## The Radical Reformation and Its Abiding Influence

Adventists disagree with both Luther and Calvin (as well as Zwingli) with respect to the relationship between church and state. On this issue Adventists are also much closer to the Radical Reformation tradition, which would be the dominant philosophy of the so-called “free” Protestant churches, and became the basis of the American principle of full separation between church and state.<sup>32</sup>

Some groups in Reformation times were more “radical” than the “magisterial” Reformers, and their associates. The Anabaptists were the most important branch of the so-called “Radical Reformation.”<sup>33</sup> They rejected the kind of close association between church and state that would lead to the establishment of “state churches” or “established churches” in a number of European countries. They were opposed to the territorial system of the Lutherans and were also opposed to any participation in warfare and the swearing of oaths.

The Radical Reformation provided the immediate roots for movements such as the Mennonites, the Quakers and the Baptists. In many ways modern evangelicalism—and, indirectly also Seventh-day Adventism—can trace some of its major ideas to the Radical Reformation. The Anabaptists insisted that believers’ baptism was the only valid mode of entrance into the church, which they conceived of as a visible community of committed Christians. They were staunch defenders of the individual’s free will as the basis for accepting or rejecting the salvation that Christ offers. They interpreted the communion service in purely symbolic terms, and in some cases reintroduced foot washing as a rite that precedes the communion. Several views of this Radical Reformation also became part and parcel of Adventist beliefs and practices, to a large extent through the early Methodist connections.<sup>34</sup>

## Adventist Interest in Freedom of Religion

Seventh-day Adventism originated and developed in a nineteenth-century North American context. It is important to remember that from its inception American Protestantism had a distinctly Calvinist flavor. Most settlers in the American Mid-Atlantic region and in New England were Calvinists, including the English Puritans, the French Huguenots, the Dutch settlers of New Amsterdam (New York), and the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians of the Appalachian back country.

The majority of the newcomers had Calvinist roots, while the Lutherans accounted for only five percent of the population.<sup>35</sup> Most successful among the so-called “free churches” were the Baptists and the Methodists, whereas the percentage of Roman Catholics would also steadily increase as the nineteenth century progressed.<sup>36</sup>

One significant factor is, undoubtedly, that America was greatly affected by two powerful waves of revivals, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century respectively. This had a significant effect on Calvinist thinking in America, in particular with regard to the fundamental doctrine of predestination. This teaching proved to be a very “contentious” doctrine.<sup>37</sup> Arminian influences that had come from Europe had already convinced many that this basic Calvinist tenet was not correct, but the revivalist preaching, that emphasized “free will,” in an often very popular manner, also had a profound influence.<sup>38</sup> The fact that the very idea of predestination did not fit well with the American idea of choosing and working hard to reach one’s own destiny, should also be mentioned.

Many immigrants (“pilgrims”) to North America had suffered religious persecution in Europe. But this did not mean that in their new country they would always favor full religious freedom and total separation of church and state. There were, however, some significant developments in colonial America as the initial supremacy of “established” churches came increasingly under fire.<sup>39</sup> Roger Williams, a Puritan-turned-Baptist-leader “was perhaps the foremost spokesman for religious freedom in seventeenth-century America.”<sup>40</sup> We might also mention the relative freedom granted to Roman Catholics in the state of Maryland,<sup>41</sup> as well as the struggle for religious freedom by the Quakers in the state of Massachusetts.<sup>42</sup>

The American Revolution brought political freedom from Great Britain, but also resulted in many changes in the area of church and religion. The churches faced the challenge to “adjust to the ideology of democratic republicanism that had driven the war.”<sup>43</sup> The new republic, of course, needed a constitution. This Constitution was signed on September 17, 1787. The First amendment of the US Constitution took effect in 1791. It stipulated that “Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the exercise thereof.” The question may well be raised, however, “how the First Amendment came to coexist with what, from a modern vantage point, looks like a thorough intermingling of church and state.”<sup>44</sup> Church historian Knoll reminds us, however, that “the colonial background of the new states

was so overwhelmingly Protestant that it was simply assumed that such things as Sunday legislation, laws prohibiting atheism and promoting public morals . . . were appropriate."<sup>45</sup>

Adventism—a new, Sabbath-keeping religious movement, that originated in this nineteenth-century Sunday-keeping context—could expect to meet with considerable opposition. This explains why almost from the beginning Adventism would be strongly interested in the promotion of full religious freedom and of a total separation between church and state. The early Adventists saw some large dangers looming. In 1864, a group of “zealous opponents of the growing secularization in the United States” established the National Reform Association. Their aim was to convince Congress that the state should enforce the general principles of Christianity. To begin with, God should be put into the Constitution. They failed in their plans, but then, from 1874 onwards, shifted gears, emphasizing legalized Sunday observance.

In some states Sunday laws were enacted, resulting in the persecution of the violators of these laws. In the 1880s, some hundred Adventists were either given jail sentences, or condemned to enforced labor, or fined. Things came further to a head when, in 1888, Senator Henry Blair of New Hampshire—unsuccessfully, notwithstanding a gigantic petition drive—tried to make Congress adopt a national Sunday law.<sup>46</sup> It was in this climate that Ellen G. White wrote *The Great Controversy*<sup>47</sup> and developed an end-time scenario that, in many ways, was a reaction to the lack of freedom many Seventh-day Adventists were very concretely experiencing in the opposition from other Christians. At the same time, in the entire Protestant world in the USA, anti-Catholicism was fed by the millions of immigrants from Catholic countries, who constituted an economic as well as religious threat. In addition, the United States itself was also seen as a future persecuting power.

Early on—in 1889—the Adventists decided to establish the Religious Liberty Association. It stated as its key principle that civil governments do not have the right to legislate on religious matters, and it underlined the importance of com-

plete freedom of conscience.<sup>48</sup> Ever since, the promotion of religious liberty, through its department<sup>49</sup> and through independent organizations, has been an important concern for the Adventist Church. The International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA) was established in 1946, at the initiative of the Adventist Church. It is headquartered in the Adventist head office in Silver Spring, but enjoys the participation of many non-Adventists experts.<sup>50</sup> The religious liberty efforts of Adventists have focused on protecting the religious rights of Adventist believers, but not exclusively so, as it recognizes that all people must enjoy full religious freedom.

### Issues and questions

Looking at where we are today with regard to religious freedom, Adventists are entitled to some sense of pride and satisfaction. Their ideas of what religious freedom means have matured and their efforts—both by public events and by silent diplomacy—to promote it have often paid off, and Adventist contributions in this domain have been recognized by many.

Adventists have traditionally been very hesitant—to put it euphemistically—to get involved in interfaith or interdenominational projects, but they have been more than willing to cooperate with other faith communities with regard to humanitarian and developmental projects, and in the promotion of religious freedom.

As we discuss this topic of religious freedom during this conference, a few important issues come to mind.

1. Unfortunately, among Adventists, the conviction that liberty of conscience and of religion should be recognized as an essential right of every person is not always matched by a genuine *interest* in what others actually believe. Often Adventists continue to cherish stereotypical views of what other faith communities stand for, or to hold on to facts that are no longer accurate.<sup>51</sup> The traditional Adventist understanding of the Roman Catholic Church and of the Protestant churches as

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the church  
and Christian  
statesmen  
are to defend  
true doctrine.**

apostate communities, has all too frequently led to disrespectful statements and unbecoming conduct towards those who believe differently from what we believe in. It would, in my view, show a mature Christian attitude if we would not just grant others the right to worship and believe as their conscience dictates, but also show respect and a greater willingness to understand what they stand for, and to give praise where praise is due.

2. With regard to another major issue that arises when we look at the “freedom of a Christian” in its most fundamental sense, we turn once again to what Martin Luther wrote in his 1520 booklet on the *Freedom of a Christian*. Where Luther’s views on “freedom of the law” tended to undervalue the role of God’s law in the life of the Christian, Seventh-day Adventists have often erred in the other direction and have not sufficiently understood and experienced the true Christian freedom that is based on an adequate understanding of justification by faith. In spite of the debate in Minneapolis in 1888 and its aftermath (and other developments since), the problem of legalism<sup>52</sup> has remained an ever-present danger. “Christ our Righteousness” must remain the basis for a correct understanding of the doctrine of salvation and of the concept of justification by faith.

This is, in my view, even a more essential point today than in much of our Adventist past, considering the increasing popularity of the so-called “Last Generation Theology,” with its dangerous emphasis on perfectionism—and its often undue stress on the human role in the salvation process. This alternative theology, which was fiercely presented by M. L. Andreasen,<sup>53</sup> has in recent years been vigorously promoted by a number of (mainly independent) ministries and also clearly present in the writings and sermons of some of our world leaders. Here, Luther should remind us of the true freedom that comes when we reject any tint of legalism, and live freely on the basis of justification by faith. In my view the “Last Generation Theology” leads many adherents to doubt or deny that our salvation is only and completely based on the merits of Christ.

3. Freedom of conscience and the freedom to express one’s beliefs can be a complicated issue. How much freedom can a denomination tolerate with regard to di-

versity in religious and doctrinal views, on the part of its leaders and ministers and its members?<sup>54</sup> To put it concretely in the context of recent developments in Adventism: *Do Adventist church members have to agree with every detail of all the Twenty-eight Fundamental Beliefs, in order to qualify as “true” Adventists?* If not, at what point may/should the church organization introduce sanctions (church discipline), or refuse to further recognize a person’s membership?

It seems to me that there is no doubt that one cannot be a Christian unless one accepts the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Likewise, it becomes meaningless to claim to be an Adventist Christian, when denying the basics of the Adventist teachings. There must be certain parameters, within which one must stay. There may not be enough dialogue in many places in the church about what these “basics” consist of. Yet, there seems to be a reasonably broad consensus that, for instance, the Sabbath doctrine is more “basic” than the distinction between “clean” and “unclean” food, or that Christ’s second coming is a more vital belief than the identity of the “beast from the earth.”<sup>55</sup>

In actual practice there has always been, and still is, both a considerable degree of consensus and a considerable amount of theological diversity in the Adventist Church. Most Adventist church members consider some degree of diversity to be acceptable. In fact, it might (justifiably, I think) be argued that a fair degree of diversity is not only inevitable but even desirable in an organization that is alive. But the question is: *How much* of such diversity can be tolerated without losing the necessary degree of unity?<sup>56</sup> Many would suggest that requiring absolute uniformity in our assent to all doctrines is unnecessary and undesirable. Moreover, it goes against the genius of Adventism, which in its formative years—and also beyond those—showed a considerable degree of diversity, also in doctrinal matters. I, for one, lament the recent attempts at codifying in ever more detail what a “real” Adventist must believe. This is, in my view, a form of coercion that limits the freedom a follower of Jesus must be able to experience.

Related to this point is the gradual growth of the church’s corpus of policies. A few decades ago the General Conference *Working Policy* was a 250–300 page book. Over time it has grown into a tome with a multiple number of pages. In itself, the creation of extra policies and making further refine-



ments is not limiting the freedom of the church workers and the church members. In fact, some policies may protect that freedom. A problem arises when policies receive a status that is almost on a par with church doctrine and when one ecclesial body claims to provide the only correct interpretations of those policies—as is the case with some policies that directly or indirectly impact on the debate on the ordination of female pastors.

It would seem (to me and many others) that church entities below the General Conference level ought to have considerable freedom to adapt policies to their regional or local circumstances. In San Antonio that freedom was denied to those world regions that wanted to have the possibility of ordaining women pastors. The very reason why the church towards the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century decentralized church authority, by creating a series of other church bodies (unions and later divisions) with considerable authority, was to make regional and local adaptations of ecclesial practices possible. There is a feeling on the part of many that this freedom to adapt rules and regulations has in recent years been limited.

### **Academic Freedom**

Another question that has become quite urgent is the matter of *academic freedom*. How much space can be given to those who teach theology in the Adventist colleges and universities? Few will deny that there must be some parameters as to what is acceptable and what is not, however difficult it may be to reach a consensus in this matter. The educational institutions that are operated by the denomination must retain their Adventist identity (whatever that exactly is must continue to be a topic for dialogue!). But it would seem that there are tendencies in the church to go overboard in controlling everything that happens in the theological departments of our institutions of higher learning, by establishing a process for the systematic screening of all theology teachers with regard to their orthodoxy. This hotly debated screening process for all university and college level theology professors entails that they should not only

agree with all the Twenty-eight Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, but must also, among other things, subscribe to the document entitled “Methods of Bible Study,” that was voted by the Annual Council of the church in Rio de Janeiro in 1986.<sup>57</sup> Many question whether this does not go too far and whether this does not, in fact, limit the possibilities for research and may inhibit creative theological thinking. Some also feel that this is a factor in creating a climate of fear, in which freely expressing one’s ideas, and having an open dialogue with colleagues, becomes rather risky, as it may easily create the suspicion of a lack of orthodoxy and even cause the loss of one’s job. They wonder whether this development does not eventually lead to precisely the kind of system of ecclesial control that the Reformers protested against. Does “religious freedom” not demand a significant degree of academic freedom, even when this might entail some risks? No doubt, this discussion will continue.

It is fair, I think, to ask the question: Should a denomination that has been and is so much in the forefront with regard to the promotion of freedom of conscience and religion not be willing to extend a fair amount of that freedom to its own members and its theology professors?<sup>58</sup> After all, is it not true what President Ronald Reagan once said during a speech at Moscow University: “Freedom is the right to question and change established ways of doing things.”<sup>59</sup> And would that not also include established ways of thinking and of formulating things in the domain of theology of adapting church policy to varying situations?

### **Conclusion**

This year we commemorate that five centuries ago Martin Luther took a courageous step towards freedom: freedom from an organization that had no place for those who disagreed with its codified beliefs, and from a system that did not allow the people the freedom to study the Bible and think for themselves. That the Reformers themselves often did not grant this same freedom to their followers and to those who disagreed with them, ought to be a warning for us, that we

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should be careful in any restrictions of the freedom of thought for our fellow believers.

Our “pioneers” insisted that we should have no creed but the Bible, after they had found freedom from the codified creeds and confessions of faith in the denominations from which they had come. Should we then not be extremely careful with any measures that restrict our freedom to explore truth for ourselves and to formulate our findings perhaps in new and more profound ways? What I say must not be construed as an appeal for playing loose with the basic Adventist tenets of faith, but must rather be seen as a call to protect—I say it again: within certain parameters—the freedom of conscience and of belief that our tradition has so much emphasized in the past.

In many ways Luther's views—and those of Calvin and other magisterial Reformers—remained defective. Five centuries after that momentous morning in Wittenberg, when Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the castle church, we may rejoice in the fact that today human rights are in most countries high on the agenda and that religious freedom is defended and practiced by many. It is gratifying to see that the Adventist Church has made freedom of conscience and of religion a point of major emphasis. But the time may have come for the Adventist Church to critically look at itself and determine whether or not this freedom of religion and conscience is perhaps being jeopardized by an over-emphasis on uniformity, with the unintended result that that true underlying unity is at serious risk. ■

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# Justice and Equality: Is God Interested? | BY RAY C. W. ROENNFELDT

DISCUSSED | the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, "Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience," Jerusalem Council

## Introduction

It is obvious that a complete coverage of the topic of God's attitude to justice and equality is beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, I will take a more focused approach by examining several key passages and stories (cases) in order to explicate Scripture's overall perspective. While the area under discussion is much wider than God's attitude towards women, given the contemporary debate in Seventh-day Adventism, this dimension of the topic will often appear in the foreground.

The approach I am taking is the following. First, I will examine the Genesis account of the creation of humankind to find the divine ideal for human relationships. The fact that God creates all of humankind in his making of Adam and Eve is surely significant as we attempt to discover the divine attitude towards humankind and their relationships with each other. Humans, of course, did not remain as God made them, and we will need to ask whether their "fall" into sin changed God's expectations in terms of his original ideal.

Second, I will examine the divine attitude towards justice and equality in Scripture more generally. The Old Testament material will be chiefly examined through the lens of a couple of case studies that conveniently combine several characteristics; both of the individuals involved were women and they were not of the "chosen people." On the other hand, the New Testament material will be entered initially via Jesus' own mission statement, and then through some of the many outstanding instances of Jesus' interactions with women, and finally, briefly, through the *locus classicus* of Galatians 3:28.

Third, like any biblical teaching or doctrine, there are difficult passages that cannot be easily 'squeezed' into a systematic approach.<sup>1</sup> It is not my intention to examine all of these passages in detail. Rather I will examine a sampling of texts via a threefold approach: the nature of Scripture itself, the overall perspective of biblical teaching, and the concept of divine accommodation.

Last, I will plot a possible path ahead as the global,



multicultural church grapples with the issue of justice and equality through the hermeneutical system portrayed as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and through the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 as a case study in church politics.

## Human Relationships: The Divine Ideal

The climax of the Genesis account of creation is the creation of human beings. Everything that has gone before on the previous five days and earlier on the sixth is a prelude to the creation of humans. However, there is something quite distinctive in this creative act. Humans are the last creatures mentioned in the account and, as Genesis 2 (verses 7 and 22) points out, they are "separately formed by God. . . . and made from the dust of the ground."<sup>2</sup> The human is not merely called into being as was the rest of creation, but is specifically "shaped" as a potter shapes the clay. Gordon Wenham points out that this "[s]hap[ing]" is an artistic, inventive activity that requires skill and planning.<sup>3</sup>

It should be observed that although the Pentateuch





provides the Israelite people with an explanation of their existence as a people, in the creation of Adam and Eve is the creation of all of humankind. This is made obvious in the genealogy from Adam to Noah (Gen 5) and in its continuation in the table of nations (Gen 10). To be specific, all of humankind finds its reason for being, its dignity, and its equality in a special divine creation, and it is apparent that God planned and intended it to be so.

Furthermore, all humans are made in the “image of God”:

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Gen 1:27, NIV<sup>4</sup>).*

What does this mean? Various explanations have been offered ranging from (1) the natural human qualities in which humans resemble God (e.g., reasoning and personality); (2) to the “mental and spiritual faculties that man shares with his creator;” (3) to the human “physical

resemblance” to God; and (4) to the image as “God’s representative[s] on earth.”<sup>5</sup> Laurence Turner comments that “While the text of Genesis 1 does not state explicitly what the image is, it does provide hints. If humans are in God’s image then there must be some analogy between God and humans.”<sup>6</sup> Turner then explains that the projected human dominion over creation is analogous to God’s subjugation of and transformation of the earth from its primeval chaos. He concludes that “This suggests that the ‘image of God’ in humans refers not only to what humans *are* but primarily to what they *do* . . . .”<sup>7</sup>

There may also be a relational aspect to the concept of the image of God. The Creator-human (or Father-man/woman) relationship is clearly inferred in God’s declaration, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness” (Gen 1:26).<sup>8</sup> The same key passage also refers to the other two foundational human relationships: the relationship between humans and their environment (Gen 1: 26, 28–30) and the relationship between human and

human in the creation of humans as male and female (Gen 1:27).<sup>9</sup> If this is so, at very least it means that there is something about men as well as women that equally “images” God in the world.

However, some might argue that the order of the creation of Adam and Eve portrays a basic inequality between the two. In response, I would suggest that there is no hint of that in the creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2. While Adam is created first, the “order” of the creation narrative would forbid such a conclusion. Within the account there is a distinct progression from what we might construe as simple living things to the more complex (e.g., vegetation on the third day, birds and fish on the fifth day, and, finally, land animals and then humans on the sixth day). In addition, the “structure” of the creation account indicates the same kind of progression: what is formed on day one is filled on day four; what is formed on day two is filled on day five; and what is formed on day three is filled on day six. In fact, ironically, one could actually argue for the superiority of Eve over Adam given the inherent structure within the narrative!

Adam’s declaration concerning the woman contains no indication of inequality between the two: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). In commenting on the relationship between Adam and Eve, Allen Ross remarks that “The woman is described as a helper, which means that she supplied what he lacked . . . , and by implication the reverse would also be true.” With the creation of the woman, the situation of Adam’s aloneness described by God as “not good” (Gen 2:18), is now “very good” (Gen 1:31). Commenting on the symbolism of the creation of the woman, Ellen White aptly says,

*God himself gave Adam a companion. He provided “an help meet for him”—a helper corresponding to him—one who was fitted to be his companion, and who could be one with him in love and sympathy. Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his second self. . . .*<sup>10</sup>

In summary, we can safely conclude that the Genesis accounts of creation indicate the intention of God to create humans as equal beings in terms of family of ori-

gin and of gender.<sup>11</sup> All of humankind is portrayed as finding their common ancestors in Adam and Eve, while God’s ideal is obviously that women and men will live together in equality. However, Genesis 3 reveals that the parents of the human race fell away from this ideal. We need to examine whether this “fall” destroyed the divine ideal of human equality, with God now establishing a different order which meant the subordination of women to men.

Clearly, Genesis chapter 3 indicates that the original perfect relationship between male and female was shattered. The disobedience of our first parents led to blame and fractured relationships between each other and God (Gen 3:10–13). God utters “curses”<sup>12</sup> on the serpent, on the woman, and on the man (Gen 3:14–19). For our purposes, the key passage is the pronouncement on the woman for that is the only one that is indicative of a change in the relationship between herself and the man:

*I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; With pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you (Gen 3:16).*

Is this pronouncement prescriptive or descriptive? In other words, is God here outlining what *must be* the part of women from henceforth, or is he indicating what *would be* in many cultures and societies? The context seems to indicate that this passage is descriptive rather than prescriptive. While Adam would now struggle with the soil to produce what was necessary to sustain life, there is certainly no edict that he was to “submit” to the fact that the soil would “now produce thorns and thistles for you.”<sup>13</sup> By analogy, one might legitimately assume that the woman, also, was not predestined to be dominated by the man.<sup>14</sup>

While the fall into sin “changed the game” in every way for humankind, it did not mean that everything was lost. Humans still reflected God’s image, although rather more dimly.<sup>15</sup> Clark Pinnock insightfully observes that

*. . . the Fall into sin is the most empirical of all the Christian doctrines. Few things are more obvious about human nature than its deeply flawed character and the misuse of human freedom. It explains much of what we see in and around us. What Adam [and Eve] did in this story is repeated and confirmed practically every day in the lives of all of us (Rom. 7:9–10).*<sup>16</sup>

The remainder of the Old Testament witnesses to fractured relationships between God and humankind, between humans and their environment, and between humans and humans. The latter, as illustrated most starkly in the injustice and inequity experienced by women, speaks volumes as does the divine intention to ameliorate the situation not only through the promise of the “offspring” of the woman (Gen 3:15), but also in day-to-day life situations.

