

 community through conversation

# SPECTRUM



## **Guns in Church: No Sanctuary**

*Christ and  
the Conflict of  
Interpretations:  
Hermeneutics  
Transfigured*

## **The Demise of Insight Magazine**

*Millennial  
Reflections on  
Johnsson's  
"Adventism After  
San Antonio"*

## **Growing Young Adventists**

community through conversation  
**SPECTRUM**

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**ABOUT THE COVER**

**ART AND ARTIST:**

Casey Speegle is an American artist from Yucaipa, California, who primarily works in oil and encaustic media.

After graduating with her Bachelors degree in Fine Art from Pacific Union College (2015), Speegle moved across the country to where she now lives and works in Takoma Park, Maryland.

Speegle creates work that is inspired by her fascination with aerial views of the earth and how different environments sculpt the landscapes into incredible designs, whether natural (volcanic ash rivers in Iceland) or man-made (rice terraces in China). Seeing islands, rivers and coastlines from airplane windows inspired a love for topography as a child that led to a passion for creating original, birds-eye view pieces of art. Her paintings offer a brief glimpse at dynamic patterns that occur all over the world, whose magnitude can oftentimes only be seen from high above. Her most recent exhibit was at the new North American Division Headquarters.

To view more of her work, please visit [www.caseyspeegle.com](http://www.caseyspeegle.com)

**Editor** Bonnie Dwyer

**Editorial Assistants** Wendy Trim, Linda Terry

**Design** Mark Dwyer

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

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**Editorial Correspondence**

Direct all correspondence and letters to the editor to:

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

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

Letters to the editor may be edited for publication.

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

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(916) 774-1080 British

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lee.blount@ubs.com

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Roseville, California