### Justice and Equality in the Old Testament

It is my intention here to provide a couple of examples in which God (almost surprisingly) treats women with justice and equity when culture and society would have prescribed otherwise. Our first example, coming from Genesis chapter 16, is the case of Hagar. Not only was Hagar a woman, but she was a woman of no account, being an Egyptian slave to Sarai, the wife of Abram. Being unable to bear a child herself, at Sarai’s insistence Abram sleeps with Hagar and conceives a child.

There are several interesting dimensions to this story. It is clear that Sarai, while very clearly burdened by her barrenness, is hardly the submissive wife in this instance. She arranges the impregnation of Hagar by her husband as a means to overcome “the curse of her childlessness.”<sup>17</sup> However, Hagar now “began to despise her mistress” (Gen 16:4) and Sarai complained to Abram: “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me” (Gen 16:5). Abram’s spineless reply is, “Your servant is in your hands. Do with her whatever you think best” (Gen 16:6). The result is that Sarai mistreats Hagar and she flees into the desert (Gen 16:6–7).

The angel of the Lord now comes to Hagar and asks her where she has come from and where she was going, to which she replied that she was running from her mistress Sarai

(Gen 16:8). Hagar is instructed to “Go back to your mistress and submit to her” and “I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count” (Gen 16:10). The angel promises her,

*You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery (Gen 16:11).*

While our modern (or postmodern) sensibilities might wish for a different ending to this story, Hagar’s positive response is to name the Lord who spoke to her, “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me” (Gen 16:13). In Hagar’s view, God had revealed himself as a God of justice, albeit as viewed through the lens of Ancient Near Eastern culture.

Our second example is Ruth, again a foreign woman, this time a Moabite. Once again, the scenario is not particularly positive. During a severe famine in Israel, Elimelech and Naomi had moved from Bethlehem to the land of Moab. There, against a divine prohibition, their two sons had married Moabite women (e.g., Deut 7:3; 23:3). About ten years later, after the death of her husband and her two sons, and hearing that there was now food to be had in Israel, Naomi decided to return home. Ruth, one of Naomi’s daughters-in-law declared her intention to accompany her: “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me” (Ruth 1:16–17).

In one of Scripture’s great love stories, Ruth meets Boaz in Bethlehem, Boaz acts the part of a kinsman-redeemer, and Boaz and Ruth are married. It is very significant that Ruth is received so completely into Israel that she is declared by the women of Bethlehem to be

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better to Naomi than seven sons (Ruth 4:15), and the narrative concludes with the family line of Boaz and Ruth: Boaz, Obed, Jesse, and David (Ruth 4:17).<sup>18</sup> Against all odds, Ruth is treated with equity and justice, and receives the blessing of the covenant.<sup>19</sup>

These two narratives are probably sufficient to conclude that in the Old Testament God appears to be on the side of the marginalised and he treats them with justice and equity. We might also have turned to the prophets—especially the Minor Prophets—<sup>20</sup> with their focus on justice or even to the Sabbath command which provided Sabbath rest to household slaves and the “alien within your gates” (Exod 20:10).

## Justice and Equality in the New Testament

Any examination of the New Testament in regard to God’s attitude toward justice and equality must begin with Jesus’ attitudes. After all, Jesus is the incarnate expression of the person of God.<sup>21</sup> Luke records that Jesus began his ministry by the reading of the Isaiah scroll in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. According to Luke, this was not a random Scripture reading for when the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him, Jesus unrolled it, and “found the place where it was written,”

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:16–21; c.f., Isa 61:1–2).*

With the eyes of the congregation fastened on him, Jesus said “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). It seems obvious (at least from Luke’s perspective) that Jesus takes this Isaiah passage as his mission statement, for Luke goes on to describe how Jesus, on being driven out of Nazareth, drives out an evil spirit possessing a man in Capernaum, heals Simon’s mother-in-law and many others, calls his first disciples to give away their fishing in order to henceforth “catch men,” heals a man with leprosy, and heals a paralysed man; all of this before he tells one parable or engages in a direct teaching or preaching ministry.<sup>22</sup>

Jesus’ revelation of God’s interest in justice and equity for the oppressed and marginalized in first-century Jewish society is illustrated in the starkest terms in Jesus’

interactions with women. Hans Küng comments that “In the time of Jesus women counted for little in society. As in some cultures today, they had to avoid the company of men in public. Contemporary Jewish sources are full of animosity toward women, who, according to the Jewish historian Josephus, are in every respect inferior to men.”<sup>23</sup> Küng notes that the writers of the four Gospels “have no inhibitions about talking about Jesus’ relations with women.” Rather, they portray Jesus as including women, showing no contempt for them, and being “amazingly open towards them.”<sup>24</sup>

I will examine a couple of examples of Jesus’ contact with women. The obvious prime example is Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan woman as found in the narrative of John 4. It is very significant that John places this incident near the front of his Gospel. In John’s schema, Jesus has just conversed with Nicodemus, the quintessential Jewish man (John 3:1–21); John the Baptist testifies that “He [Jesus] must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:22–36); and then Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman, the quintessential outsider, at Jacob’s well in the town of Sychar (John 4:1–38). A number of elements in this narrative are very significant: (1) Contrary to Jewish practice at the time, in travelling from Judea to Galilee, Jesus chooses to go through the region of Samaria; (2) Jesus initiates a conversation with a Samaritan woman, something no Jewish man would do;<sup>25</sup> (3) Jesus, for the first time, forthrightly reveals himself as the Messiah to this marginalised woman by saying, “I who speak to you am he” (John 4:26);<sup>26</sup> and (4) the woman becomes the first Christian evangelist, with many of the Samaritans from the town believing in “him because of the woman’s testimony” (John 4:39–42). So, here we have a woman, and a Samaritan at that, a person of doubtful morals, and a believer in an apostate offshoot of Judaism, being treated with respect and equity by Jesus. Is God interested in justice and equality? To the disciples’ surprise, he was and is (John 4:27).

Another, perhaps even more startling, example is the story of the Syrophenician woman of Mark 7. Again, Jesus is outside of his own territory, near Tyre. A Greek woman comes to Jesus begging that he drive out a demon possessing her daughter.<sup>27</sup> This time, Jesus appears at first to treat the woman’s request as any Jewish male might: “it is not right to take the children’s bread



and toss it to their dogs" (Mark 4:27). The woman's feisty reply is that "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (Mark 4:28), and Jesus' response is that the demon has already left her child (Mark 4:29–30).<sup>28</sup> In both the Markan and the Matthean accounts the story of this Canaanite woman's faith follows a discussion of what constitutes cleanness and uncleanness. Jesus is surely indicating that this "unclean" woman was truly part of God's kingdom of justice and equity.

We might cite example after example from the ministry of Jesus in which he demonstrates divine mercy and justice being directed to the marginalised and the oppressed. However, perhaps it is Galatians 3:28 that sums up best the implications of the revolutionary ministry of Jesus Christ: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Clearly, for Paul, God makes no difference between race, social status, or gender in regard to salvation: "You are all sons [and daughters] of God through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal 3:27) and as such all who "belong to Christ . . . are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:29). In light of this affirmation, one might legitimately ask if all racial, social, and gender differences are now *passé* in the Christian community, yet it is other writings from this same Paul that appear to be the primary seedbed particularly for the church's practice of treating women inequitably.<sup>29</sup> How are we to regard such biblical passages in light of what we've already seen in terms of God's keen interest in justice and equity?

## Two Faces of Scripture?

We have built a persuasive case for a positive answer to our question: Yes, God is vitally interested in justice and equality. But, is our case "watertight"? What of the passages of Scripture—in both the Old and New Testaments—that appear to support slavery, and why does the Bible contain no clear prohibition in regard to slavery? What about the texts that ap-

pear to justify the dominance of the male in church and society, and why does Scripture contain no clear direction on the ordination of women to the gospel ministry?

Some, like Marcion in the early church era, are tempted to reject the Hebrew Scriptures because they revealed a god different to the God of the New Testament. However, even Marcion himself found that it was necessary to "edit" the Christian Scriptures as well in order to maintain their harmony; and in general, the Christian church has resisted such a radical approach.<sup>30</sup> While it is not my intention here to provide a complete coverage of this issue, I will briefly illustrate the diversity of Scripture in regard to its attitude to slaves and women.

Slaves who were not part of Israel itself were considered as the legal property of their masters and were listed as "property," as were cattle, gold, and silver (e.g., Gen 12:16; 20:14; 24:35; 30:43; 32:5; Exod 20:17). In this regard, the status of slaves in Israel and in other areas of the Ancient Near East was similar. However, the Old Testament does contain legal instructions that ameliorated the situation of slaves, unlike anything else in ANE codes. For example, slaves were not to be required to work on the Sabbath (Exod 20:10); slaves born in the house of their master were to be circumcised in order for them to share in Israel's religious life (Exod 12:44; Deut; 12:12,18; Lev 22:11); and murder of a slave was considered a crime (Exod 21:20). If a master put out the eye of his slave or knocked out a tooth, the slave was to be granted freedom (Exod 21:26–27). In summary, "Hebrew law was relatively mild toward the slaves and recognized them as human beings subject to defence from intolerable acts, although not to the extent of free persons."<sup>31</sup>

In contrast to the Old Testament, the New Testament does not contain the detailed legal material in relation to slavery. Instead there are prominent Pauline passages that provide instruction for Christian slaves and the Letter

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to Philemon is written as advice to him regarding his escaped Christian slave, Onesimus. It is noteworthy that Paul's advice to Timothy to pass on to Christian slaves is that they respect their masters "so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered." And, "Those [slaves] who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers" (1 Tim 6:1–2). Again, Paul sends the escapee Onesimus back to Philemon with the request that he be treated "better than a slave [and] as a dear brother" (Philemon 16), but he resists instructing Philemon to release Onesimus. Eventually though, "The early Christian ideology undermined the institution of slavery, declaring an equality of all people in Christ."<sup>32</sup> However, the journey to that conclusion was far from smooth.

In spite of its primarily positive stance regarding women,<sup>33</sup> with many women playing key roles as judges and military leaders, diplomats, and prophetesses,<sup>34</sup> the Old Testament also contains some "hard sayings" in its legal material. For instance, there are regulations pertaining to marriage with "beautiful" captive women (Deut 21:10–14); how to relate in polygamous relationships (e.g., Deut 21:15–17); the necessity of stoning for women who could not prove their virginity (Deut 22:13–21); and the "uncleanness" as a result of childbirth (Lev 12) and menstruation (Lev 15:19–33), to name just a few. Such passages pose as difficulties to the modern mind; especially in regard to the divine attitude toward the equality of women and men. It comes across as small comfort that while a case can definitely be made that women within ancient Israel were treated with greater respect than in the surrounding nations, one is left wondering why God did not more proactively promote justice and equality for women.<sup>35</sup>

One of the prominent Pauline passages regarding the role of women in the church community is to be found in the same letter that has been cited above in regard to slavery; 1 Timothy.<sup>36</sup> As part of his instructions about worship, Paul states that "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (1 Tim 2:11–12). The apostle then provides reasons for his position: (1) "Adam was formed first, then Eve", (2) "Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner", and (3) "women will be saved through childbearing—if they

continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety" (1 Tim 2:13–15). It must be admitted that Paul's reasoning here is quite unusual. The Genesis creation narratives provide no indication that the order of the creation of Eve implied any subordination. Neither does Paul's view that it was Eve who was deceived and sinned comport with Paul's own perspective found in many of his writings that it is "in Adam [that] all die" (1 Cor 15:22). And, what Paul meant by women being saved through childbearing remains a puzzle to most commentators.

Perhaps an answer to such diversity is to be found in both the nature of Scripture and the nature of God. Much (maybe all) of Scripture is what might be described as "occasional." Certainly, the Pauline epistles are written to particular church communities or to Paul's colleagues to deal with particular situations and issues. Sometimes it is impossible to determine exactly what motivated him to write as he did. For instance, we do not know exactly what lies behind Paul's instructions to Timothy regarding women in the church in Ephesus. Were the women abusing their Christian freedom? Were they speaking out of ignorance and lack of education? Were they "lording it over" the men in the church? We cannot be sure, however it is evident that Paul is wanting to make a statement to correct whatever the abuse was, and he uses arguments that may seem strange to us. Are we permitted to argue with Paul in terms of his reasoning while accepting his writings as inspired? Or, to phrase the question even more starkly: Is Paul's logic God's logic? Ellen White describes the Bible as

*... written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.*<sup>37</sup>

I have to admit some nervousness in regard to this position. It is all too easy for us (me included) to "slip down the slope" so that the Scriptures which we previously saw as God speaking authoritatively to us become at best good advice from which we might pick and choose. For myself, I will continue to view Scripture as God's Word, and operationally I come to it with an "inerrancy expectation."<sup>38</sup> If we are to maintain this attitude

of respect for the Bible, we must search the Scriptures “as a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who handles correctly the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Understanding the Bible is not something for the faint-hearted or for the slacker. It requires deep study to detect Scripture’s overall perspective and a constant listening to the voice of the Spirit of God as he guides the church into all truth.<sup>39</sup>

Again, Scripture portrays God as accommodating himself to the human condition. While this is certainly true in terms of the fact that God has “stooped” to meet us when “he prattles to us in Scripture in a rough and popular style”<sup>40</sup> and in “mean and lowly words”<sup>41</sup>, perhaps this is best borne out by reference to the way that God chose to interact with the people of Israel at various times. Regarding divorce, Jesus says, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But this was not the way from the beginning.” Jesus then goes on to say, “I tell you . . .”<sup>42</sup> Paul, in Athens argued that “in the past God overlooked such ignorance [i.e., that the divine being is an image fashioned by humans], but now he commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).<sup>43</sup> So, while we as postmodern people might find ourselves confronted by some of the diversity in regard to justice and equity in both Testaments, we can, at the same time, detect a distinct thread that clearly affirms God’s interest in justice and equity. Georg Braulik has provided an example of this in his comparison of Deuteronomy and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). He concludes that there are “surprisingly many correspondences or at least common tendencies.”<sup>44</sup>

Given the diversity of Scripture on our topic, but also with clear indications that God is on the side of justice and equality and also that he works within and even accommodates to the variations of time and place in order to maintain interaction with humanity, we have to ask how we might best interpret the Bible and grow in understanding as a community of faith.

## Plotting a Path Ahead

It may prove helpful for conservative Christians such as Seventh-day Adventists to consider the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral”—a circle of authority composed of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience—as at least one of the tools for the interpretation of Scripture; especially when the biblical materials show evidence of diversity. The Methodist theologian and historian, Albert C. Outler is generally credited with coining this description of John Wesley’s approach to theology which was critically and faithfully familiar with Scripture, cognizant of Christian history, logically analytical, and growing out of “a vital, inward faith that is upheld by the assurance of grace.”<sup>45</sup>

Susan Elliott applies the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to the issue of women’s roles in church leadership and the pulpit. She begins her survey by pointing out that John Wesley, himself, did not begin with a positive view in regard to the role of women; and this was in spite of the contributions of his own mother, Susanna.

While some conservative Christians might be concerned that tradition, reason, and experience could subvert the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura*, Elliott describes Scripture as “the inerrant Word of God, truth as the foundation of reason, tradition and experience.” Obviously, in her view the “Quadrilateral” is not an equilateral parallelogram; Scripture always maintains the dominant position (and certainly this would have been the case for Wesley). So, we have to take seriously the task of discovering the breadth of the biblical perspectives on the justice of God and the equality of women. However, that is not the end of our task. Tradition, reason, and Christian experience need also to be taken into account, even if only to raise questions to send us back to the Bible for better answers.

Elliott points out that we have a wealth of tradition in the interactions of Jesus with

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women that should inform us in regard to the equality of women in the church. She cites the fact that Jesus constantly “challenged the traditional social norms about women and modelled equality of women.” And, Elliott considers that we cannot ignore that fact that Jesus called only men as disciples and leaders, she cites approvingly Brower and Serrao: “to our knowledge no . . . group insists that all ordained leaders must be circumcised and Jewish. The Twelve are symbolic and representative of the whole, restored, holy people of God.”<sup>46</sup> Church communities have a prime responsibility to take account of the new “tradition” inaugurated by Jesus Christ; not just the traditional understandings that have been passed down through Christian history.<sup>47</sup>

What role does human reason play in the interpretation of Scripture? Again, on the equality of women, Elliott maintains that “The core of theological conflict on gender equality is grounded in human interpretation and application.”<sup>48</sup> All of us use reason when we come to the Scriptures, even when we claim to be using “plain” or literal interpretation. For example, Dennis Bratcher maintains that “a ‘plain sense’ reading actually takes far less notice of the actual story itself, and must read far more things into the text to make it all ‘work,’ than do other ways of interpreting the text. The main reason for this is because what the ‘plain sense’ of the text says to us, in says in the context of a 21<sup>st</sup> century view of the world.”<sup>49</sup> Reason asks a variety of questions related to our topic: If no watertight case can be made for ordination as it is practiced in most denominations, on what basis can it be denied to women? If women are contributing positively to society in leadership roles, why would God deny them such a role in the church? At very least, such questions should send us back to Scripture to ask if we’ve not misunderstood its perspective.

Elliott then turns to the role of Christian experience. She points to the fact that Paul repeatedly acknowledged “the importance of women in ministry and in leadership positions.”<sup>50</sup> Yet, “Two verses taken from the whole of scripture (proof texting) . . . have created centuries of oppression.”<sup>51</sup> The contemporary church might point positively to the experience of the many women engaged in pastoral ministry and even in church leadership. Surely the fruitful work of women

pastors in the Republic of China and areas like the United States, Europe, and Australia should cause us to ask, “How is God not in this?”, and force us to re-examine Scripture.<sup>52</sup>

The Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 provides a case study in how we in the twenty-first century might wrestle through an issue that clearly involves biblical hermeneutics and church politics. In fact, we might say that this is a case study in how to do church and it is instructive for us that the four dimensions of the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” were allowed to function creatively together. *Scripture* is certainly to the fore since James says “The words of the prophets are in agreement with this . . . .” (Acts 15:15).<sup>53</sup> In this instance, the traditionalist party clearly had what would have appeared to be the “weight” of Scripture behind them.<sup>54</sup> *Tradition* and traditional understandings of Scripture were obviously under discussion. In fact, the Council would not have taken place except that “Some men came from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). *Reason* and logic were also taken account of. James argued, “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19) and the letter sent to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia stated, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you . . . .” (Acts 15:28). In addition, the *experience* of God’s Spirit working with Peter, on the one hand, and Barnabas and Paul, on the other, carried great weight (Acts 15:7–14).

From where we are in the twenty-first century, it is difficult to grasp the revolutionary impact of this first church council. If a totally conservative position had been taken, it would have stymied the growth of the fledgling Christian church. And, if it had been too progressive it would have completely severed the church from its Jewish roots.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps, even today we’ve not completely understood the implications of the position taken at this Jerusalem council, which made circumcision nothing, and uncircumcision nothing. No longer was the mark of the covenant something that only pertained to males, rather “Keeping God’s commands is what counts” (1 Cor 7:19; cf., John 14:15, 23).



What enabled the church to move forward in regard to this issue? The weight of biblical evidence and tradition were on the side of the circumcision party. But, the Spirit had been leading the community in a different direction and that caused the church to look again at the Scriptures, raising to prominence some passages that had been overlooked previously. In addition, the earliest church were blessed with courageous leaders in Peter, James, Barnabas, and Paul who were willing to stand up (sometimes literally<sup>56</sup>) for a biblical and pragmatic solution to a divisive issue.

## Conclusion

We may very confidently conclude that God is vitally interested in justice and equality. We see it clearly in the manner in which God created all of humankind in his own image, irrespective of race or gender. We also observe it in the way God dealt with the issues of race, slavery, and gender in the Old Testament. But the issues of justice and equality are given even greater clarity through Jesus' mission to provide freedom and healing to the marginalised and oppressed. However, this divine interest is not merely to remain the domain of Deity. Rather God's attitude to justice and equity is to be played out in the way we interact with each other: "We are to adopt as our standard his law and precepts. We are to treat others justly and fairly (Amos 5:15; James 2:9) because that is what God himself does."<sup>57</sup> Our mission is to work with God in "repairing the world."<sup>58</sup>

Today we need a new paradigm that will assist us in breaking through the hermeneutical tangle that is dividing member from member and region from region. It is not enough to say that we should now ignore issues of justice and equity and focus on the mission and message of the church. We have found that, for Jesus himself, there was no dichotomy or separation between mission and message; the two were actually one and the same. Preaching righteousness by faith without doing jus-

tice and righteousness is heresy (e.g., James 2:14–26), preaching Sabbath sacredness without living out the freedom and equity it stands for is legalism (e.g., Mark 2:23–28), and preaching the second advent without helping the alienated and marginalised is downright dangerous (e.g., Matt 26:31–46).

Perhaps the "quadrilateral" of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience will provide an interpretive key and that might assist in breaking the impasse. And, the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council may provide a model for "doing" church; even for dealing spiritually and pragmatically with issues of church party politics! ■

## References

1. For instance, there are difficult passages that do not appear to "fit" neatly into a doctrine of the perpetuity of the Sabbath and texts that seem to teach a doctrine of the immortality of the soul.
2. Allen Ross and John N. Oswalt, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Genesis and Exodus* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008) 39. Note that Ross is the author of the section on Genesis and that this work will be referred to as Ross.
3. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Vol 1: Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco TX: Word Books, 1987) 59.
4. Note that *The Holy Bible, New International Version* will be used throughout (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011).
5. Wenham, 29–30; cf., Ross, 39–40.
6. Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis*, 2nd edition, in *Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009) 14.
7. Turner, 15. In pointing to their role as "God's representatives," Ross states that "God's image in humans is functional" (Ross, 40).
8. Cf., Gen 5:1–3.
9. For this insight, I am indebted to a Christian Anthropology (MA Religion) class taught by Gottfried Oosterwal at Avondale College during the 1980s.
10. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1890, 1958), 46.
11. Susan E. Elliott maintains that gender equality "is a dynamic and repeated theme from Genesis to Revelation"

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Ray Roennfeldt has served as president of Avondale College of Higher Education since 2009. Previous to this appointment, he served as dean of the Faculty of Theology and senior lecturer in systematic and historical theology. Ray graduated as a registered nurse from Sydney Adventist Hospital's School of Nursing in 1969. He then completed a Bachelor of Arts in theology at Avondale, graduating in 1973. He has also earned a Master of Arts in religion and a Doctor of Philosophy from Andrews University. His thesis for the latter analysed and critiqued Christian theologian, apologist, and author Clark H Pinnock's shift in his doctrine of biblical authority and reliability. He is married to Carmel, a high school teacher, and has two adult children.

(Elliott, "Biblical Gender Equality in Christian Academia," *Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Roundtable*, Summer 2010).

12. In fact, the "curses" are only on the serpent and the ground (Gen 3:14 and 17), so they are better seen as divine pronouncements. See Wenham, 81.

13. Gen 3:18.

14. In the past, it was sometimes argued that the woman should not receive analgesia during childbirth because God has decreed that she was to have pain. For instance, during the 1800s "many members of the British clergy argued that this human intervention in the miracle of birth [i.e., the use of analgesic drugs] was against the will of God." Bhavani Shankar Kodali (of Harvard Medical School), "A Brief History of Pain Relief in Labour," available at <http://www.papapetros.com.au/HistoryPainRelief.pdf>. Accessed June 4, 2017.

15. See, for instance, Gen 9:6, where God continues to refer to humans as being in his image.

16. Clark H. Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way through Modern Theology from an Evangelical Perspective* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1990), 195.

17. Turner, 75.

18. Ruth is one of the few women named in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:5).

19. Significantly, the Book of Ruth is Scripture's clearest illustration of the role of the kinsman-redeemer, although there are some hints in the Pentateuch: e.g., Lev 27:9–25; 25:47–55; Num 3:9–34; and 25:47–55.

20. See Habakkuk's complaints and prayers.

21. See for instance, John 1:1–5; 10:30; and Heb 1:1–3.

22. In Luke, Jesus relates his first parable (Luke 5:36–39) after being accused of eating and drinking with the tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:30); that is those who were identified as on the fringes of Jewish society.

23. Hans Küng, *Women in Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (London, UK: Continuum, 2001), 2. Küng cites Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2, 201.

24. Küng, *Women in Christianity* 2.

25. Jesus' request for water meets with shock on the part of the Samaritan woman: "'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans)" (John 4:9).

26. This is in spite of Jesus' recognition that the Samaritan woman was living in an adulterous relationship (John

16–18).

27. Mark seems to go out of his way to indicate that this was a non-Jewish woman: "The woman was Greek born in Syrian Phoenicia" (Mark 7:26).

28. Matthew's version of this narrative has Jesus responding: "Woman, you have great faith. Your request is granted" (Matt 15:28).

29. Samuel L. Adams sums up his article with the following: "Despite arguments to the contrary, social justice and economic fairness are core themes in Scripture." Adams, "The Justice Imperative in Scripture," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 69/4 (2015): 399–414.

30. A convenient summary of Marcion's differentiation between the creator god and the Redeemer God can be found in E. Ferguson, "Marcion," in Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 685–86.

31. Muhammad A. Dandamanyev, "Slavery: Old Testament," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David N. Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 6:64.

32. Dandamanyev, "Slavery: Old Testament" 65.

33. An outstanding example is to be found in Prov 31:10–31.

34. See Patricia Gundry's excellent chapter "What Can Women Do?" in her *Woman be Free: The Clear Message of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977), 89–104.

35. Maybe Alden Thompson's *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989) provides some clues for us. See especially his chapter, "Strange People Need Strange Laws," (71–90).

36. In fact, the majority of this epistle is composed of advice: instructions on worship (chapter 2), instructions to congregational overseers and deacons (chapter 3), personal pastoral instructions to Timothy (chapter 4), and instructions about widows, elders, and slaves (chapter 5–6:2).

37. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 21. Note that this is from Ellen White's Manuscript 24, written in 1886.

38. I am indebted to Clark H. Pinnock for this description of how I personally come to the Scriptures. See Pinnock's *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1984), 77.

39. John 16:13.

40. John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, edited by John T. McNeill and translated by Ford L. Battles (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, ca. 1960), Commentary on John 3:12.

41. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), 1.8.1.

42. cf., Matt 5:31–32.

43. Perhaps a similar theme is found in Heb 1:1–3 where God “spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” Of course, the supreme divine accommodation is to be found in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

44. Georg Braulik, “Deuteronomy and Human Rights,” *Verbum et Ecclesia: Skrif en Kerk* 19/2 (1998): 207.

45. Albert C. Outler, “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20/1 (1985): 7–18. It should be observed that in the same place Outler confesses some regret at having coined the term since it has been sometimes misconstrued. However, he concludes that the “conjoint recourse to the fourfold guidelines of Scripture, tradition, reason and experience may hold more promise for an evangelical and ecumenical future than we have realized as yet—by comparison, for example, with Biblicism or traditionalism or, rationalism, or empiricism.” Note that a more complete coverage of the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” can be found in D. C. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999). For a helpful introduction to the pros and cons of using the Wesleyan Quadrilateral as a hermeneutical tool from an evangelical perspective, see Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze*, 71–74.

46. Kent Brower and Jeanne Serrao, “Reclaiming the Radical Story,” *Holiness Today* 11/3 (2009): 23 (cited in Elliott).

47. Note that I accessed an online version of Elliott article which does not have page numbers.

48. Elliott.

49. Dennis Bratcher, “The Problem of a ‘Plain Sense’ Reading of Scripture,” available at <http://www.crivoice.org/plainsense.html> (copyright 2016), accessed on 8 June 2017. See also my own discussion in “Our Story as Text,” in Ross Cole and Paul Petersen, eds., *Hermeneutics, Intertextuality and the Contemporary Meaning of Scripture*, (Adelaide, South Australia: Australian Theological Forum / Avondale Academic Press,

2014), 81–88.

50. Elliott cites Rom 16:1–16; Phil 4:2–3; and Acts 18.

51. Elliott cites 1 Tim 2:11–12; and 1 Cor 14:34–35, ironically both passages from Paul.

52. In Matthew 12, Jesus points out that to attribute what is obviously of God to Beelzebul is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit which cannot be forgiven (see especially Matt 12:31–32).

53. James cites Amos 9:11–12.

54. Circumcision was undoubtedly the sign of the covenant with Abram, the father of the Jewish race (Gen 17). However, Paul, for instance, picks up the concept of “circumcision of the heart” from such passages as Deut 30:6 and expands on it in Rom 2:25–29.

55. Note the cautiousness implied in Acts 15:21, “For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

56. Acts 15:7.

57. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985) 289.

58. For this idea, I am indebted to Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (London: W. H. Allen, 2015), 54, where she cites a rabbi’s sermon on civil rights and *tikkun olam*, a Hebrew phrase which means “repairing the world.”

**We have  
found that,  
for Jesus  
himself, there  
was no  
dichotomy or  
separation  
between mission  
and message;  
the two were  
actually one a  
nd the same.**

# BONUS HISTO

## God's Last Choice: Overcoming Ellen White's Gender and Women in Ministry During the Fundamentalist Era | BY KEVIN M. BURTON

**Editor's note:** This article was peer-reviewed and published on the *Spectrum* website, June 15, 2017.

### Introduction

Seventh-day Adventism was wholly reinvented in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>1</sup> Though the organizational structure did not change much after 1918, the church prior to this time was fundamentally different from the church that was created during the inter-war years. Most Adventists are unaware of this reinvention and George R. Knight has correctly argued that many Adventists in the early twenty-first century incorrectly look back to “the years between 1920 and 1960 . . . as the era of ‘Historic Adventism.’”<sup>2</sup> This article supports Knight’s assessment through the lenses of unity, authority, and gender. Simply put, there was a time in which Adventists were united by a simple covenant: to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ. There was a time in which local churches were governed congregationally and in which a local conference, a union, or the General Conference, had no authoritative control over their daily operations. There was a time in which church policy did not prohibit women from serving as conference presidents or forbid their ordination to the gospel ministry. This was a time in which Adventists, and their churches, were autonomous *and* united.

In addition to items voted at General Conference sessions, the Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes four sources of authority that outline policy for governance.<sup>3</sup> Though the General Conference Constitution was adopted in 1863 and its bylaws outlined in 1889, the other three sources of authority have their genesis in the twentieth century. Between 1926 and 1932, the General Conference

adopted a *Working Policy* (1926), a list of Fundamental Beliefs (1931), and a *Church Manual* (1932). In this article, I analyze the adoption process of the *Working Policy* and *Church Manual* and demonstrate the impact these sources of authority initially had on Seventh-day Adventist women.

Change regarding policy was intimately related to an evolving understanding of unity and authority. As the meaning of these concepts changed in the Adventist Church, the dynamics of power and governance shifted. Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek advise,

*To ask where and when shifts in authority occur, why and by what process, and to inquire into their consequences is to place exacting demands on the description of change in governance over time, on the identification of causes and the weighing of their relative significance, and on the accurate portrayal of the new historical patterns they produce. In all of these ways, it encourages scholars to sidestep a priori logics of development, to question stylized treatments of history, and to anchor theory building more firmly in empirical evidence.<sup>4</sup>*

This article illustrates how unnoticed shifts in denominational policy produced a “new historical pattern” of governance that took away women’s right to serve as ministers and conference officers. Since at least the early 1980s, scholars have recognized that “[s]omething happened to women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, beginning in 1915 and sharply accelerating in the mid-1940s, that led to the almost total exclusion of women from leadership positions in the church.”<sup>5</sup> Bertha Dasher, Patrick Allen, Kit Watts, and Laura L. Vance have analyzed the decline of women in leadership positions post-1915,<sup>6</sup> but the only policy changes thus far noted were the establishment of term limits in 1931, and the Annual Council’s 1923 decision that it was preferable that “the future home missionary and mis-



# RY LESSON

**DISCUSSED** | ordination, women, unity, authority, Fundamentalism, “Resolved,” Church as “Big Business”



sionary volunteer secretaries” be “ordained ministers.”<sup>7</sup> This article provides a fresh analysis prompted by recently discovered documentation that further clarifies the “what” that “happened” to female leadership in Adventism.<sup>8</sup> Though multiple factors were involved, I argue that Adventist male leaders of the Fundamentalist era intentionally used denominational policy to exclude women from conference leadership positions and the ordained ministry.

## **Unity and Authority: 1840s to 1932**

Seventh-day Adventists were hesitant to organize as a denomination because they were part of the Restoration Movement, which sought to return the church to its original purity before institutional hierarchies were introduced. Leaders of this movement, such as Alexander Campbell, “called for local church autonomy, exclusively biblical requirements for church membership, the unity of Christians around biblical essentials, and an end to sectarian creeds and ecclesiasticism.”<sup>9</sup> Because Adventists held these beliefs so fervently, they organ-

ized in the 1860s with extreme caution and intentionally established a simple ecclesiastical structure designed to protect local church autonomy and individual conscience.<sup>10</sup>

When the General Conference was established in 1863 to ensure that ministers and missionaries were equitably distributed in all regions of the field, it had a very limited jurisdiction—it only had authority over wage and labor distribution.<sup>11</sup> The constitution specified that the General Conference served two purposes: first, it had “the purpose of securing unity and efficiency in labor.” The key phrase, “securing unity,” was restricted to *labor*—an important and intentional limitation of power. The type of labor was clearly outlined, indicating that the General Conference jurisdiction included “the general supervision of all ministerial labor” and “the special supervision of all missionary labor.” Aside from this, the General Conference treasurer ensured that church laborers were paid and the executive committee organized and oversaw the regular meetings, which initially met annually.<sup>12</sup>

The General Conference's second purpose was "promoting the general interests of the cause." The work of "promoting" was very different from "securing unity" in that it denoted no relationship of authority. The phrase, "general interests," was intentionally broad. While it initially included just the Publishing Association, many other ministries were added to the church in subsequent years. These ministries were not governed directly by the General Conference and were organized as independent entities with their own constitutions and governing bodies. In the nineteenth century, the General Conference counseled the "general interests" of the church, but these ministries were not technically within its jurisdiction.<sup>13</sup>

The General Conference was "higher in authority than State Conferences," but this meant that it could only "mark out the general course to be pursued" by these conferences.<sup>14</sup> If the General Conference adopted a resolution that related to these conferences, then the state conferences had the authority to ratify, amend, or reject the resolution.<sup>15</sup> As James White explained, the state conferences chose "to carry out the decisions of [the] General Conference" only "if it be the[ir] pleasure." This system of checks and balances was set in place so that "unity . . . [would] be secured" and autonomy maintained.<sup>16</sup>

This system of checks and balances also guided the relationship between the state conferences and the local churches. If a state conference adopted a resolution that fell outside of its jurisdiction, then the local churches in that territory had the authority to ratify, amend, or reject that resolution.<sup>17</sup> The local church was "congregational in its government" and strictly protected by Adventist Church policy. The General Conference explained the relationship between these two organizational units as follows: "The State conference . . . has general supervision of the churches and their work, though it exercises no authority over the local church, except as particular questions are submitted to it for decision."<sup>18</sup>

Understanding the limited jurisdiction of the General Conference clarifies an often-misinterpreted resolution that the Adventist Church adopted in 1877. It stated,

*Resolved, That the highest authority under God among Seventh-day Adventists is found in the will of the body of that people, as expressed in the decisions [sic] 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>19</sup>

At this time, the jurisdiction of the General Conference was limited to wage and labor distribution, which indicates that the "all" who were to "submit" referred specifically to denominational employees, primarily ministers and missionaries.<sup>20</sup> At this time, the General Conference did not have the authority to establish theological beliefs for the denomination or institute policies that governed the local church directly.<sup>21</sup>

Seventh-day Adventists considered altering this policy a year later. During the 1878 General Conference session, the General Conference Executive Committee was authorized to "take immediate steps toward the publication of a Manual" that outlined church policies and parliamentary procedure.<sup>22</sup> Though the "Church Manual" was again discussed a year later,<sup>23</sup> no further action was taken until the church decided, in 1882, to publish the manual in the *Review and Herald* so that it could be peer-reviewed.<sup>24</sup> It was printed between June and October 1883,<sup>25</sup> but when the General Conference met in annual session a month later the Church Manual was unanimously rejected for four reasons: first, the Adventist Church was already united without one; second, it might lead to established creeds or disciplines; third, ministers and church officers would consult the Church Manual on matters of polity rather than the Bible and the Holy Spirit; and fourth, Adventist leaders reasoned and asked, "It was in taking similar steps that other bodies of Christians first began to lose their simplicity and become formal and spiritually lifeless. Why should we imitate them?"<sup>26</sup> Seventh-day Adventists at this juncture ultimately upheld their conviction that denominational organization must remain simple and that local church autonomy was a critical component of denominational unity and spiritual vibrancy.

## **Women in Ministry: 1840s to 1932**

Early Adventist understandings of unity and authority enabled women to play a critical role in church life and work. The most preeminent example was Ellen White, one of the founders of the Adventist Church. Though she began her prophetic ministry in 1844 and served as a public minister until her death in 1915, she never held a formal position of authority within her denomination and was never ordained by the laying on of human hands. She did claim that God had ordained her,<sup>27</sup> however, and Adventist administrators affirmed this ordination and gave her the same ordination credentials that men carried.<sup>28</sup> Adventists recognized that this ordination enabled Ellen White to speak publicly, to teach, and to have authority over men and women. Adven-

tists were influenced through her teaching and work to be open to women serving as ministers of the gospel.<sup>29</sup> Early Adventists also used Ellen White's gender as justification for other women teaching and having authority over men.<sup>30</sup>

Scholars have highlighted several notable women who served the church in official capacities.<sup>31</sup> Adelia P. Van Horn was the first woman to serve in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in a formal position. Between 1864 and 1867 she was the editor of the *Youth's Instructor* and in 1871 she was elected treasurer of the General Conference.<sup>32</sup> Sarah A. Lindsey was the first woman to receive a ministerial license, which was issued to her through the New York and Pennsylvania Conference in 1869.<sup>33</sup> A ministerial license enabled men and women to prepare for the ministry as itinerate preachers and evangelists, but did not authorize them "to celebrate the ordinances, to administer baptism, or to organize a church."<sup>34</sup> These licenses were given to "[a]pplicants for ordination to the ministry" and after "a limited term" the licensing conference would recommend that individual for ministerial ordination.<sup>35</sup> Dozens of women received ministerial licenses between 1869 and 1930 but, unlike their male counterparts, these women were not ordained to the gospel ministry, even though a few were given ministerial credentials.

In the 1850s and 1860s, Adventist leaders unanimously refuted the notion that the Bible commanded women to be silent in the churches.<sup>36</sup> Though Adventist ministers and theologians all affirmed that women could preach, prophesy, exhort, and pray publicly, the majority did not acknowledge that Phoebe was a deaconess<sup>37</sup> and rejected the notion that a woman could hold a position of authority within the church.<sup>38</sup> In 1866, Uriah Smith argued that women could preach and teach publicly, but qualified his stance by adding, "The leadership and authority is vested in the man. 'Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.' Gen. iii, 16. This order is not to be reversed, and the woman take the position which has been assigned to the man; and every action on her part which shows that she is usurping this authority, is disorderly, and not to be allowed."<sup>39</sup>

D. T. Bourdeau also argued, "Paul does not suffer a woman to teach, or to usurp authority over the man; and we do not learn from the Scriptures that women were ever ordained apostles, evangelists, or elders; neither do we believe that they should teach as such. Yet they may act an important part in speaking the truth to others."<sup>40</sup>

Adventist administrators and theologians began to alter their perspective in the 1870s, shortly after the Seventh-day Adventist Church began to grant women ministerial licenses in 1869. These licenses affirmed that women could serve as ministers but also raised an important question, Did the Bible allow women to be ordained? Adventist leaders apparently wrestled with this question throughout the decade.

By late 1878, Adventist discussions of women in ministry had taken a subtle, yet significant turn. In December, J. H. Waggoner, a leading minister and resident editor of the *Signs of the Times*, published an editorial, titled, "Woman's Place in the Gospel." Waggoner offered nothing new, however, and rehashed the same argument that Adventists circulated in the 1850s and 1860s. He argued that women could publicly serve as gospel laborers through prophesying, praying, edifying, and exhorting, but denied their right to serve in positions of authority. "A woman may pray, prophesy, exhort, and comfort the church," he wrote, "but she cannot occupy the position of a pastor or a ruling elder. This would be looked upon as usurping authority over the man, which is here [in 1 Tim. 2:12] prohibited."<sup>41</sup> As Nancy J. Vyhmeister has demonstrated, Waggoner also considered the office of deaconess to be illegitimate.<sup>42</sup>

Waggoner's article may have sparked a debate. About this time, James White had requested that S. N. Haskell study the topic of women in ministry. Haskell responded by letter about the time that Waggoner wrote his article, but came to a different conclusion. He noted the examples of women who had positions of authority in the Bible, including Miriam, Deborah, Abigail, Huldah, Anna, and others, and concluded that women could serve in the church as deaconesses and elders. Women could also, according to Haskell, serve as ministers and

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traveling preachers who baptized female converts.<sup>43</sup> Other Adventist leaders supported Haskell on these points, rather than Waggoner, and argued that Scripture allowed for women to hold positions of authority in the churches.

Shortly after Haskell's letter was written and Waggoner's article was published, several others wrote on the topic of women in ministry for the *Review and Herald*, which was edited by Uriah Smith. In January 1879, Ellen White wrote, "Women can be the instruments of righteousness, rendering holy service. It was Mary that first preached a risen Jesus. . . . If there were twenty women where now there is one, who would make this holy mission their cherished work, we should see many more converted to the truth."<sup>44</sup> At this time, Ellen White apparently sidestepped any debate and affirmed the point upon which Haskell and Waggoner agreed: women were called to preach and teach the gospel publicly.<sup>45</sup>

Others openly challenged Waggoner's view of women in ministry. In the same issue of the *Review* in which Ellen White's article appeared, leading Adventist theologian, J. N. Andrews, affirmed that the Bible supported women holding certain positions of authority. "Romans 16:1 shows that Phebe was a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea," he wrote, "and Acts 18:26 shows that [Pricilla] was capable of instructing Apollos." It is important to recognize that Andrews' statement about Phoebe broke new ground: J. B. Frisbie was the only Adventist minister to acknowledge in print that she was a deaconess prior to Andrews. But Frisbie's article had appeared in 1856 and it took over twenty years for other Adventist ministers to support his conclusion in print.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, it is significant that Andrews publicly rejected the old argument that Waggoner rehashed and concluded that women could hold certain church offices and positions of authority—this was a significant advancement in Adventist theological understanding.<sup>47</sup>

A few months later, James White revised his previous position on the subject as well. In the 1850s, White had affirmed that women could speak publicly, but did not affirm that they could hold positions of authority in the church.<sup>48</sup> In 1879, however, White supported Haskell and Andrews' new perspective by stating that women could hold positions of authority. He analyzed numerous examples in the Bible of "holy women [who] held positions of responsibility and honor" and built upon Haskell's research. His first example was Miriam, of whom he stated, "Here we find a woman occupying a *position equal* to that of Moses and Aaron, God's chosen servants to lead the millions of Israel from the house

of bondage." Next, White analyzed the position of Deborah and declared, "She was a judge in Israel. The people went up to her for judgment. *A higher position no man has ever occupied.*" In addition to several other examples of godly women, White concluded, on the basis of Joel 2:28–29 and Acts 2:17–18, "The Christian age was ushered in with glory. Both men and women enjoyed the inspiration of the hallowed hour, and were teachers of the people. . . . And the dispensation which was ushered in with glory, honored with the labors of holy women, will close with the same honors."<sup>49</sup>

Several Adventist churches began to elect deaconesses after Haskell, Andrews, and White concluded that this office was biblically based. In 1883, W. H. Littlejohn stated that it was now "the custom of some of [the] churches to elect one or more women to fill a position similar to that which it is supposed that Phebe and others occupied in her day."<sup>50</sup> In addition, more women began to serve the church as licensed ministers throughout the 1870s and into the early 1880s. By 1881, at least sixteen women had received a ministerial license<sup>51</sup> and the majority of Adventist leaders, including the Whites, Andrews, Haskell, Littlejohn, and Smith, had affirmed that these women could hold positions of authority within the church.<sup>52</sup> By contrast, Waggoner seemingly had few supporters and his old perspective apparently became the minority view by this time. Though none of these articles overtly addressed *ordaining* women to the ministry or to the deaconate, they did stress that women did have authority to teach and labor publicly. Since the subject was soon addressed formally, it is evident that church leaders were thinking about women's ordination.

During the General Conference session of 1881, W. H. Littlejohn, B. L. Whitney, and Uriah Smith were elected as the Committee on Resolutions.<sup>53</sup> This trusted standing committee was tasked with thoroughly considering all propositions to be presented to the conference delegates in the form of resolutions that reflected their definite recommendation. As David Trim has noted, the men on the 1881 Committee on Resolutions were among the group of Adventists who "saw no objections to ordaining women to gospel ministry."<sup>54</sup> This led them to formulate the following resolution: "*Resolved*, That females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry."<sup>55</sup> After this resolution was presented, some delegates discussed the matter and it was then referred to the General Conference Executive Committee, which included G. I. Butler, S.



N. Haskell, and Uriah Smith.

Adventists have wrestled with this resolution for decades, unsure if it was adopted or rejected. Three interpretations have emerged in the historiography: 1) that the resolution was directly adopted by a vote of the delegates; 2) that the resolution was indirectly adopted, but never implemented; and 3) that the resolution was indirectly rejected because it was referred to the General Conference Committee. David Trim has categorically refuted the first option—the official minutes do not explicitly state that the resolution was voted or adopted and the word “resolved” does not mean that it was approved. Still others have cautiously suggested either option two or three, but thus far no consensus has emerged. Only one of these options is correct and the matter must be settled, as Trim has affirmed, by clarifying “what ‘referral to the GC Committee’ actually meant.”<sup>56</sup>

After thoroughly analyzing the documentation currently available, I have concluded that the 1881 resolution was *indirectly* adopted and referred to the General Conference Executive Committee for implementation. I hold this perspective for four primary reasons (see Appendix on page 163): first, this interpretation is supported by the rulebooks Seventh-day Adventists used for parliamentary procedure in 1881; second, analogous referred resolutions were, in fact, all indirectly adopted and implemented; third, the report of the 1881 General Conference in the *Signs of the Times* states that the resolution was adopted; and fourth, this outcome provides a more convincing explanation of subsequent statements on policy. Though I argue that this resolution was indirectly adopted, it is important to stress that it was never officially implemented—no women are known to have been ordained as ministers prior to 1930. Nevertheless, I argue that after 1881, the question for Seventh-day Adventists was not *could* women be ordained, but rather, *would* they be ordained—a question that remained unsettled until 1930–1932.<sup>57</sup>

Though there is no known documentation that explicitly explains why the resolution to ordain women was presented at the General Conference

in 1881, it seems that it was connected to both the growing number of female licentiates and the new practice of electing deaconesses in local churches. Perhaps early Adventists were concerned with the gender question and not with questions about role or function. In other words, it may be that they reasoned, if a woman can hold an office she can be ordained to that office, and if she can be ordained to one office she can be ordained to any office. What is clear is that Adventist leaders considered ordaining women to the ministry at the time that the churches began to elect deaconesses and it is unlikely that this timing was coincidental.

James White was the first Adventist minister to ordain a woman. On July 27, 1867, he set apart Phillip Strong as a minister and ordained his wife, Louisa, “as his helper.” James White reasoned, “My views and feelings are that the minister’s wife stands in so close a relation to the work of God, a relation which so affects him for better or worse, that she should, in the ordination prayer, be set apart as his helper.”<sup>58</sup> As Denis Kaiser states, “It does not seem, however, that this procedure became a general practice in the church.”<sup>59</sup>

Though women were not typically ordained as ministerial helpers, Adventist women were frequently ordained as deaconesses after 1895. Scholars have assumed that these ordinations only occurred for a few years, were limited to certain regions of the world, and were very rare. Further investigation proves that this was not the case, however. Since the resolution to ordain women as ministers was not implemented, it is not surprising that W. H. Littlejohn admitted in 1883 that it was not “the custom” of Adventists to ordain deaconesses.<sup>60</sup> This changed in 1895, however, when Ellen White stated in the July 9 issue of the *Review*, “Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands.”<sup>61</sup> This statement prompted several Adventist ministers to ordain women as deaconesses; the first known ordination took place about a month later, on August 10, 1895.

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conference  
officers.**

deacons and deaconesses are also elected annually to care for the financial and administrative work. In the case of large congregations, particularly in cities, ordained ministers are sometimes appointed as pastors, but usually they act as itinerant evangelists, having supervision of a number of local churches, and directing their chief effort to missionary work in the development of new fields.

All the churches in a State form a State conference, to which they elect delegates in the ratio of 1 to every 15 members. The State conference meets annually and has general supervision of the churches and their work, though it exercises no authority over the local church, except as particular questions are submitted to it for decision. In some large States there are two or more of these conferences, and as a matter of convenience the term "local conference" is coming into use. The State conferences are united into groups of five or six, to form union conferences, which hold sessions quadrennially, and to which delegates are elected by the State conferences on the basis of 1 for every 200 church members. The union conferences throughout the world are united in the General Conference, which holds sessions quadrennially, and is composed of delegates from the union conferences in the ratio of 1 to every 1,000 church members.

Each conference has an executive committee for the conduct of its business along the lines of the different departments of the church's work. The presidents of the State conferences and chairmen of State departments are ex officio members of the executive committees of their union conferences, and the presidents of the union conferences, together with the chairmen of union departments, constitute the executive committee of the General Conference. Membership in the conferences or the ministry is open to both sexes, although there are very few female ministers.

Applicants for church membership, not already members of a church, appear before the elders of the local church for examination. If approved, they are recommended for baptism at some public service, usually when the ordained minister in general charge can be present, though this is not essential. After baptism, either at the same or a subsequent service, they are presented to the church by the elders, and received by vote of the members present.

Applicants for ordination to the ministry are licensed to preach, for a limited term, by a conference, either State, union, or general. At the expiration of that term, on approval by the conference, they are recommended for ordination, and are ordained, under supervision of the conference, by ministers selected for that service. This ordination is for life, but ministers are expected to renew their papers at each meeting of the conference which ordained them.

Local church expenses are met by special contributions, and collections are made during the year for the different departments of denominational work. An effort is also being made to collect a sum amounting to 60 cents per week per member for foreign mission work. The expenses of the ministry are met by the tithing system, each church member being expected to contribute a tenth of his income. The tithes are paid through a deacon to the treasurer of the State conference, who pays the salaries of the State conference ministers and remits one-tenth to the treasurer of the union conference. Of this amount the latter treasurer appropriates nine-tenths for the expenses of union conference ministers and remits one-tenth to the treasurer of the General Conference. Any surplus in the treasury of a State or union conference is voted to the treasurer of the General Conference for the foreign missionary work of the denomination. Associations for the holding of property belonging to the denomination have been formed in nearly every country in which work is carried on. The jurisdiction of these associations is generally coextensive with that of a conference, State, or union, and their officers are usually the officers of the conference, while their membership

the wicked are raised in the second resurrection; led by Satan they come up against the Lord and the city. Final judgment is pronounced upon them, and fire consumes them utterly. Death itself is destroyed, and the grave. Satan is no more. All traces of sin are removed by the purifying fires, and the earth comes forth, recreated, restored to the purity and beauty of the original Eden. "The meek shall inherit the earth." It becomes the eternal home of the redeemed of Adam's race. (Rev. 20: 7-15; 21: 1-5.) There is then no sin or pain in all the universe, and every creature gives praise to God. (Rev. 5: 13.)

#### ORGANIZATION

*The local church.*—The local church is congregational in its government, although under the general supervision of the conference of which it is a member. One or more elders—generally laymen—are elected annually to care for the spiritual interests of the church, conduct services, and, in the absence of an ordained minister, to administer the sacraments. One or more deacons and deaconesses are also elected annually to care for the financial and administrative work. In the case of large congregations, particularly in cities, ordained ministers are sometimes appointed by the conference as pastors, but usually they act as evangelists, having supervision of a number of local churches, and directing their chief effort to evangelistic work in the development of new churches.

*Local, union, and General Conference.*—A number of churches are united to form a conference or mission. The conference meets biennially and is composed of delegates elected by the churches. The conference has general supervision of the churches and their work. In some large States there are two or more of these conferences, and as a matter of convenience the term "local conference" has come into use. The local conferences or missions are united into groups to form union conferences, which hold sessions quadrennially, and to which delegates are elected by the local conferences. The union conferences and union missions throughout the world are united in the General Conference, which holds quadrennial sessions composed of delegates from union conferences and union missions throughout the world. For convenience in administering the work of the General Conference, the world field is divided into 12 divisions, each with its staff of division officers, presided over by a vice president of the General Conference.

*Executive committees.*—Each local conference and local mission has an executive committee for the conduct of its work, composed of its officers and other elected or appointed members. The union conference president, secretary, and treasurer, together with the presidents of the local conferences and superintendents of local missions and other elected members, compose the executive committee of the union conference. The president, secretary, and treasurer, the field secretaries of the division, the presidents of union conferences, and superintendents of union missions, with division departmental secretaries, and other appointed members, constitute the executive committee of the division. The president of the General Conference, and other officers of the General Conference and the divisions, the field secretaries, together with General Conference and division departmental secretaries, the union conference presidents and superintendents of union missions, and other elected members, constitute the General Conference executive committee.

#### WORK

*Membership and work.*—Applicants for church membership appear before the pastor or officers of the local church for examination. If approved, they are recommended for baptism and church membership.

Candidates for the gospel ministry are licensed to preach, for a limited term, by a conference, either local, union, or general. At the expiration of that term, on approval by the conference, they are recommended for ordination.

Local church expenses are met by special contributions, and collections are made during the year for the different departments of denominational work. An effort is also being made to collect a sum amounting to 40 cents per week per member for foreign mission work. The support of the ministry is provided by the tithing system, each church member being expected to contribute a tenth of his net income for this purpose. The tithes are paid through a church treasurer to the treasurer of the local conference. The conference supervises the work of ministers and pays the salaries. Associations for the holding of property belonging to the denomination have been formed in nearly every country in which work is carried on. The jurisdiction of these associations is coextensive with that of a conference, local, or union, and their officers are the officers of the conference,

Records indicate that these ordinations were not localized or uncommon. Many women, in fact, were ordained as deaconesses between 1895 and the 1920s in several different countries, including Australia, Borneo, India, the United Kingdom, and all throughout the United States.<sup>62</sup>

Recently discovered statements on policy suggest that the Adventist Church remained open to the possibility of women's ministerial ordination as long as women were ordained as deaconesses. At the turn of the twentieth-century, the United States Census Bureau initiated a census of religious bodies every ten years, beginning with the year 1906. The Bureau began to collect the data for the first religious census in 1907 and published the results in two volumes in 1910. The first volume included numerical data about the various religious bodies that worshipped in the United States. The second volume, however, was comprised of the beliefs, history,

and polity of each religious group. According to Charles Nagel, the director of the census, "The descriptive statements were prepared, wherever possible, by competent persons in the denominations, who were appointed by the bureau as special agents for this purpose."<sup>63</sup> The "general statement covering the history, doctrine, polity, and work of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination" was prepared by the General Conference, under the direct supervision of Harvey Edson Rogers, General Conference Statistical Secretary and member of the General Conference Executive Committee.<sup>64</sup>

Since the General Conference prepared this statement, its description of the church and its work was authoritative. This statement did not introduce new concepts, but rather explained how the church operated to a non-Adventist audience. Seventh-day Adventist leaders were thrilled with the opportunity to share their faith in this manner and re-

sponded enthusiastically to these censuses because it gave them a chance to “place [their] work in proper light.”<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the censuses of religious bodies gave Adventist leaders a voice and occasion to portray their movement in the manner they believed the most accurate.

Since the General Conference wanted to present Adventism in an accurate manner, it is particularly interesting to note the sections of polity that dealt with the ministry and ordination. In a paragraph that outlined the different types of conferences—local, union, and General—and the function of the presidents and executive committees, the General Conference wrote, “Membership in the conferences or the ministry is open to both sexes, although there are very few female ministers.”<sup>66</sup> The context of this paragraph makes the meaning clear: it was possible for a woman to be elected to any office of a local conference, union, or the General Conference, including the office of president, and serve as a gospel minister. Though no women had served as conference, union, or General Conference presidents, policy did not prohibit this possibility. Furthermore, this statement affirms that there were some female ministers and that the title, “minister,” was given to both men and women—no distinction was made upon the basis of gender between those who filled ministerial positions.

The topic of ministerial ordination was addressed a paragraph later. Since this statement on polity declared that the ministry was open to both sexes, the wording of the clause on ordination was crucial. *If* Adventist Church policy did restrict ministerial ordination to men, it was necessary to clarify that point explicitly. However, this was not the case. Though the ordination paragraph did not explicitly state that ordination to the ministry was open to women, it was intentionally written in gender-neutral terms. The statement reads in full:

*Applicants for ordination to the ministry are licensed to preach, for a limited term, by a conference, either state, union, or general. At the expiration of that term, on approval by the conference, they are recommended for ordination, and are ordained under supervision of the conference, by ministers selected for that service. This*

*ordination is for life, but ministers are expected to renew their papers at each meeting of the conference which ordained them.”<sup>67</sup>*

The imprecise language of this statement is significant. James E. Anderson, political scientist and expert on policymaking, articulates the importance of clear language in relation to policy as follows: “Public policies in modern political systems do not, by and large, just happen.” Rather, policy is linked “to purposive or goal-oriented action rather than to random behavior or chance occurrences.” The language of policy statements, whether description or prescriptive, is thus crucial. Explicit policies require definite, clear, and precise language; policies intended to be open are written in ambiguous terms. According to Anderson, “The goals of a policy may be somewhat loosely stated and imprecise in content, thus providing a general direction rather than precise targets for its implementation. Those who want action on a problem may differ both as to what should be done and how it should be done. Ambiguity in language then can become a means for reducing conflict, at least for the moment.”<sup>68</sup> The descriptive policy statement on ministerial ordination in the religious census was written in ambiguous terms, which implies that the Adventist Church tacitly allowed that women’s ministerial ordination was possible, even though it had not yet been officially practiced. Though other details regarding policy were altered, it is important to note that these statements about the openness of ministry and ordination remained unchanged when the 1916 and 1926 censuses of religious bodies were published. Once again, Harvey Edson Rogers oversaw these censuses and the General Conference approved the statements.<sup>69</sup>

The significance of these statements is accentuated by a comparison with another document prepared by the General Conference shortly before the third religious census was taken for the year 1926. The *Manual for Ministers* was published in 1925, but was not an authoritative guide in a strict sense. Rather it was “printed as suggestive, and . . . not necessarily to be exactly followed” in all of its details. Unlike the policy statement printed in the reli-

**In the 1850s  
and 1860s,  
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gious censuses, the *Manual for Ministers* described ministerial ordination with gender-specific terminology. Words like “brother,” “him,” and “man” appear numerous times.<sup>70</sup> Adventist administrators were therefore inclined to use gender-specific terms to describe ministerial ordination, which highlights the significance of the policy statements in the religious censuses—particularly the one prepared for 1926, which was updated after the *Manual for Ministers* was published. The General Conference officers did not use gender-neutral terms in those statements accidentally. Rather, it seems that they were aware that denominational policy had been open to women’s ordination since 1881. To be sure, the statements on polity provided in these religious censuses were not prescriptive—the documents did not serve the same function as a codified working policy. Nevertheless, these statements did provide an accurate description of Adventist policy prior to 1930, especially since the General Conference wrote it for a non-Adventist audience—people completely unfamiliar with Adventist policy and procedure. In the early 1930s, Adventist administrators deliberately removed the clause, “Membership in the conferences or the ministry is open to both sexes, although there are very few female ministers,” from the polity statement in the religious censuses when an official declaration on ministerial ordination was finally made gender-specific in 1930—once policy stated that ordination was for men only, the ministry was no longer open to both sexes.

### **Unity, Authority, and Women in Ministry: Post-1932**

As Seventh-day Adventism grew in size and spread to new countries and regions, the General Conference increased its authority and jurisdiction. The first significant step in this direction took place in 1889. The Constitution was heavily revised during this year and bylaws were added to it. Most significantly, the purpose of the General Conference was redefined: whereas it initially had the “purpose of securing unity and efficiency in labor” the Constitution now specified that its object “shall be to unify and extend the work of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination throughout the world.” This newly stated purpose required increased authority and jurisdiction. Prior to this time, the General Conference only supervised ministerial and missionary labor. In 1889, however, these statements were revised so that the General Conference had “the general supervision of all denominational work.” In spite of this significant change, denominational ministries remained independent and retained much of their autonomy. This changed about a decade later.<sup>71</sup>

Adventists also began to meet in regular session biennially after 1889, which meant that the elected officers now served longer terms. The General Conference Executive Committee was also granted “full administrative power during the intervals between the sessions” and a new administrative tradition was initiated: the Annual Council, which met for the first time in the autumn of 1890.<sup>72</sup> The Annual Council soon became “one of the most important meetings of the General Conference Committee” because it acquired the authority to establish policies for church governance—a privilege previously reserved for delegates at General Conference sessions.<sup>73</sup>

Seventh-day Adventists began to institutionalize as the church expanded into foreign lands, but these changes also transpired in concert with the centralization of authority in the United States. As Ian Tyrrell has argued, “the late nineteenth century to the end of World War I was a crucial period for the growth of the federal state.” During this time America began to build an empire by acquiring several territories beyond its continental borders.<sup>74</sup> Federal authority continued to centralize in other ways between the 1910s and 1930s. Historians often interpret the presidential election of 1916 as “a foreshadowing of the New Deal coalition”<sup>75</sup> because Americans “argued that state and federal officials must work to regulate business, prevent labor abuses, create an educated populace, build a transportation infrastructure, ensure public health, and regulate private behavior.”<sup>76</sup> Ultimately, Americans got their wish in the 1930s when the New Deal was established. This “gave rise to Social Security, unemployment compensation, federal welfare programs, price stabilization programs in industry and agriculture, and collective bargaining for labor unions.” Previously, “these policy areas seemed to belong exclusively to the states,” but the New Deal centralized this power in the Federal Government.<sup>77</sup>

The concept of big business also emerged in the latter part of the nineteenth-century and by the early twentieth-century the “giant corporation proved to be the seedbed of a new social and economic order.” A new “managerial class” arose in America that was “governed by the engineering values of efficiency and systematic approaches to problems.” As Glenn Porter has stated, “soon almost the entire society would fall under the influence of corporate ways of doing things.”<sup>78</sup> Amanda Porterfield has observed the impact big business had on religion. As citizens in the Roaring Twenties “endorsed corporate organization as the path to social progress,” denominations, attracted by “centralized hierarchy,” began to translate “religion into business.”<sup>79</sup>



The Seventh-day Adventist Church was one of the denominations that began to translate itself into a big business in the early twentieth-century. A significant step in this direction was taken in 1901. Though some historians have focused on organizational decentralization during the 1901 General Conference session,<sup>80</sup> it is important to recognize that centralization ultimately triumphed. As Benjamin McArthur states, “The 1901 General Conference . . . offers a nearly perfect case study of the larger trends toward rationalized bureaucratization occurring in American society.”<sup>81</sup> Perhaps the clearest example of the General Conference’s increased authority was its takeover of the independent ministries. According to Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, “By 1902 the old independent associations had been replaced by four separate departments: Education, Publishing, Religious Liberty, and Sabbath School. By 1922 the church added eight more as the effectiveness of departments and the need for a broader range of activities became apparent.” The reorganization in 1901 therefore facilitated the centralization of authority, though decentralization was intended. As Schwarz and Greenleaf note, “By bringing all church activities under the ultimate control of the General Conference, church leaders produced a new centrality to the organization.”<sup>82</sup>

Adventist administrators disagreed with the pioneers before them who had insisted that the denomination’s organizational structure remain simple. They began to reason (incorrectly) that “[t]he leaders of the church who developed a simple organization (1863) did not yet see the world field as a part of it.”<sup>83</sup> In point of fact, the Whites recognized the world as the church’s mission field when Ellen White received a vision in November 1848 about “streams of light that went clear round the world.”<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, the church did rapidly expand in the 1870s and 1880s and, by 1921, there were more Seventh-day Adventist members in other countries than in the United States.<sup>85</sup> As the church grew, General Conference officers reasoned that big businesses functioned best when authority was centralized at the top.

Theological innovations and the threat of

“Modernism” also influenced conservative Christians to centralize authority in fundamental doctrines. Fundamentalists arose militantly to defend their “new form of ‘old-time religion’” in the 1910s.<sup>86</sup> Seventh-day Adventists were likewise distraught by the signs of the times and, as Paul McGraw has demonstrated, “During the first half of the twentieth century, Adventism produced various church leaders who began to seek common ground with the wider Christian community.”<sup>87</sup> Adventists of the twentieth century craved respectability and believed that an alliance with the Fundamentalist camp was the surest way to achieve it.<sup>88</sup> In 1926, I. A. Crane asked Seventh-day Adventists, “Are you really a fundamentalist?” He then answered for them, stating firmly, “Yes, when it comes to the Bible we are all strong for taking it to mean what it says. We are fundamentalists of the fundamentalists. We all thank God that this is so.”<sup>89</sup> Following Crane’s lead, Adventist leaders throughout the 1920s and 1930s repeatedly boasted that they were “the fundamentalists of the fundamentalists.”<sup>90</sup>

Fundamentalists were not favorable to women in ministry. According to Margaret Bendroth,

*The events of the [1920s] finally put to rest the old stereotype of women as the true guardians of religion, replacing it with a new one emphasizing their moral weakness and theological shallowness. In the new formulation, fundamentalist men forsook their previously passive role in religion and, in theory at least, assumed full responsibility for guarding orthodoxy.*<sup>91</sup>

Many of the new taboos were focused on women. Liberal women of the era—known as flappers—smoked cigarettes, listened to jazz music, bobbed their hair, wore shorter skirts, and painted their faces with cosmetics. Such women were a sign of moral decay and became the foil for the Fundamentalists’ ideal woman—one whose identity was intricately linked with modesty, propriety, motherhood, and homemaking. This new Cult of Domesticity stressed that women were not to assert themselves in the public sphere because a “plain” reading of Scripture indicated that the Apostle Paul’s proscriptions on women in

**Several  
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deaconesses  
after Haskell,  
Andrews,  
and White  
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public in were not “culturally conditioned.” As Randall Balmer has stated, “fundamentalist women are expected to be submissive, to demand no voice of authority in the church or in the home.”<sup>92</sup> Laura L. Vance notes the impact this new perspective had on Seventh-day Adventism, stating, “Whereas nineteenth-century Adventist women had been depicted as independent, competent, and intelligent workers (especially prior to 1880) whose responsibilities included, but were not limited to, domestic work, the woman portrayed in the Review of the 1920s and 1930s appeared to have little knowledge, experience, or ambition outside of the domestic sphere.”<sup>93</sup>

Fundamentalists raised a new criticism of Seventh-day Adventism that related to gender as the two groups came into closer contact with one another. In 1917, William C. Irvine became the first to declare in print that Seventh-day Adventism was a cult, in his book, *Timely Warnings*.<sup>94</sup> Irvine believed that Adventism was a cult for a variety of reasons, but the issue of gender was central to his attack. He began his chapter on Adventism with these words: “SEVENTH-DAY [sic] ADVENTISM, Christian Science, and Theosophy have one thing in common at least—they all had hysterical, neurotic women as their Founders!”<sup>95</sup> Other Fundamentalists soon joined the counter-cult movement and railed against Seventh-day Adventism as a religion founded by “the incontrovertible logic of a woman.”<sup>96</sup>

It was much more difficult for Seventh-day Adventists to be perceived as honorable and to maintain self-respect once they had been designated a cult.<sup>97</sup> Since the designation was intricately connected with Ellen White’s gender, Adventists found ways to minimize her significance, or at least her gender. To call Ellen White the church “Founder” was particularly deplorable to Adventists of this period. The term itself was a big business label that pointed to the person(s) who established an institution. A woman, especially one who claimed to have visions, was incapable of legitimately possessing this status in the business world—particularly if the business was a religion—and the charge invalidated current Adventist managers and the rapidly growing institution they operated. It is not surprising, then, that Adventists of this period quickly responded to their critics that Ellen G. White “was not the founder of Seventh-day Adventism.” Those unwilling to give White founder status either remarked that she “was a great pioneer and leader in it” or merely “the leading writer.”<sup>98</sup> Others more generously admitted that she was “one of the

founders of the Seventh Day [sic] Adventists.”<sup>99</sup>

But if White was only one of the founders, who else could be honored with this status? Accounts initially varied. Some stated that James White was “the [only] founder of the denomination,”<sup>100</sup> but more frequently a coterie was granted this status, including the Whites, Joseph Bates, Hiram Edson, Frederick Wheeler, and S. W. Rhodes.<sup>101</sup> The definitive answer eventually came from Everett Dick, a trained historian who published *Founders of the Message* in 1938. Dick specified that “three strong characters, two men and a woman” had emerged from the Millerite disappointment to found the Seventh-day Adventist Church—“Joseph Bates, James White, and Ellen White.”<sup>102</sup> Though Dick’s claim was not necessarily historically inaccurate, it is important to note that it answered a nagging criticism raised by other Christians. Adventists of the Fundamentalist era were relieved that they could call Ellen White just a co-founder *and* place her name at the end of the list behind two men. A two-thirds male majority ensured the legitimacy of Seventh-day Adventism and enabled it to more credibly grow into a big business capable of missionizing the world.

Adventists now had a response to the founder question, but they also needed to answer the charge about a hysterical female visionary. Seventh-day Adventists published their first book-length apologetic works on Ellen White and the gift of prophecy during the 1920s and 1930s,<sup>103</sup> but a subtler, yet remarkably more potent response also arose at this time—one that specifically excused White’s gender. In the 1890s, J. N. Loughborough introduced a three-part story about William Foy, Hazen Foss, and Ellen Harmon. As the story goes, Foy was the first to receive a vision, but since he didn’t understand it he refused to share it. Next, Foss was given the same vision, but stubbornly resisted God’s command to tell it to others. Finally, the vision was given to Harmon—someone unafraid to share it despite the fact that prolonged illness had made her “the weakest of the weak.”

Most Adventists know this story, but do not realize that it has evolved over time into a complete myth. Loughborough occasionally presented his narrative as one connected story,<sup>104</sup> but typically mentioned the three persons in disconnected fashion.<sup>105</sup> Specifically, in his most popular works, he introduced Harmon some twenty pages after Foss, which obscures the cause and effect nature of the story—something other storytellers made explicit.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, Loughborough’s story did not focus on gender. He never re-

ferred to Ellen Harmon as a woman or young girl, but gave her the proper title, “Sister Harmon” or “Miss Harmon.” Furthermore, he always connected the phrase, “the weakest of the weak” with her poor health. This, however, began to change in the 1920s. During this decade, storytellers added three elements to the story: first, Ellen Harmon was now presented as “a young woman,” or “a young girl”;<sup>107</sup> second, the phrase “the weakest of the weak” was detached from Harmon’s poor health and connected to the phrase “young woman” or “young girl”;<sup>108</sup> and third, Harmon’s first vision was typically situated within a room of “five women . . . praying earnestly for light,” which amplified the femininity of Harmon’s prophetic call.<sup>109</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s, Adventists concluded that Ellen Harmon White was God’s last choice to receive the prophetic gift. One author prefaced the story in this manner: “Throughout the history of the human race, God has used *men* as channels through which He has communicated His will to other *men*. So, early in the history of this movement, God chose a *special* messenger.” This messenger was considered to be “special” because of her gender. The tale was now told with explicitly causal language and the gender of each subject was emphasized. God first turned to “a young *man* by the name of William E. Foy. . . . Because William Foy had failed to do the work that God had desired him to do, Hazen Foss, a young *man* . . . was chosen.” After Foss refused to deliver God’s message, the story continued, “the Lord called Ellen Harmon.” In what setting did this occur? “It was during a morning prayer meeting when she, with five *women*, was kneeling in prayer, that she was taken off in [her first] vision.”<sup>110</sup> In a more concise version of this tale, A. W. Peterson wrote, “On two different occasions two different *men*, William Foy and Hazen Foss, were given messages . . . but both shrank from the burden and the humiliation which has always been the part of God’s prophets. Then it was that God called a *young girl*, ‘the weakest of the weak,’ to speak for Him.” Peterson’s paragraph ended with this sentence, suggesting that a woman was

weak, but Ellen Harmon was “the weakest of the weak” because she was a young girl.<sup>111</sup> By the mid-1930s, this newly gendered narrative had become entrenched within the collective Adventist consciousness. The moral of the story was simple: God failed to find a man who would serve Him so He was forced to find a weak little girl to relate His message to the people.<sup>112</sup> Unlike Dick’s selection of Adventist founders, this myth is riddled with historical inaccuracies.<sup>113</sup>

Adventists created ways to respond to the founder and visions questions, but they also had to contend with the fact that the Adventist Church had employed women preachers for decades and still had a policy open to women’s ordination. In *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Women Preachers*, John R. Rice railed against “Mrs. White and Seventh Day [sic] Adventism” because she was partially to blame for “the rise of women preachers” in America. According to Rice, “women preachers” promoted false “doctrine, radical emotionalism, ‘speaking in tongues’ and trances . . . [and] false pretenses of healing—these things surely should warn us that there is infinite harm in women preaching.”<sup>114</sup> Seventh-day Adventist policy in the 1920s still implicitly allowed women to serve as conference presidents or ordained gospel ministers because it was not explicitly forbidden. If they were to gain the respect of Fundamentalists and maintain self-respectability, this policy had to be altered.

The *Working Policy and Church Manual* changed this policy in 1930/1932. To be sure, Seventh-day Adventists had policies of procedure prior to this time, but they were not systematized into a single document until the Autumn Council approved the first *Working Policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists* in 1926.<sup>115</sup> It is significant that Adventist policy on ordination did not change when the *Working Policy* first appeared: if policy had limited ordination to men prior to this time, this should have been reflected in the first edition of *Working Policy*. However, this was not the case. In fact, when the General Conference revised its descriptive policy statement in 1927 for the 1926 Federal Census of Religious Bodies, ordina-

**What is clear is that Adventist leaders considered ordaining women to the ministry at the time that the churches began to elect deaconesses and it is unlikely that this timing was coincidental.**



tion to the gospel ministry was still open to both sexes. This changed three years later, however, when the Adventist Church officially specified in the 1930 edition of *Working Policy* for the first time that “ordination to the ministry is the setting apart of *the man* to a sacred calling.”<sup>116</sup> It is therefore important to recognize this point: prior to 1930, church policy statements on ordination were written in gender-inclusive language, but this changed in 1930—from this point onward church policy has explicitly restricted ministerial ordination to men.

This change was intentional. According to James E. Anderson, “a policy is defined as a *purposive course of action or inaction followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern.*”<sup>117</sup> Adventist administrators in the 1920s and 1930s recognized that church policy implicitly allowed for the ordination of women. Though no women prior to the 1930s are known to have been ordained as ministers, many had been ordained as deaconesses and some had been ordained as elders and performed the functions of that office. During the Colorado camp meeting held in 1922 at Rocky Mountain Lake Park, someone asked if women were allowed “to officiate at quarterly meeting” and “be ordained as church elder.” The question was answered in the negative at this time, but the respondent reluctantly admitted that he was cognizant of “[o]ne or two instances” in which women had

been ordained as elders and officiated at the Lord’s Supper. Apparently, ordinations of this nature occurred frequently enough for the writer to plead with his brethren and sisters to cease and desist. Who was at fault? According to this writer, it was the women who were ordained. “[N]o woman should allow herself to receive ordination,” the writer implored, “much less to officiate [at the Lord’s Supper] even though she might have been ordained by someone who exceeded his authority.” Though the writer assured his readers that these ordinations were “not recognized by the denomination,” it is important to note that his claim was only supported by a general consensus, not church policy.<sup>118</sup> Administrators in the Fundamentalist era therefore dealt with this “problem” by making the policy statement on ordination explicit—it was, after 1930, for men only.

It is significant to note that a General Conference session did not approve this decision. When the revisions to the *Working Policy* were suggested at the 1930 session, the changes were not presented to the delegates and the matter was referred to the General Conference Executive Committee for implementation without discussion.<sup>119</sup> The delegates were completely unaware that denominational leaders were planning to restrict ordination to the gospel ministry to the male gender. Though it is likely that the delegates would have approved this change in 1930, they were not given the



opportunity. The concept of authority had changed since the issue was first addressed—in 1881 a General Conference session decided the question of gender and ordination.

Since very few people read the *Working Policy*, the General Conference ensured that Adventists would follow this new policy by including it in the *Church Manual* (1932).<sup>120</sup> This publication completely changed the nature of Seventh-day Adventism and its very adoption represents a new perspective on unity and authority.<sup>121</sup> Whereas the 1883 Manual was presented to a General Conference session for adoption, the 1932 *Church Manual* was not—the Executive Committee simply authorized and published it. Whereas Adventists in 1883 realized that they were united without a Church Manual, Adventist administrators in the early twentieth-century determined that unity could not be achieved or maintained unless they had one. Whereas nineteenth-century Adventists rejected a Manual because they wanted people to rely on Scripture alone, the 1932 *Church Manual* was advertised to church members as “the final word regarding the Church, its Officers and its work.”<sup>122</sup> Whereas the autonomy of the local church had been intentionally guarded and protected, the General Conference now dictated what these bodies could and could not do in regard to matters of polity.

Between 1930 and 1932, Seventh-day Adventist administrators took authoritative action to bar women from ministry with three (if not more) policies.<sup>123</sup> First, the *Working Policy* and *Church Manual* officially stated for the first time that ordination to the gospel ministry was reserved for men only. Between 1906 and 1926, the descriptive policy statement in the Federal censuses included this clause: “Membership in the conferences or the ministry is open to both sexes, although there are very few female ministers.” Prior to 1930, General Conference policy allowed for women’s ordination to the ministry by not prohibiting it, but this changed when the *Working Policy* and *Church Manual* were published. The United States Census Bureau completed its final census of religious bodies for the year 1936 and

this change was reflected in it. Harvey Edson Rogers oversaw this project once again and the General Conference approved it. Though other policy details remained essentially unchanged, the clause that specified that “[m]embership in the conferences or the ministry [was] open to both sexes” was stricken from the record.<sup>124</sup> Once the General Conference dictated that ordination was for men only, this statement no longer accurately described Seventh-day Adventist policy of ministry. According to Patrick Allen, between 1931 and 1933 “the number of female pastors dropped from six to zero.”<sup>125</sup>

Second, the 1932 *Church Manual* also took away the right of women to be ordained as deaconesses. As stated previously, many women had been ordained as deaconesses between 1895 and the 1920s but, in spite of this fact, the first *Church Manual* stated, “the practice of ordaining deaconesses is not followed by our denomination”<sup>126</sup> and women were not officially granted this privilege again until the eighteenth edition of the *Church Manual* was approved in 2010.<sup>127</sup> The topic of women’s ordination to the gospel ministry arose when Adventists began to elect deaconesses in their churches in the late 1870s and early 1880s, and in the early 1930s ordination to both of these offices was officially disallowed, even though women had been ordained as deaconesses around the world for more than three decades.

It is evident that Adventist administrators of the Fundamentalist era were focused on the gender question—if a woman could not be ordained to one office, she could not be ordained to any office. In 1936, the Home Missionary Department planned to reprint Ellen White’s 1895 article that specified that women should be ordained as deaconesses “as a leaflet.”<sup>128</sup> J. A. Stevens, head of the department, was alarmed to read from Ellen White’s pen that women “should be set apart . . . by prayer and laying on of hands” and brought the article before the General Conference officers because it seemed “to recommend the ordination of women.” As David Trim has noted, “The emphasis is on the gender question, not the role or function question (home mission-

**Though no women had served as conference, union, or General Conference presidents, policy did not prohibit this possibility.**

ary versus minister, elder or deacon). The Officers seem not to have identified that Ellen White was writing about the function of a deaconess." Trim's observation is strengthened by the fact that these administrators concluded that "this matter has never been acted upon during the years." These men must have known that women had been ordained as deaconesses because it had happened frequently and, at times, by the hands of church administrators. The General Conference officers therefore apparently believed that White endorsed women's ordination to any office. They had disallowed this just a few years prior to this time and now chose to silence their dead prophet by voting "[t]o recommend that the entire paragraph be eliminated from the leaflet."<sup>129</sup> The General Conference did not republish Ellen White's statement on women's ordination until 1995.<sup>130</sup> This incident reveals that these Adventist administrators believed that if a woman was ordained to one office, she could be ordained to any office—something they could not accept, even if a prophet of God advocated it.

In 1931, Adventist administrators adopted a third policy that impacted women directly. At this time, the General Conference set term limits that fixed General Conference positions to twelve years, unions to eight, and local conferences and missions to six. Though term limits also impacted men, this new policy enabled church administrators to eliminate women currently employed in church leadership positions. In 1905, some twenty women served as conference treasurers while another thirty held the post of conference secretary. In 1915, about thirty-two women served as educational departmental leaders while the same number served as educational department secretaries. Also in 1915, about fifty-eight women were employed as Sabbath School Department leaders, while the same number served as Sabbath School Department secretaries. By 1950, men held all of these offices exclusively.<sup>131</sup> Though terms were limited, this policy protected the careers of men through transfers—the men were moved from one conference to another or promoted to a higher position. As Patrick Allen has noted, however, "The *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* statistics for the period 1920 to 1940 seem to indicate that women might have fallen victim to this policy, for there is virtually no record of such transfers."<sup>132</sup> Not only were women officially refused the rite of ordination, but the unordained women who served the church were also excised from their leadership positions. Men were to lead the church and the women were only God's last choice.

## Conclusion

Adventist administrators in the 1920s and 1930s deliberately changed church policy to ensure that no women would be ordained to any office. Though no women were elected to a conference, union, or the General Conference presidency, or known to be ordained to the gospel ministry prior to 1930, if one had been set apart by the laying on of hands the act would have been in harmony with the policy indirectly adopted in 1881. Any local conference or union had the authority to ordain women between 1881 and 1930 and if they had done so they could not have been censured by the General Conference for an act that policy implicitly allowed.

By the 1920s, the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of unity had changed. In the nineteenth century, Adventists were united and autonomous—nothing infringed upon the agency of the local church. Yet, in the early twentieth century, Seventh-day Adventists began to assume that they could be united only if all members adhered to an orthodoxy and an orthopraxy. The *Church Manual* was published to establish such uniformity. The *Church Manual* also gave the General Conference direct control over the local churches and, after it was published, the clause that specified that "State conferences . . . exercise[] no authority over the local church, except as particular questions are submitted to it for decision" was removed from statements on policy.<sup>133</sup>

These new understandings of unity and authority directly impacted Seventh-day Adventist women. For nearly fifty years, church policy implicitly allowed that women could serve in any church position and be ordained to the gospel ministry. Though none were apparently ordained as ministers, several did serve in this capacity. Numerous women were employed by the denomination in leadership positions, some were ordained as elders, and dozens served their local churches as ordained deaconesses. This changed between 1930 and 1932, however, when male administrators altered church policy.

By the 1940s, very few women served in leadership and Adventists were beginning to forget their history. For this reason, Ava M. Covington wrote a book on the topic of women in ministry—the first Adventist book devoted exclusively to women who had served the church. Published in 1940, she gave it the perceptive title, *They Also Served*. Covington featured fifteen different Adventist women in her book including, strikingly, Ellen G. White. This was not an act of banality—the fact that Covington included White suggests that she believed that her contemporaries were forgetting that Ellen White was a *woman* who had also served the

church.<sup>134</sup> To be sure, Covington knew that Adventists had not forgotten that Ellen White existed, but she was apparently aware that White's femininity was excused. Ellen White was not the founder of Seventh-day Adventism, but only one of the founders. She was not supposed to be a prophet, but since God could not find a man who would accept the prophetic gift, He reluctantly gave it to a woman. Ellen White and all women who served the church were merely God's last choice.

### **Appendix: The 1881 Resolution to Ordain Women to the Gospel Ministry**

As indicated in the main article, the 1881 resolution to ordain women to the gospel ministry has been widely misunderstood. Most interpreters have assumed, or argued, that the resolution was indirectly rejected, but a more comprehensive analysis suggests that it was indirectly *adopted*, even though it was never implemented. I evaluate the three main factors upon which this question rests within this appendix: Seventh-day Adventist parliamentary procedure, General Conference Committee practice, and the *Signs of the Times* report.

### **Seventh-day Adventist Parliamentary Procedure**

Though scholars have wrestled with the 1881 session of the General Conference for decades, none of the works I have reviewed consulted *Robert's Rules of Order* or *Key to Smith's Diagram of Parliamentary Rules*. Henry M. Robert's *Pocket Manual of Rules of Order* was first published in 1876. In 1877, Adventist leaders began instructing Adventist ministers, missionary workers, and local church leaders on the rules of parliamentary procedure<sup>135</sup> and by 1879 the subject was taught at Battle Creek College. As stated in the *Review*, "Robert's Rules of Order, for sale at this Office, is the text book used."<sup>136</sup> In 1881, Uriah Smith published a simplified version of *Robert's Rules of Order* that he titled, *Key to Smith's Diagram of Parliamentary Rules*.<sup>137</sup> Though Smith simplified Robert's work, there is no substantive difference between parliamentary rules outlined in each text. It is therefore evident that by 1881 Adven-

tists followed these texts for rules of order in their deliberative assemblies.

In 1881, the delegates of the General Conference took the action to commit, or refer, the resolution to ordain women to a committee.

According to *Robert's Rules* and *Smith's Diagram*, this action was a subsidiary motion. Uriah Smith explained that subsidiary motions "are such as are applied to other motions for the sake of disposing of them in some other way than by direct adoption or rejection."<sup>138</sup> Subsidiary motions therefore enabled delegates at deliberative assemblies to take action in regard to a resolution by indirectly adopting or rejecting it.

A motion or resolution could be indirectly rejected in a number of ways. For example, the delegates could lay it on the table, which "remove[d] the subject from consideration till the assembly vote[d] to take it from the table."<sup>139</sup> A resolution could also be postponed to a certain day, but at the specified time the resolution could not be "taken up except by a two-thirds vote."<sup>140</sup> If a resolution were taken from the table or reconsidered at a later date, it could be either adopted or rejected, but the two-thirds vote required to reconsider the matter made this difficult, if not unlikely. If delegates wished to reject a resolution in an indirect manner with no possibility for adoption, they took the action to postpone it indefinitely. The effect of this action was "to entirely remove the question from before the assembly for that session."<sup>141</sup>

Delegates could indirectly adopt a motion or resolution by referring the matter to certain committees. Committees were not empowered to indirectly reject resolutions, however, and usually had the purpose to present a report to the deliberative assembly. The action to commit, or refer, was taken when the particular item at hand was debatable. The type of the debate can be determined by noting the type of committee to which the debatable resolution was referred. First, if the subject of the resolution was controversial, then the resolution would be referred to a committee of the whole. A temporary committee would then be composed of representatives from the larger body of dele-

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gates and be empowered to adopt, amend, or report on the resolution at hand. Second, a disputed topic could be addressed by referring it to a special (or select) committee. In such cases a temporary committee would be elected and asked to report on the item at hand, but it was not empowered to indirectly adopt or amend the resolution. Third, if the wording of a resolution was debatable, then it would be referred back to the Committee on Resolutions—a standing committee elected at each regular meeting (e.g., a General Conference session). In such a case, the Committee on Resolutions would rephrase the resolution and resubmit it to the entire assembly for adoption or rejection. Fourth, if the matter needed further study it would be referred to a committee for deliberation or investigation (e.g., a theology of ordination study committee). If this were done, Robert outlined that it was “of the utmost importance that all parties be represented” on a large committee so that when it reported to the full assembly “unpleasant debates” would be avoided.<sup>142</sup>

Just as there was one action to intentionally reject a motion indirectly, so also was there one action specifically designed to indirectly adopt resolutions—to refer the matter to a committee for action. According to *Robert’s Rules of Order*, “A committee for *action* should be small, and consist only of those heartily in favor of the proposed action.” If the delegates found a resolution to be acceptable, but debated its implementation, then it was referred to a committee for action. The committee was small because the resolution itself was not controversial; debatable resolutions had to be addressed by larger committees. Furthermore, committees for action were composed of people “*heartily in favor* of the proposed action” because the question related to implementation, not approval.<sup>143</sup> Unlike the other committees described, the small three-person General Conference Committee was a permanent *executive* committee—a committee for action.<sup>144</sup>

If the 1881 General Conference delegates wanted to indirectly reject the resolution to ordain women, they would have postponed it indefinitely, or possibly tabled it or postponed it to a certain day.<sup>145</sup> If the resolution itself were debatable, then the delegates would have referred the matter to a temporary committee, such as a committee of the whole, special committee, or the Committee on Resolutions.<sup>146</sup> If the resolution needed further study, a large committee for deliberation or investigation would have been organized and the question referred to that body.<sup>147</sup> These things did not

happen, however. Rather, the matter was referred to the General Conference Committee—a committee for action. It must be stressed that, according to *Robert’s Rules of Order* or *Key to Smith’s Diagram of Parliamentary Rules*, committees did not have the authority to reject motions or resolutions. Committees of the whole and committees for action were empowered to adopt resolutions, but even these committees did not have the authority to reject resolutions. Therefore, an analysis of Adventist parliamentary procedure suggests that the delegates indirectly adopted the resolution and expected the General Conference Executive Committee to determine a way to tackle the challenge of its implementation.

### General Conference Committee Practice

As stated previously, Seventh-day Adventists had followed *Robert’s Rules of Order* since the late 1870s and it is clear from denominational practice that they sought ways to implement items referred to the General Conference Committee. After poring through the first twenty-five years of General Conference minutes, David Trim found only two other “draft resolutions proposed by the Resolutions Committee that were referred to the GC Committee.”<sup>148</sup> In addition, Denis Kaiser has located another example worthy of comparison.<sup>149</sup> A thorough analysis of these three analogous draft resolutions reveals that they were all indirectly adopted. All of these resolutions were referred to the General Conference Committee because there was a question about implementation, but after the questions were addressed, each resolution was implemented.

The first example relates to an action taken at the Tract and Missionary Society in 1879. Though this action did not occur during a General Conference session, it is still worthy of comparison. On this occasion, the Committee on Resolutions reported fourteen different resolutions. Resolution 11 stated, “*Resolved*, That we recommend that the *Stimme der Wahrheit*, from the beginning of next year, be issued monthly instead of quarterly.” After various remarks from some of the brethren, the resolution “was referred to the General Conference Committee.”<sup>150</sup> It is evident that this resolution was indirectly adopted and later implemented because W. C. White stated a short time later, “The *Stimme der Wahrheit* . . . will hereafter be issued monthly.”<sup>151</sup>

Second, during the twenty-fifth session of the General Conference held in November and December 1886, the Committee on Resolutions presented a number of resolutions to the delegates. Resolution 35 stated, “*Whereas*, The provi-



dence of God has seemed, in a special manner, to open the way for distributors to be used in New York City, and for missionary work to be done in Castle Garden among those of all nationalities; therefore—*Resolved*, That Bro. Robert Sawyer and wife be requested to connect themselves with the work in that city.” After its presentation, this resolution “was referred to the Conference Committee.”<sup>152</sup> Since the Sawyers did not move to New York and since Adventists did not work in Castle Garden, scholars have assumed that this resolution was indirectly rejected. This was not the case, however. In January 1887, the General Conference Executive Committee met with the New York Tract Society and discussed the topic of city missions.<sup>153</sup> The General Conference had organized the Brooklyn, New York, Mission in January 1886 and wanted Robert and Mary Sawyer to work among the immigrants that passed through Castle Garden, which was America’s largest immigration station prior to the opening of Ellis Island in 1892. Since the Sawyers were unable to move to New York City, presumably due to Mary’s poor health,<sup>154</sup> Daniel Thomson was selected to take their place. Thomson arrived at the Brooklyn Mission in March 1887 with the intention of working at Castle Garden. Unfortunately, the plan could not be executed as the General Conference originally intended. As stated in the 1888 *Year Book*, “Bro. Thomson was disappointed in not being able to obtain the privilege of working as a missionary in Castle Garden.” Though Adventists were not allowed to work within Castle Garden itself, Thomson “immediately laid plans to reach the immigrants as they landed from the steamers or left on the railroads” and within nine months he had distributed some 10,000 tracts.<sup>155</sup> Though the 1886 General Conference resolution was challenging to implement, the General Conference Committee found ways to distribute literature among the immigrants of New York City.

The third example took place at the twenty-second annual session of the General Conference in November 1883. The Committee on Resolutions reported eighteen resolutions and number 14 stated,

Whereas, *It is evident that it will soon be necessary to take advance steps in the way of establishing publishing interests in Europe; and—Whereas, Bro. W. C. White has had experience in this branch of work; therefore—Resolved, That we recommend that the said W. C. White so arrange his business, the coming year, as to be at liberty to render the requisite assistance another season.*

Upon motion, the matter was then “referred to the General Conference Committee.”<sup>156</sup> Since W. C. White did not go to Europe at this time, scholars have assumed that this resolution was indirectly rejected. However, further analysis reveals that it was indirectly adopted and implemented. White was apparently unable to travel to Europe at the time, but the Executive Committee found someone else to do the work. Shortly after the General Conference session closed, the Executive Committee met to take care of unfinished business. According to G. I. Butler, current General Conference president, several “cases were referred to the General Conference Committee. This committee, after the close of the Conference, considered some of them.” The resolution presented by the Committee on Resolutions was on their agenda and Butler explained that they “advised that Eld[.]. M. C. Wilcox, of New York . . . arrange to go to England to labor,”<sup>157</sup> as a replacement for W. C. White. In February 1884, M. C. Wilcox stated, “In harmony with the request of the General Conference Committee, I have been, up to Feb. 1, working in the REVIEW office, trying to obtain experience and knowledge to enable me to assist in the publishing work elsewhere [i.e., England].”<sup>158</sup> Wilcox helped to establish Seventh-day Adventist publishing interests in England shortly after his arrival and the first issue of a new periodical, *The Present Truth*, rolled off the presses in April 1884. According to G. I. Butler, this was in harmony with the “well known . . . vote[] at the last General Conference.”<sup>159</sup> Since the matter was indirectly adopted through its referral to the Executive Committee, they were empowered to implement the resolution by finding an alternative person to go to Europe in White’s stead.

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## The *Signs of the Times* Report

Adventist parliamentary procedure and practice suggests that the 1881 resolution to ordain women to the gospel ministry was indirectly adopted and a contemporary interpreter affirmed this conclusion. On January 5, 1882, a full month after the General Conference action on the resolution to ordain women to the gospel ministry, the *Signs of the Times* printed a partial list of “the resolutions adopted.”<sup>160</sup> The resolution to ordain women to the gospel ministry was the second item on that list. Some scholars have dismissed this report as a simple mistake, but further analysis discredits that notion.

First, it is important to take into consideration the credibility of the resident editor for the *Signs of the Times*. J. H. Waggoner held that position in 1881 and 1882.<sup>161</sup> He did not go to Battle Creek for the 1881 General Conference, but stayed in California at his post during the annual meetings.<sup>162</sup> Waggoner was a veteran editor, administrator, and minister—someone who, without question, was well versed in Seventh-day Adventist parliamentary procedure and practice. He had served on the General Conference Executive Committee for two years and understood what it meant for a resolution to be referred to this committee.<sup>163</sup> Since the report was printed as an unsigned article, Waggoner not only approved the report for publication, but likely authored it.

Second, it is necessary to analyze the General Conference report itself. It is actually quite significant that the report is an unofficial “partial account of the proceedings.” The wording of the resolutions in the report and the official minutes is identical, which reveals that the report was copied from the original source, not from a letter or telegram. Further comparison reveals that certain items were intentionally excluded from the report, including items that were not adopted as well as some that were.<sup>164</sup> This indicates that the *Signs* intentionally featured items interpreted to be adopted and important. Since the report is not an official record it should be read as a contemporary interpretation of Seventh-day Adventist parliamentary procedure—one that was approved

and/or written by a capable and informed individual, J. H. Waggoner. The report is, therefore, a reliable source for historical analysis.

Third, it is significant to note that J. H. Waggoner was not favorable to women’s ordination. As mentioned in the main article, Waggoner did not believe women should occupy any office in the church. Waggoner’s son, E. J. Waggoner, also held this view of women in ministry. He wrote, “It is a sad fact that infidelity is creeping—no, not creeping, but stalking boldly, into the church.” He then listed some examples, including a reference to the Methodist Church, which was considering “the admission of women as delegates to the General Conference, and their ordination as ministers.”<sup>165</sup> Father and son were both opposed to the ordination of women, whether to the deaconate or to the ministry. This point is significant because it reveals that Waggoner was not likely to accidentally include a resolution he found heretical in his list of items adopted at the General Conference.

Finally, Denis Kaiser has noted that “the *Signs* did not print a correction regarding this resolution in subsequent issues.”<sup>166</sup> Adventist editors maintained high standards and when significant mistakes did appear in Adventist periodicals, a published correction or retraction was typical.<sup>167</sup> No such statement was ever offered in any Adventist periodical in regard to the 1881 resolution to ordain women.

In summary, J. H. Waggoner was not likely to make, or allow, a simple mistake to appear in the *Signs of the Times* report. Waggoner was not only an experienced Adventist administrator, but had “learned the printer’s trade” as a boy and was co-owner and senior editor of the Baraboo, Wisconsin, *Sauk County Standard* before he accepted the Adventist faith in the early 1850s.<sup>168</sup> He was a veteran editor and his *Signs* report remains a valuable contemporary interpretation of Adventist parliamentary procedure.

It is therefore unlikely that the 1881 resolution to ordain women was indirectly rejected. Rather, the weight of the evidence supports the



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interpretation that the resolution was *indirectly adopted*—a conclusion substantiated by Adventist parliamentary procedure, General Conference Committee practice, and the *Signs of the Times* report. As the main article also demonstrates, subsequent statements on policy issued by the General Conference itself also support this interpretation. ■

## References

1. Many examples, which cannot be included in this paper, could be mentioned. I will include two notable changes, however, in this footnote. First, Seventh-day Adventists began to settle pastors in local churches in the 1920s. This was a significant shift in mentality and practice. As late as 1912, A. G. Daniells explained,

*We have not settled our ministers over churches as pastors to any large extent. In some very large churches we have elected pastors; but as a rule we have held ourselves ready for field service, evangelical work, and our brethren and sisters have held themselves ready to maintain their church services and carry forward their church work without settled pastors. And I hope this will never cease to be the order of affairs in this denomination; for when we cease our forward movement work, and begin to settle over our churches, to stay by them, and do their thinking and their praying and their work that is to be done, then our churches will begin to weaken, and to lose their life and spirit, and become paralyzed and fossilized, and our work will be on a retreat.*

A. G. Daniells, "The Church and Ministry: An Outline of Lesson No. 5," *Pacific Union Recorder* (April 4, 1912): 1. It is important to note that the General Conference Executive Committee initially balked at this change, and at the Autumn Council of 1923 they expressed their "concern [with] the rapidly increasing practice of placing ministers over churches as settled pastors" and urged local conference executive committees "to give careful study to this question." General Conference Committee Minutes, October 15, 1923, 486; cf. F. M. W[ilcox], "Standing by the Preacher," *Review and Herald* [hereafter *RH*] (June 4, 1925): 5; G. A. Roberts and W. C. Moffett, "Building the Home Base," *RH* (November 11, 1926): 7; H. E. Willoughby, "Stress Evangelism," *The Ministry* 1, no. 4 (April 1928): 28–29. The "insistent cry" from local congregations "for pastoral help" proved too great, however, and voices of protest quickly died out in the 1930s and 1940s as Adventist views regarding ministry took on this new trajectory. J. L. McElhany, "A Greater Evangelism," *The Ministry* 4, no. 1 (January 1931): 7; cf. F. D. Wells, "More Workers," *Atlantic Union Gleaner* (January 8, 1930): 4; Charles O. Franz, "Alabama: A Trip Through the Alabama Conference," *Southern Union Worker* (July 16, 1930): 2; H. A. Lukens, "666," *Canadian Union Messenger* (January 23, 1934): 3.

Second, the rise of settled pastors in local churches occurred in tandem with the rise of a standardized church program. As Theodore N. Levterov states, "At the center of early Sabbatarian worship was the studying of the Bible and doc-

trines. Since most churches lacked the presence of a regular minister, Bible study was usually substituted for traditional preaching. It was also not uncommon for believers to read the *Review and Herald* and learn biblical concepts through its pages during worship." Theodore N. Levterov, "Early Adventist Worship, 1845–1900s," in Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, ed., *Worship, Ministry, and the Authority of the Church* (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 2016), 61–62. Prior to the 1920s and 1930s, spontaneity was presented as the desired norm. In 1907, J. N. Loughborough published *The Church: Its Organization, Order, and Discipline*, which was republished several times until the 1920s. In this work, Loughborough addressed the question, "In the absence of a minister what is the proper manner of conducting the church service?" Loughborough's answer was simple and intentionally vague. "There should certainly be the avoidance of any stereotyped, formal manner that would run things into a special rut," he wrote. He then supported his conclusion from the writings of Ellen White, stating, "The 'Testimonies for the Church' give much excellent instruction on that point. As samples of this, see Vol. II, pages 419, 420, 577–579; Vol. IV, page 461; Vol. V, page 609, etc." J. N. Loughborough, *The Church: Its Organization, Order, and Discipline* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1920), 170. In spite of this council, other Adventist leaders did desire a standard order of service. In 1906, H. M. J. Richards published *Church Order and Its Divine Origin and Importance*, and outlined a program that he believed Adventists should follow in their church services. H. M. J. Richards, *Church Order and Its Divine Origin and Importance* (Denver: Colorado Tract Society, 1906), 64–66. Richards' publication had limited circulation in comparison to Loughborough's book, however, and it was not until the 1920s and 1930s that Richards' view became dominant. Some local churches began printing weekly bulletins in the 1920s, which outlined the order of service for that particular church on that particular Sabbath. "The Suggestion Corner: Advertise the Meeting," *The Church Officers' Gazette* 10, no. 5 (May 1923): 16; "News Notes: [Church Bulletin Weekly]," *Columbia Union Visitor* (January 3, 1924): 4; Robert S. Fries, "Boston," *Atlantic Union Gleaner* (February 17, 1926): 2. In 1932, the first *Church Manual* standardized local church practice around the world with two suggested orders for service, one longer and the other shorter. Both of these program outlines are still followed by a large number of Adventists churches today. [J. L. McElhany], *Church Manual* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1932, 151–152; cf. Levterov, "Early Adventist Worship," 72–73).

2. George R. Knight, "Old Prophet, New Approaches: 45 Years of Crisis and Advance in Ellen White Studies," *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 17, no. 2 (2014): 99.

3. Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, "A Study of Church Government and Unity," n.p., (September 2016), 7–8.

4. Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 123–124.

5. Otilie Stafford, "On Mislaying the Past," *Spectrum* 15, no. 4 (December 1984): 31.

6. Bertha Dasher, "Leadership Positions: A Declining Opportunity?," *Spectrum* 15, no. 4 (December 1984): 35–37; Patrick Allen, "The Depression and the Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church," *Adventist Heritage* 11,

no. 2 (Fall 1986): 48–54; Bertha Dasher, “Women’s Leadership, 1915–1970: The Waning Years,” in *A Woman’s Place*, ed. Rosa Taylor Banks (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1992), 75–84; Kit Watts, “The Rise and Fall of Adventist Women in Leadership,” *Ministry* 68, no. 4 (April 1995): 6–10; Kit Watts, “Moving Away from the Table: A Survey of Historical Factors Affecting Women Leaders,” in *The Welcome Table*, eds. Patricia A. Habada and Rebecca Frost Brillhart (Langley Park, MD: TEAMPRESS, 1995), 45–59; Laura L. Vance, *Seventh-day Adventism in Crisis: Gender and Sectarian Change in an Emerging Religion* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

7. Watts, “Moving Away from the Table,” 54.

8. Some of the most significant works on this subject (in addition to those cited in footnote 6) include: John G. Beach, *Notable Women of Spirit: The Historical Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1976); Bert Haloviak, “The Adventist Heritage Calls for Ordination of Women,” *Spectrum* 16, no. 3 (August 1985): 52–60; Iris M. Yob, *The Church and Feminism: An Exploration of Common Ground* (Englewood, CO: Winsen Publications, 1988); Lourdes E. Morales-Gudmundsson, ed., *Women and the Church: The Feminine Perspective* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1995); Nancy Vyhmeister, ed., *Women in Ministry: Biblical & Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1998); Josephine Benton, *Called By God: Stories of Seventh-day Adventist Women Ministers*, rev. ed. (Lincoln: AdventSource, 2002); Beverly Beem and Ginger Hanks Harwood, “‘Your Daughters Shall Prophesy’: James White, Uriah Smith, and the ‘Triumphant Vindication of the Right of the Sisters’ to Preach,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 41–58; Beverly G. Beem and Ginger Hanks Harwood, “‘What about Paul?’ Early Adventists and the Preaching of ‘the Marys,’” *Spectrum* 38, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 25–30; Jan Barna, *Ordination of Women in Seventh-day Adventist Theology: A Study of Biblical Interpretations* (Belgrade, Serbia: Preporod, 2012); David Trim, “The Ordination of Women in Seventh-day Adventist Policy and Practice, up to 1972” (paper presented at the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, Linthicum Heights, MD, July 22–24, 2013), accessed May 2, 2017, <https://www.adventistarchives.org/the-ordination-of-women-in-seventh-day-adventist-policy-and-practice.pdf>; Denis Kaiser, “Setting Apart for the Ministry: Theory and Practice in Seventh-day Adventism (1850–1920),” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 51, no. 2 (Autumn 2013): 177–218; Laura Vance, “Gender,” in Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers, eds., *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 279–294; Ginger Hanks Harwood and Beverly Beem, “‘Not a Hand Bound; Not a Voice Hushed’: Ordination and Foundational Adventist Understandings of Women in Ministry,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 52, no. 2 (Autumn 2014): 235–273; Ginger Hanks Harwood and Beverly Beem, “‘Quench Not the Spirit’: Early Adventist Hermeneutics and Women’s Spiritual Leadership,” *Spectrum* 43, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 66–71; John W. Reeve, ed., *Women and Ordination: Biblical and Historical Studies* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 2015).

9. J. Caleb Clanton, *The Philosophy of Religion of Alexander Campbell* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), 2; cf. George R. Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth: The Development of Adventist Church Structure*, Adventist Heritage Series (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2006), 15–27.

10. As James White stated, “Those who drafted the form of organization adopted by S. D. Adventists labored to incorporate into it, as far as possible, the simplicity of expression and form found in the New Testament.” When White reminded Adventists in the early 1880s of this fact, he stressed, “The more of the spirit of the gospel manifested, and the more simple, the more efficient the system.” [James] W[White], “Organization and Discipline,” *RH* (January 4, 1881): 8.

11. James White clarified that the General Conference was to be organized as a means of “systematizing the[] labor” of Adventist preachers and controlling “all missionary labor in new fields.” [James White], “General Conference,” *RH* (April 28, 1863): 172.

12. John Byington and U. Smith, “Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *RH* (May 26, 1863): 204–206.

13. *Ibid.*

14. [White], “General Conference,” *RH* (April 28, 1863): 172.

15. State conferences typically ratified General Conference resolutions. A number were amended or rejected, however. Researchers can verify if a resolution was ratified, amended, or rejected, by comparing official General Conference minutes with official state conference minutes. Here are some examples: First, on March 12–13, 1870, the Battle Creek church voted to hold a Laodicean church trial (i.e., every member was put on trial) and give the General Conference Executive Committee the authority to settle each individual’s case. The General Conference session of 1870 voted to approve this request on March 15. The Michigan State Conference then ratified the General Conference vote on March 16. Authority was therefore delegated to the General Conference and the trial was soon carried out. J. N. Andrews, G. H. Bell, and Uriah Smith, *Defense of Eld. James White and Wife: The Battle Creek Church to the Churches and Brethren Scattered Abroad* (Battle Creek: Steam Press, 1870), 112–113; Jas. White and Uriah Smith, “Business Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists,” *RH* (March 22, 1870): 109; H. S. Gurney and Wm. C. Gage, “Michigan State Conference: Tenth Annual Session,” *RH* (March 22, 1870): 110, cf. Kevin M. Burton, “Cracking the Whip to Make a Perfect Church: The Unholy Cleansing of the ‘Adventist Temple’ in Battle Creek on April 6, 1870,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, forthcoming.

Second, on November 17, 1873, the General Conference adopted a resolution that endorsed G. I. Butler’s leadership philosophy-theology. W. H. Littlejohn opposed this stance on leadership and feared that it would be ratified by the state conferences. He explained his concern to Ellen White in a private letter and stated that the General Conference resolution was cautiously worded “lest their doctrine should prove too bold for general acceptance.” James White soon opposed Butler’s leadership doctrine and traveled to each state conference to make sure that these bodies did not ratify it. In the end, the Michigan State Conference and Battle Creek church were the only two bodies that did ratify the resolution—all others rejected it. Geo. I. Butler and U. Smith, “Business Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the S. D. A. General Conference,” *RH* (November 25, 1873): 190; Wolcott H. Littlejohn to Ellen G. White, October 26, 1874, White Estate Incoming Correspondence, EGWE-GC; E. H. Root and I. D. Van Horn, “Michigan Conference of S. D. Adventists: Thirteenth Annual Session,” *RH* (September 16, 1873): 110; [Seventh-day Adventist Church of Battle Creek, MI],



"Pledge of the Church at Battle Creek, and others, to the General Conference of S. D. Adventists, Nov. 14–18, 1873," WDF 453 #3, CAR; cf. Kevin M. Burton, "Centralized for Protection: George I. Butler and His Philosophy of One-Person Leadership," (master's thesis, Andrews University, 2015).

Third, on March 15, 1880, a special session of the General Conference adopted the following resolution:

*Resolved, That the local elders and deacons in our churches should be elected annually, such election to occur in each church at a time set by each State Conference, except in churches where dissatisfaction with the incumbent has been expressed by at least a respectable minority of the church. In such cases it shall be the duty of the church clerk to notify the Conference committee of such fact; and elections in such churches shall be deferred till proper help is provided by the committee.*

Though this was adopted by a General Conference session, it still needed to be ratified by the state conferences and local churches. The General Conference Committee reported the following in the *Review* in January 1881: "This recommendation of the General Conference was considered by nearly all our State Conferences during the past camp-meeting season, when sessions of these Conferences were held. Quite a number of them passed resolutions indorsing this action," General Conference Committee, "A Change of Church Officers," *RH* (January 4, 1881): 11. This report indicates that the General Conference resolution was only a "recommendation" even though it did not use that language. The 1881 report also reveals that the resolution was rejected by some state conferences. The following conferences ratified the resolution: Dakota, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Vermont. The following conferences rejected it: New England, New York, Quebec, and Upper Columbia. The Iowa State Conference amended the resolution by adding an appendix. Jas. White and U. Smith, "Business Proceedings of the Special Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists, March 11–15, 1880," *RH* (March 18, 1880): 187; S. B. Whitney and A. L. Dawson, "Dakota Conference," *RH* (October 21, 1880): 269; R. F. Andrews and N. F. Craig, "Illinois Conference," *RH* (September 30, 1880): 237; S. H. Lane and J. S. Shrock, "Indiana Conference," *RH* (October 14, 1880): 253–254; Smith Sharp and W. E. Dawson, "Kansas Conference: Sixth Annual Session, Held at Wakarusa, May 20–24, 1880," *RH* (June 10, 1880): 381; J. B. Goodrich and Timothy Bryant, "[Maine Conference]," *RH* (September 9, 1880): 188–189; J. Fargo and A. B. Oyen, "Michigan Conference," *RH* (October 14, 1880): 253; H. Grant and D. P. Curtis, "Minnesota Conference," *RH* (July 15, 1880): 61; D. M. Canright and J. B. Gregory, "Ohio Conference," *RH* (September 30, 1880): 238; B. L. Whitney and D. T. Fargo, "Pennsylvania Conference," *RH* (October 21, 1880): 269; A. S. Hutchins and C. E. Powell, "Vermont Conference," *RH* (September 30, 1880): 238; Geo. I. Butler and D. A. Robinson, "New England Conference," *RH* (September 16, 1880): 204–205; B. L. Whitney and E. W. Whitney, "New York Conference: Nineteenth Annual Session," *RH* (October 21, 1880): 269; James White and D. T. Bourdeau, "Organization of the S. D. A. Conference of the Province of Quebec," *RH* (September 2, 1880): 173; G. W. Colcord and Alonzo T. Jones, "Upper Co-

lumbia Conference Business Proceedings at the Milton, Oregon, Camp-meeting, May 20–31, 1880," *RH* (July 15, 1880): 61–62; Geo. I. Butler and Ira J. Hankins, "Iowa Conference," *RH* (June 24, 1880): 13–14).

16. [Emphasis is mine.] [White], "General Conference," *RH* (April 28, 1863): 172.

17. Researchers can analyze this system of checks and balances by comparing state conference minutes with local church record books. Unfortunately, most church record books are unavailable and church clerks were often sparse in their commentary. Nevertheless, one of the clearest examples that illustrates this point is local church adoption, rejection, or amendment of the recommended church covenant. In 1860, local churches were counseled to adopt the following covenant: "We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together, as a church, taking the name, Seventh-day Adventists, covenanting to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ." Most local churches did adopt this covenant, while some amended it and others rejected it entirely. The Ashfield, New South Wales, Australia, church, for example, modified the covenant slightly. Others, however, made significant changes or wrote their own covenant. On April 5, 1879, the Soliloquy, Virginia, Seventh-day Adventist Church organized and added various restrictions and promises to the standard covenant. Most notably, the church outlawed the usage of tobacco and alcohol and condemned the wearing of jewelry, artificials, bonnets, or feathers in hats in their covenant. They further promised to evangelize the world and maintain an active Sabbath school and Bible class. Similarly, in 1919, the Norfolk Island, Australia, church, adopted the standard covenant but added fifteen questions to it that must be asked to each potential member prior to their acceptance into the church. The Yarmouth, Maine, Seventh-day Adventist Church is an especially interesting example. This church organized in 1863 and adopted a unique covenant entirely unlike the standard suggestion. Perhaps the most significant aspect to note is that it intentionally, unlike the standard covenant, included all three members of the Trinity. The first part of the (long) covenant stated,

*We whose names are herein after recorded, situated in Yarmouth, Me. and vicinity, believing the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are inspired by God (2d Tim. 2.15) giving the doctrine and rules by which all men should be governed, and that we, by faith in Jesus Christ, have become the children of God (Gal. 3.24, 26) being regenerated and renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8.15, 16. Titus 3.5) and made to hope for eternal life through Jesus Christ, as his second appearing (Matt. 25.46. Phil. 3.20, 21. Rom. 2.7. Col. 3.4) which we believe to be now near even at the door, (Matt. 24.14, 32, 33. Dan. 2.44) And believing it our duty, as Christians, to live according to the requirements of the New Covenant, to observe and practice its order, its institutions and ordinances, We therefore Covenant together . . .*

Joseph Bates and Uriah Smith, "Doings of the Battle Creek Conference, Oct. 5 & 6, 1861," *RH* (October 8, 1861): 148; Seventh-day Adventist Church of Ashfield, New South Wales, Australia, "Record of Meetings," 1–2 (printed), WDF 285-e, CAR; Seventh-day Adventist Church of Soliloquy, Virginia, "Record Book, 1879–1905," Church Covenant Page, VT 000225,

CAR; Seventh-day Adventist Church of Norfolk Island, Australia, "Norfolk Island Church," [1–6], WDF 285-e, CAR; [Emphasis is mine.] Seventh-day Adventist Church of Yarmouth, Maine, "Record Book, 1863–[ ]," [5–8], VT 000325 ASC Vault, CAR.

18. United States Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1926*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1929), 25–26.

19. James White and A. B. Oyen, "Sixteenth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists," *RH* (October 4, 1877): 106.

20. Burton, "Centralized for Protection," 146–157, 169–172.

21. In December 1871, the tenth annual session of the General Conference adopted a resolution that listed ten different theological beliefs. They did not adopt these beliefs as a creed or statement of beliefs, however, but merely thanked God that He had revealed these truths to them. James White and U. Smith, "Business Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," *RH* (January 2, 1872): 20.

22. James White and U. Smith, "Seventeenth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists," *RH* (October 17, 1878): 121.

23. Jas. White and U. Smith, "General Conference of S. D. Adventists: Eighteenth Annual Session, Nov. 7, 1879," *RH* (November 20, 1879): 161.

24. Geo. I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, "General Conference: Twenty-first Annual Session," *RH* (December 26, 1882): 787.

25. First issue, of the eighteen-part series: [W. H. Littlejohn], "The S. D. A. Church Manual," *RH* (June 5, 1883): 361–362.

26. Geo. I. Butler and A. B. Oyen, "General Conference Proceedings: Twenty-second Annual Session," *RH* (November 20, 1883): 733. It is worth noting that Ellen White was present during the discussion of the proposed Church Manual. W. C. White to Mary White, November 13, 1883, White Estate Incoming Correspondence, EGWE-GC.

27. In 1909, Ellen White stated, "The city of Portland was remarkably blessed by God in the early days of the message. At that time able ministers preached the truth of the soon coming of the Lord, giving the first warning of the near approach of the end of all things. In the city of Portland, *the Lord ordained me as His messenger, and here my first labors were given to the cause of present truth.*" [Emphasis is mine.] Ellen G. White, *An Appeal*, October 19, 1909, LT 138, 1909; cf. Ellen G. White, *An Appeal to Our Churches Throughout the United States*, MS 003, 1910; Ellen G. White, "An Appeal to Our Churches Throughout the United States," *RH* (May 18, 1911): 3.

28. Vance, "Gender," 286.

29. Laura L. Vance has noted that Ellen White's "later writings ([late] 1870s–1915) more frequently encouraged Adventist women to engage in 'public gospel work,' and Adventist employers to treat female employees well and pay them equitably." Vance, *Seventh-day Adventism in Crisis*, 180; cf. Denis Fortin, "Ellen White, Women in Ministry, and the Ordination of Women," in *Women and Ordination*, ed. Reeve, 102. Jerry Moon has analyzed many of these writings and concluded, "The list of roles open to women in gospel ministry embraces a wide range of job descriptions and vocational options, including preaching, teaching, pastoral care, evangelistic work, literature evangelism, Sabbath school leadership, chaplaincy, counseling, and church administration." Jerry Moon, "'A

Power That Exceeds That of Men': Ellen G. White on Women in Ministry," in *Women in Ministry*, ed. Vyhmeister, 203.

30. In the 1880s, Adventist missionaries argued with some men on Pitcairn Island that "had withdrawn from the church" and "would not attend the meetings as long as the 'woman [Mary McCoy] continued.'" These men believed "that if they attended the meeting while a woman taught, the word of God would be broken; for a woman must not 'usurp authority over a man.'" Mary McCoy lamented, "So the greater part of the men absented themselves, and the women who attended, did not come with a right spirit." Two days later, in another meeting, the topic was debated, and those supportive of women teaching men argued, "Does Mrs. White teach?" They stated emphatically, "'Yes,' and no one dares to condemn her work and labor of love." This was undoubtedly not a singular occurrence. J. O. Corliss, "The Pacific Islands as a Mission Field," *RH* (February 21, 1888): 118–119.

31. Josephine Benton published a partial list of Seventh-day Adventist women ministers from 1884 to 1975. Benton, *Called by God*, 155–162. Another partial list appeared in Habada and Brillhart, eds., *The Welcome Table*, 359–381. More recently, Andrews University Seminary Studies and Pioneer Memorial Church sponsored Sarah Burton to compile another list made from official conference minutes with included source references. Her partial list runs from 1869 to 1973, but it is much less thorough after 1905. Though this list has not yet been published, the author has a copy in his possession. [Sarah E. Burton], "Women Ministers and Missionaries," n.p., [2014].

32. Terrie Aamodt, "Van Horn, Isaac Doren and Adelia P. (Patten)," in Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, eds., *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2013), 532; Jas. White and U. Smith, "Business Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists," *RH* (February 14, 1871): 68.

33. E. B. Saunders, "Report of the N.Y. and Pa. Conference," *RH* (October 12, 1869): 126.

34. Geo. I. Butler and U. Smith, "General Conference Proceedings: Twenty-fourth Annual Session (Concluded)," *RH* (December 8, 1885): 760.

35. United States Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1910), 23; S. N. Haskell, "Ministerial Licenses," *RH – Supplement* (October 23, 1879): 2; Kaiser, "Setting Apart for the Ministry," 202–203.

36. Beem and Harwood, "'Your Daughters Shall Prophesy,'" 41–58; Beem and Harwood, "What about Paul?," 25–30; Harwood and Beem, "'Not a Hand Bound,'" 235–273; Harwood and Beem, "'Quench Not the Spirit,'" 66–71.

37. J. B. Frisbie is the only known Adventist to affirm the position of deaconess prior to 1879. J. B. [Frisbie], "Deacons," *RH* (July 31, 1856): 102; cf. Nancy J. Vyhmeister, "Deaconesses in History and in the Seventh-day Adventist Church," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 147–149. Though most Adventist leaders did not acknowledge Phoebe to be a deaconess in their own writing, Uriah Smith did reprint an article that stated this. J. A. Mowatt, "Women as Preachers and Lecturers: [Reprinted from the *Portadown News*]" *RH* (July 30, 1861): 65–66; cf. [Reprinted from the *Golden Rule*],

"On Keeping Silence," *RH* (December 16, 1858) 27.

38. Note that all of these writers affirm that women can speak publicly, but did not extend to them a position of authority within the church aside from the prophetic office. J[ames] W[hite], "Paul Says So," *RH* (September 10, 1857): 152; D. Hewitt, "Let Your Women Keep Silence in the Churches," *RH* (October 15, 1857): 190; J[ames] W[hite], "Unity and Gifts of the Church, No. 4," *RH* (January 7, 1858): 68–69; B. F. Robbins, "To the Female Disciples in the Third Angel's Message," *RH* (December 8, 1859): 21–22; B. F. Robbins, "The Promise of the Father. Luke XXIV, 49," *RH* (January 5, 1860): 53; S. C. Welcome, "Shall the Women Keep Silence in the Churches?," *RH* (February 23, 1860): 109–110; "Questions by Bro. McDonald," *RH* (April 22, 1862): 164; M. W. Howard, "Woman as a Co-Laborer," *RH* (August 18, 1868): 133; Mary Van Horn, "Letters: From Sr. Van Horn," *RH* (August 10, 1869): 55; M. M. Osgood, "Extracts from the Writings of the Learned, No. 2," *RH* (January 24, 1871): 47; "Shall Women Speak in the Church?," [Reprinted from the *Morning Star*] *RH* (March 14, 1871): 99; I. Fetterhoof, "Women Laboring in Public," [Reprinted from the *Earnest Christian*], *RH* (August 8, 1871) 58–59.

39. [Emphasis is mine.] [Uriah Smith], "'Let Your Women Keep Silence in the Churches,'" *RH* (June 26, 1866): 28.

40. D. T. Bourdeau, "Spiritual Gifts," *RH* (December 2, 1862): 5–6.

41. [J. H. Waggoner], "Woman's Place in the Gospel," *Signs of the Times* [hereafter *ST*] (December 19, 1878): 380; cf. "Wanted, Men and Women," *ST* (December 16, 1880): 566; "[Women Needed in the Home]," *ST* (December 30, 1880): 571.

42. Vyhmeister, "Deaconesses in History," 149.

43. S. N. Haskell to James White, December 13, 1878, White Estate Incoming Correspondence, EGWE-GC; cf. Vance, *Seventh-day Adventism in Crisis*, 197.

44. E. G. White, "Address and Appeal, Setting Forth the Importance of Missionary Work," *RH* (January 2, 1879): 1; cf. Kaiser, "Setting Apart for the Ministry," 189–190.

45. In 1880, Ellen White was about to preach to a large congregation when someone passed a note to S. N. Haskell, who was with her, that quoted a "certain text prohibiting women speaking in public." Haskell quickly took the preacher's stand and, as Ellen White remarked, "took up the matter in a brief manner and very clearly expressed the meaning of the apostle's words." It is evident, therefore, that White supported Haskell's view regarding women in ministry. Ellen G. White to James White, April 1, 1880, LT 017a, 1880.

46. See footnote 37. George R. Knight, "Early Seventh-day Adventists and Ordination, 1844–1863," in *Women in Ministry*, ed. Vyhmeister, 109; Kaiser, "Setting Apart for the Ministry," 208.

47. J. N. A[ndrews], "May Women Speak in Meeting?," *RH* (January 2, 1879): 4.

48. W[hite], "Paul Says So," 152; W[hite], "Unity and Gifts of the Church, No. 4," 68–69.

49. [Emphasis is mine.] J[ames] W[hite], "Women in the Church," *RH* (May 29, 1879): 172.

50. W. H. L[ittlejohn], "The Church Manual," *RH* (July 3, 1883): 426.

51. These women included: Sarah A. H. Lindsay, Ellen G. White, Julia Lee,

Ellen S. Lane, Roby Tuttle, Elbra Durfee, Anna Fulton, Julia Owen, Hattie Enoch, Lizzie Post, Libbie Collins, Libbie Fulton, A. M. Johnson, Ida W. Ballenger, Helen L. Morse, and Day Conkling. [Burton], "Women Ministers and Missionaries."

52. Cf. S. N. Haskell, "What We Need," *RH* (June 19, 1879): 195; S. N. Haskell, "Onward," *RH* (January 1, 1880): 12; E. G. White, "Christ's Commission," *RH* (June 10, 1880): 369; J. W[hite], "All Branches of the Work," *RH* (August 5, 1880): 104; G. B. Starr, "Does Paul Contradict Himself?," *RH* (December 16, 1880): 388; N. J. Bowers, "May Women Publicly Labor in the Cause of Christ?," *RH* (June 14, 1881): 372; Brian E. Strayer, *J. N. Loughborough: The Last of the Adventist Pioneers* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald, 2014), 361–362.

53. S. N. Haskell and U. Smith, "The General Conference: Twentieth Annual Session, Dec. 1, 1881," *RH* (December 6, 1881): 360.

54. Trim, "The Ordination of Women," 15–17.

55. S. N. Haskell and U. Smith, "General Conference: Business Proceedings (Continued)," *RH* (December 20, 1881): 392. The official General Conference minutes were printed in the *Review and Herald*, but also appeared unaltered as a printed tract. *Report of the General Conference and Other Anniversary Meetings of the Seventh-day Adventists, Held at the Tabernacle, in the City of Battle Creek, Michigan, Dec. 1–19, 1881* (Battle Creek: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1882), 8.

56. Trim, "The Ordination of Women," 14–16.

57. The case of Lulu Wightman is worthy of note. Wightman formally began her ministry in 1897 when she received a ministerial license from the New York Conference. A. E. Place and Wm. A. Westworth, "New York Conference Proceedings," *RH* (November 9, 1897): 717. After four years of ministerial labor, Wightman sought ordination to the gospel ministry. Significantly, she requested ministerial ordination through her local conference, not the General Conference. Wightman did not need permission from the General Conference since the 1881 resolution was indirectly adopted. Nevertheless, when her case was considered at the 1901 New York Conference meetings, it was rejected. R. A. Underwood, the union president, "and others" were in favor of ordaining Wightman, but G. B. Thompson, the local conference president, and A. G. Daniells, the General Conference president, were opposed. Thompson and Daniells's recorded response is telling—they apparently did not state that ordaining a woman was against policy, but reasoned that "they felt . . . that a woman could not properly be ordained—just now at least." Haloviak, "The Adventist Heritage," 53–56; Bert Haloviak, "A Place at the Table: Women and the Early Years," in *The Welcome Table*, eds. Habada and Brillhart, 27–32; cf. T. E. Bowen, "New York Conference," *RH* (September 24, 1901): 626. Therefore, these details provide some support for my suggestion that church policy was open to the ordination of women to the gospel ministry prior to 1930.

58. James White, "Report from Bro. White," *RH* (August 13, 1867): 136. Francis Nelson praised Louisa Strong in the *Review* a short time later, stating, "I would say to all who may avail themselves of the benefit of her labors, that sister Strong was a great help to the sisters just starting out in the health and dress reforms, in which they have made good progress." Francis Nelson, "Thanks for Labor," *RH* (December 17, 1867): 16.

59. Kaiser, "Setting Apart for the Ministry," 197–198.

60. [Littlejohn], "The Church Manual," *RH* (July 3, 1883): 426.

61. E. G. White, "The Duty of the Minister and the People," *RH* (July 9, 1895): 434. Denis Kaiser has demonstrated that "by the 1890s, Ellen White recommended the ordination of people, both male and female, for various lines of ministry. Thus, she emphasized that ordination was not an act linked solely to the clergy, but she envisioned ordination as a practice that set apart and committed people to various specific lines of ministry such as deaconesses, missionaries, and medical physicians." Kaiser, "Setting Apart for the Ministry," 213–214, 218.

62. Vyhmeister, "Deaconesses in History," 150; Arthur N. Patrick, "The Ordination of Deaconesses," *RH* (January 16, 1886): 18–19; Douglas Morgan, *Lewis C. Sheafe: Apostle to Black America*, Adventist Pioneer Series, ed. George R. Knight (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2010), 276; H. F. Phelps, "Minnesota," *RH* (March 1, 1898): 145; C. H. Castle, "What We Are Doing," *Pacific Union Recorder* (April 23, 1903): 4; Anna M. Nicholas, "Toledo," *The Welcome Visitor* (March 30, 1904): 2; H. H. Burkholder, "Wilmington," *The Welcome Visitor* (July 20, 1904): 2; W. H. Green, "Second Church, Pittsburg, PA," *Atlantic Union Gleaner* (January 31, 1906): 54; "[Elder Burkholder]," *The Welcome Visitor* (April 25, 1906): 4; F. H. DeVinney, "Report of Labor," *The New York Indicator* (November 20, 1907): [2]; W. A. Westworth, "Southern New England," *Atlantic Union Gleaner* (March 4, 1908): 75; W. E. Bidwell, "Locust Point, Medina, O.," *Columbia Union Visitor* (April 29, 1908): 3; "Northern Illinois," *Lake Union Herald* (May 25, 1910): 7; B. W. Spire, "Among the Churches," *Field Tidings* (June 25, 1919): 3; F. A. Detamore, "First Fruits in Sarawak," *Asiatic Division Outlook* (September 1 and 15, 1921): 5; "News Notes," *Southwestern Union Record* (September 27, 1921): 4; F. A. Detamore, "First Fruits in Sarawak," *RH* (December 8, 1921): 11; Kasim Ali, "Nowshera Bath, Punjab," *Eastern Tidings* (June 1, 1923): 8; cf. "Are They Not Important Now?," *ST* (January 24, 1900): 16. It is important to note that Adventist periodicals noted the ordination of local church officers (elders, deacons, and deaconesses) far less frequently than the ordination of ministers. The dozens of specific examples documented in periodicals thus represents a meager percentage of the actual number of women ordained to this office. Furthermore, several other sources mention that deaconesses were elected in numerous Adventist churches around the world, but say nothing specifically about ordination. Since it was standard procedure to ordain newly elected officers in the local churches it is possible that these women were also ordained. Here are a few representative examples: G. B. Thompson, "Rochester," *The New York Indicator* (January 24, 1900): 1; Mae Dart, "Lexington," *Southern Union Worker* (January 5, 1911): 4; "East Pennsylvania," *Columbia Union Visitor* (March 22, 1911): 5; J. Gershom Dasent, "Decatur, Ala.," *The Gospel Herald* 9, no. 2 (February 1913): 1; "[Redondo]," *Pacific Union Recorder* (September 7, 1916): 8; Geo. H. Skinner, "Port Arthur Church," *Western Canadian Tidings* (February 14, 1923): 7.

63. United States Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, vol. 2, 7.

64. H. E. Rogers, "Church Elders, Attention!," *RH* (February 7, 1907): 30.

65. H. E. Rogers, "Report to Bureau of the Census," *RH* (April 21, 1927): 24.

66. The word "membership" should not be confused with "church

membership," which is the topic of the paragraph that immediately follows this sentence. The entire paragraph in which this statement appears reads as follows:

*Each conference has an executive committee for the conduct of its business along the lines of different departments of the church's work. The presidents of the state conferences and chairmen of state departments are ex officio members of the executive committee of their union conferences, and the presidents of the union conferences, together with the chairmen of union departments, constitute the executive committee of the general conference. Membership in the conferences or the ministry is open to both sexes, although there are very few female ministers.*

United States Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, vol. 2, 23. It is worth noting that people did read these census statements and that other authors quoted this particular clause in their work. Rulon S. Howells, *His Many Mansions: A compilation of Christian Beliefs . . .* (New York: Greystone Press, 1940), 39.

67. [Emphasis is mine.] United States Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, vol. 2, 23.

68. James E. Anderson, *Public Policymaking: An Introduction*, 8th ed. (Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2015), 7.

69. United States Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1916*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), 22; United States Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1926*, vol. 2, 26.

70. *Manual for Ministers* (Takoma Park: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1925), 2–9.

71. Gilbert M. Valentine, *The Prophet and the Presidents* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 2011), 73–75.

72. *Seventh-day Adventist Year Book of Statistics for 1889 . . .* (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1889), 132–133; *Seventh-day Adventist Year Book for 1890 . . .* (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, [1890]), 115–118; "General Conference Committee Minutes for 1890," n.p., (1890), 21, accessed June 2, 2017, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1890.pdf>. General Conference sessions were held in the late summer, fall or early winter from the 12th annual session in 1873 to the 28th annual session in 1889. Beginning with the first biennial session of the General Conference in 1891, the regular meetings have convened in the spring or summer so as not to conflict with the Fall Council.

73. Department of Education, *Lessons in Denominational History* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1942), 320; *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 1996 ed., s.v. "Annual Council."

74. Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire*, *America in the World*, eds. Sven Beckert and Jeremi Suri (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1–7. Matthew McCullough, *The Cross of War: Christian Nationalism and U.S. Expansion in the Spanish-American War*, *Studies in American Thought and Culture*, ed. Paul S. Boyer (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).



75. Lewis L. Gould, *The First Modern Clash Over Federal Power: Wilson Versus Hughes in the Presidential Election of 1916* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016), 130–132.
76. Alison Collis Greene, *No Depression in Heaven: The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the Transformation of Religion in the Delta* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 48.
77. Robert E. Wright and Thomas W. Zeiler, eds., *Guide to U.S. Economic Policy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2014), 137.
78. Glenn Porter, *The Rise of Big Business, 1860–1920*, 3rd ed., The American History Series, eds. John Hope Franklin and A. S. Eisenstadt (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2006), 93–94.
79. Amanda Porterfield, *Corporate Spirit: The Long History Behind American Corporate Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
80. George R. Knight, “The Role of Union Conferences in Relation to Higher Authorities,” *Spectrum Online*, October 7, 2016, accessed May 19, 2017, <http://spectrummagazine.org/article/2016/10/07/role-union-conferences-relation-higher-authorities>.
81. Benjamin McArthur, A. G. Daniells: *Shaper of Twentieth-Century Adventism*, Adventist Pioneer Series, ed. George R. Knight (Nampa: Pacific Press, 2015), 105.
82. Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa: Pacific Press, 2000), 317, 330. It is worth noting that Ellen White, as well as other pioneers, such as J. N. Loughborough and C. C. Crisler, began to stress the importance of simplicity in organization as the General Conference grew in size and power in 1889 and 1901. A. Leroy Moore, “Kingly Power,” in Fortin and Moon, eds. *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 920; Ellen G. White to the Brethren of the General Conference, December 19, 1892, LT 032, 1892; J. N. Loughborough, *Rise and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists . . .* (Battle Creek: General Conference Association, 1892), 323–324; Barry David Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure: Past, Present, and Future*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 15 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1989), 201–217; J. N. Loughborough, *The Church: Its Organization, Order, and Discipline* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1907), 124–125, 141–143, 156; C. C. Crisler, *Organization: Its Character, Purpose, Place, and Development in the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Takoma Park: Review and Herald, 1938), 14, 87, 106, 115, 187, 192–193, 212–213.
83. Department of Education, *Lessons in Denominational History*, 320.
84. Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White . . .* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1915), 125.
85. Harwood and Beem, “‘Not a Hand Bound,’” 255–257; Gary Land, *Historical Dictionary of the Seventh-day Adventists*, 2nd ed., Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements, ed. Jon Woronoff (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), xxiv.
86. Timothy E. W. Gloege, *Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 10.
87. Paul Earnest McGraw, “Born in Zion? The Margins of Fundamentalism and the Definition of Seventh-day Adventism,” (PhD diss., George Washington University, 2004), 2.
88. Some recent works illustrate some aspects of Adventist-Fundamentalist relations. Michael W. Campbell, “The 1919 Bible Conference and Its Significance for the Seventh-day Adventist History and Theology,” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2007); Denis Kaiser, “Trust and Doubt: Perceptions of Divine Inspiration in Seventh-day Adventist History (1880 – 1930),” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2016).
89. I. A. Crane, “Are You Really a Fundamentalist?,” *Southwestern Union Record*, (March 23, 1926): 2; I. A. Crane, “Are You Really a Fundamentalist?,” *Columbia Union Visitor*, (April 22, 1926): 8.
90. James Lamar McElhany, “Are Seventh-day Adventists Christians?,” *ST* (May 10, 1927): 4; Varner J. Johns, “Gates of Brass,” *ST*, (April 7, 1931): 14; Robert Leo Odom, “Why We See Protestantism in Eclipse,” *The Watchman Magazine* (September 1931): 8; W. H. Branson, “Loyalty in an Age of Doubt,” *The Ministry* 6, no. 10 (October 1933): 3; F. D. N[ichol], “Are We Justified in Proselyting?,” *RH* (January 23, 1936): 3; Carlyle B. Haynes, “What Do You Know About Seventh-day Adventists?,” *ST* (November 28, 1939): 4; Carlyle B. Haynes, “What Do You Know About Seventh-day Adventists?,” *The Canadian Watchman* (February 1940): 8.
91. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism & Gender, 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 56.
92. Randall Balmer, “American Fundamentalism: The Ideal of Femininity,” in *Fundamentalism and Gender*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 48–49, 53.
93. Vance, *Seventh-day Adventism in Crisis*, 115.
94. Cf. J. Gordon Melton, “Critiquing Cults: An Historical Perspective,” in *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America*, vol. 1, eds. Eugene V. Gallagher and W. Michael Ashcraft (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 127.
95. Wm. C. Irvine, *Heresies Exposed . . .* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1921), 154; cf. H. F. D., “Seventh-Day [sic] Adventist ‘Heresies,’” *Present Truth* (September 30, 1926): 10.
96. This work was originally published in 1938. Jan Karel van Baalen, *The Chaos of Cults: A Study of Present-Day Isms*, Rev. Ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1952), 196–197, 211.
97. H. M. S. Richards, *Feed My Sheep* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958), 352–353.
98. C. G. Bellah, “Getting a Minister’s Order,” *Central Union Outlook* (December 3, 1912): 2; [A. L.] K[ing], “False Statements Refuted,” *Signs of the Times Australia* (September 3, 1934): 6.
99. “Adventist Founder Dies,” *Northern Union Reaper* (July 20, 1915): 3.
100. S. H. Lane, “Indiana,” *RH* (March 24, 1903): 19.
101. United States Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1936*, vol. 2, part 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941), 27.
102. Everett Dick, *Founders of the Message* (Takoma Park: Review and Herald, 1938), 9. It is interesting to note that Dick was unable to publish an academic historical monograph for the church in the first part of the

twentieth-century. As Gary Land states, “The leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference preferred the apologetic approaches” to their history and would not allow Dick “to address such matters as the ill health of James and Ellen White and the shut door doctrine.” It was for this reason that Dick prefaced *Founders of the Message* with this statement: “I make no claim that the volume is a critical, scientific history, but have frankly attempted to produce a popular work.” *Ibid.*, 9–10; Gary Land, “Foreword,” in Everett N. Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1994), vii–viii; cf. Jonathan M. Butler and Ronald L. Numbers, “Introduction,” in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), xvi.

103. Merlin D. Burt, “Bibliographic Essay on Publications About Ellen G. White,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, eds. Fortin and Moon, 165–166.

104. J. N. Loughborough, *The Prophetic Gift in the Gospel Church*, The Bible Students’ Library, vol. 164 (Oakland: Pacific Press, 1901), 44–48.

105. J. N. Loughborough, “The Study of the Testimonies—No. 4,” *Daily Bulletin of the General Conference*, (January 31 and February 1, 1893), 58–59; J. N. Loughborough, “The Prophetic Gift,” *RH* (July 18, 1899): 454.

106. J. N. Loughborough, *Rise and Progress*, 70–74, 91ff; J. N. Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement: Its Rise and Progress* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1905), 145–147, 182–183, 202–203.

107. Carlyle B. Haynes, “Are Prophets Essential to the Church To-Day?,” *ST* (February 4, 1919): 13.

108. V. P. Hulse, “To Keep Thee in the Way,” *North Pacific Union Gleaner* (June 15, 1926): 1.

109. “Divine Leadership All the Way,” *Inter-American Division Messenger* (November 1927): 1.

110. [Emphasis is mine.] “God’s Special Messenger,” *The Church Officers’ Gazette* 26, no. 4 (April 1939): 28–29.

111. [Emphasis is mine.] A. W. Peterson, “Where There Is No Vision the People Perish,” *Youth’s Instructor* (October 17, 1944): 15.

112. Though he has incorrectly attributed this version of the story to Loughborough, Ronald Graybill has astutely observed that this story “helps to explain why [Ellen White’s] prophetic gift never translated into any belief that women in general might be fitted for leadership roles in the church and why to this day the central church leadership has refused to approve the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.” Ronald Graybill, “Prophet,” in *Ellen Harmon White*, eds. Aamodt, Land, and Numbers, 81. Though Loughborough did not connect the Foy-Foss-Harmon story with gender, Uriah Smith did make this association in 1866, but only in reference to Foss and Harmon—he never mentioned Foy. Smith’s statement was not remembered or repeated, however. The only person prior to 1935 to reference Smith was W. C. White, Ellen White’s son. When White cited Smith’s 1866 statement, however, he intentionally excluded the comments about gender. White did not accept the gender myth or even perpetuate Loughborough’s version of the story. He did not mention William Foy, utilize the phrase, “the weakest of the weak,” or make any connections with gender. [Uriah Smith], “The Visions—Objections Answered,” *RH* (June 12, 1866): 10; William C. White, “Sketches and Memories of James and Ellen G. White,” *RH*

(March 14, 1935): 10.

113. First, Delbert Baker has demonstrated that William Foy did not refuse to share his visions, but rather continued to serve God his entire life. Delbert W. Baker, *The Unknown Prophet*, rev. ed. (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2013). This disrupts that causality of the narrative: God did not choose Foy first, then reluctantly turn to Hazen Foss, and finally settle on Ellen Harmon. Second, there is no evidence from the 1840s to suggest that Foy, Foss, and Harmon all had the same vision. In 1866, Uriah Smith did claim that Foss had the same vision as Ellen Harmon, but he made no mention of Foy. The next documented moment in which this topic arose came in 1890, when Ellen Harmon White wrote a private letter and said that Foss told her that he had seen the same vision that she had received. White did not endorse or deny Foss’s purported claim, however—she simply repeated it. [Smith], “The Visions—Objections Answered,” *RH* (June 12, 1866): 10; Ellen White to Mary Foss, December 22, 1890, LT 037, 1890. Third, Ellen White never claimed, or affirmed, that she was God’s last choice and that God would have preferred a man to be His prophet. Though William Foy, Hazen Foss, and Ellen Harmon were all real people who had visions, the connections that have been made between the three of them lack historical merit. “Did God Choose Ellen G. White to Be [a] Prophet Only Because Two Men Refused His Calling?,” Center for Adventist Research, September 1, 2015, accessed May 2, 2017, <https://askthecenter.freshdesk.com/support/solutions/articles/6000054387-did-god-choose-ellen-g-white-to-be-prophet-only-because-two-men-refused-his-calling->

freshdesk.com/support/solutions/articles/6000054387-did-god-choose-ellen-g-white-to-be-prophet-only-because-two-men-refused-his-calling-.

114. John R. Rice, *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Women Preachers: Significant Questions for Honest Christian Women Settled by the Word of God* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1941), 58.

115. *Constitution, By-Laws, and Working Policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek: Autumn Council, 1926).

116. [Emphasis is mine.] *Constitution, By-Laws, and Working Policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek: Autumn Council, 1930), 71.

117. [Emphasis is in original.] Anderson, *Public Policymaking*, 7.

118. “Questions and Answers,” *The Central Union Outlook* (September 12, 1922): 6.

119. W. H. Branson and M. E. Kern, “Report of Committee on Constitution and Working Policy,” *RH* (June 19, 1930): 234.

120. [McElhany], *Church Manual*, 139.

121. Though I strongly disagree with his analysis and conclusions, Peter Hitchens has also recognized this point. Peter Hitchens, *A Hidden Shadow: An Investigation Into the Church Manual* (Anaconda, MT: Bob Vun Kannon, 1993). George R. Knight and Barry D. Oliver argue that this concept of unity originated in response to the 1901 General Conference session. George R. Knight, “The Role of Union Conferences”; Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure*, 317n2, 341.

122. [Emphasis is in original.] “The New Church Manual,” *RH* (June 2, 1932): 527.

123. During the Fundamentalist era women were sidelined in many conservative Christian assemblies and ministries. The women’s missions movement began to decline in the 1920s and about this time women were barred from

management positions in the Moody Bible Institute and forbidden to take classes on preaching. Tyrrell, *Reforming the World*, 227; Gloege, *Guaranteed Pure*, 125–126, 160. “In 1930 the Independent Fundamental Churches in America explicitly eliminated women as voting members.” This organization, formed in 1924 as the American Conference of Undenominational Churches, had allowed women to serve as pastors, but after 1930 they became “almost a nonentity as far as formal activity was concerned.” Bendroth, *Fundamentalism & Gender*, 63.

124. United States Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1936*, vol. 2, part 1, 29.

125. Allen, “The Depression and the Role of Women,” 53. According to Allen one female pastor was added in 1935, but he did not specify how long she held that position.

126. [McElhany], *Church Manual*, 34.

127. *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 18th ed. ([Silver Spring]: Secretariat of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), 78–79. Though the *Church Manual* did not allow for the ordination of deaconesses until 2010, several Adventist ministers ordained deaconesses anyway in the late twentieth-century. Nancy J. Vyhmeister, “Deaconesses in History and in the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 151; Ruth de Graaff, “Blossburg Deaconesses are Properly Ordained,” *Columbia Union Visitor* (October 15, 1986): 6.

128. E. G. White, “The Duty of the Minister and the People,” *RH* (July 9, 1895): 434; This statement has been republished several times in various periodicals, presumably by those in favor of ordaining women to at least the office of deaconess. E. G. White, “A Working Church,” *The Canadian Union Messenger* (May 30, 1911): 86; E. G. White, “A Working Church,” *Northern Union Reaper* (February 21, 1911): 2; E. G. White, “A Working Church,” *Southern Union Worker* (March 2, 1911): 65; E. G. White, “A Working Church,” *Australasian Record* (March 9, 1914): 2; “Council to Workers,” *Columbia Union Visitor* (May 18, 1933): 2; Ellen G. White, “The Duty of the Minister and the People,” *Southwestern Union Record* (May 16, 1934): 2; “A Broader Dorcas Work,” *The Church Officers’ Gazette* 36, no. 10 (October 1949): 22; “A Broader Dorcas Work,” *The Church Officers’ Gazette* 37, no. 6 (June 1950): 22; Ordell R. Rees, “Northern Union Conference Gateway to Service: Dorcas and the Church,” *Northern Union Outlook* (February 28, 1956): 3; R. A. Pohan, “Dorcas Activities in North Borneo,” *Far Eastern Division Outlook* (March 1956): 9; R. A. Pohan, “Dorcas Activities in North Borneo,” *The Messenger* 6, no. 2 (March–April 1956): 6.

129. Trim, “The Ordination of Women,” 17–18.

130. Ellen G. White, *Pastoral Ministry* (Silver Spring: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1995), 75, 224. Several Adventists have intentionally extracted this statement from Ellen White’s article in their publications. S. T. Shadel, “Laymen’s Missionary Movement,” *Lake Union Herald* (March 17, 1926): 7; P. T. Jackson, “The Master’s Example,” *Lake Union Herald* (October 29, 1946): 4; “A Work for Women,” *Pacific Union Recorder* (March 27, 1950): 11.

131. Vance, *Seventh-day Adventism in Crisis*, 172–178.

132. Allen, “The Depression and the Role of Women,” 52.

133. This statement appeared in the 1906, 1916, and 1926 Federal censuses of religious bodies, but was removed in the 1936 statement on polity. United States Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1926*, vol. 2, 26; United States Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1936*, vol. 2, part 1, 29.

134. Ava M. Covington, *They Also Served: Stories of Pioneer Women of the Advent Movement* (Takoma Park: Review and Herald, 1940), 83–104.

135. G. W. Colcord and F. M. T. Simonson, “Quarterly Report of the Ill. T. and M. Society,” *RH* (February 8, 1877): 43; [Uriah Smith], “The Biblical Institute,” *RH* (November 22, 1877): 164; Ex. Com. Gen. T. & M. S., “Tract and Missionary Institute,” *RH* (November 28, 1878): 176; [Uriah Smith], “Tract and Missionary Institute,” *RH* (January 2, 1879): 4; “Constitution and By-laws of the American Health and Temperance Association,” *RH – Supplement* (January 9, 1879): 2; B. L. Whitney, “Wellsville, N. Y., Institute,” *RH* (February 20, 1879): 63; D. M. Canright, “Ohio T. and M. Institute,” *RH* (January 29, 1880): 74; [Uriah Smith], “The Institute at Battle Creek,” *RH* (February 26, 1880): 136; D. P. Curtis, “The Minnesota T. and M. Institute,” *RH* (April 15, 1880): 253; Geo. I. Butler, “Tract and Missionary Institute in Iowa,” *RH* (September 23, 1880): 219; R. F. Andrews and N. F. Craig, “Illinois Conference,” *RH* (September 30, 1880): 237; T. M. Steward and A. A. John, “Illinois T. and M. Institute,” *RH* (January 18, 1881): 44; W. W. Conklin, “Institute in Dist. No. 4, Iowa,” *RH* (January 25, 1881): 60; R. F. Andrews and F. A. Lawrence, “Illinois Conference,” *RH* (September 27, 1881): 220; cf. “Literary Notices: Robert’s Rules of Order,” *Health Reformer* 12, no. 4 (April 1877): 126.

136. “Editorial Notes,” *RH* (January 2, 1879): 5; S. Brownsberger, “Students and Teachers, Attention,” *RH* (July 24, 1879): 36.

137. Uriah Smith, *Key to Smith’s Diagram of Parliamentary Rules . . .* (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1881); W. H. [Littlejohn], “The Church Manual,” *RH* (September 18, 1883): 602.

138. It is important to note that the word “dispose” does not mean reject—it means to take action. As clear from the context of this statement, resolutions were disposed of by direct or indirect adoption or rejection. Smith, *Key to Smith’s Diagram of Parliamentary Rules*, 5; cf. Henry M. Robert, *Pocket Manual of Rules of Order for Deliberative Assemblies . . .* (Chicago: S. C. Griggs and Company, 1879), 28§7.

139. Robert, *Pocket Manual*, 45§19; Smith, *Smith’s Diagram*, 13–14.

140. Robert, *Pocket Manual*, 53§21; Smith, *Smith’s Diagram*, 16–17.

141. Robert, *Pocket Manual*, 59§24; Smith, *Smith’s Diagram*, 19.

142. Robert, *Pocket Manual*, 54–56§22, 77§29; Smith, *Smith’s Diagram*, 17, 22–26.

143. [Emphasis is in original.] Robert, *Pocket Manual*, 147–148§53, 54–56§22; Smith, *Smith’s Diagram*, 17.

144. In 1873, J. N. Andrews described the General Conference Executive Committee as a committee for action. He wrote,

*The efficiency of our system of organization depends very much upon the existence and the action of this committee. During the interval from one Conference to another, the general management of our affairs as a people is in their hands. They constitute an executive board to carry into effect the meas-*

ures which are determined upon by the Conference. Without their action, much of the Conference business would end in mere talk. By their means we are able to act as a body, and at all times are represented by those who are authorized to act for us.

J. N. Andrews, "The General Conference Committee," *RH* (October 28, 1873): 160.

145. Here are some examples of Adventists taking these actions: *Lay It on the Table*: Geo. I. Butler and U. Smith, "Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists," *RH* (March 11, 1873): 108; "Transcription of Minutes of GC Sessions from 1863 to 1888," 158, accessed May 12, 2017, <http://docs.adventistarchives.org/docs/GCB/GCB1863-88.pdf#view=fit>; Jas. White and U. Smith, "Business Proceedings of the Special Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists, March 11-15, 1880," March 18, 1880, 187; S. N. Haskell and U. Smith, "The General Conference Business Proceedings (Continued)," *RH* (December 13, 1881): 376. *Postpone to a Certain Day*: Jas. White and U. Smith, "Business Proceedings of the Special Session of the General Conference of S. D. Adventists, March 11-15, 1880," March 18, 1880, 187; S. N. Haskell and U. Smith, "The General Conference Business Proceedings (Continued)," *RH* (December 13, 1881): 376; S. N. Haskell and U. Smith, "General Conference: Business Proceedings (Continued)," *RH* (December 20, 1881): 392.

146. Here are some examples of Adventists taking these actions: *Committee of the Whole*: J. O. Corliss and D. H. Lamson, "S. D. A. Ministerial Association of Michigan," *RH* (April 11, 1882): 238; S. N. Haskell and M. L. Huntley, "International Tract Society (Continued)," *RH* (November 25, 1884): 742. *Special Committee*: Jas. White and U. Smith, "General Conference of S. D. Adventists: Eighteenth Annual Session, Nov. 7, 1879," *RH* (November 20, 1879): 161; Geo. I. Butler and U. Smith, "General Conference Proceedings: Twenty-fifth Annual Session (Continued)," *RH* (November 30, 1886): 744. *Referred Back to the Committee on Resolutions*: S. N. Haskell and U. Smith, "General Conference: Business Proceedings (Continued)," *RH* (December 20, 1881): 392.

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community through conversation  
**SPECTRUM**

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The logo for the Unity 2017 Conference in London is the featured art.

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**About the photograph:**

At the close of the conference, all attendees gathered on the lawn outside the Crowne Plaza Hotel meeting room for a photograph. This is the group of attendees and presenters.

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## *High Horses and Higher Ground*

BY DON WILLIAMS

I've had it with prodigals  
Slamming doors in God's face;  
Plotting their escape;  
Risking self and others.

Then I find myself  
Discounting my birthright;  
Drifting away under the cover of my own darkness;  
Retreating to the far country of my rationality.

As I attempt to put distance  
Between my emptiness and His fullness,  
I'm amazed to find Him so close, and  
More gracious than before.

Now I surprise myself  
With the willful;  
Not by caring less,  
But by loving more.

*“Where sin abounds...  
...grace abounds all the more.”* ROMANS 5:20

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Don Williams, who is now the assistant to the president of Adventist University of Health Sciences, has been at the University since it opened its doors in 1992. He has served as Chair of the General Education Department and was the Academic Dean for thirteen years. He has a bachelor's degree in Psychology and a Master of Divinity from Andrews University and a PhD in Counseling from Purdue University. He and his wife, Merrie Lyn, have been married for 45 years and have two children and five grandchildren.





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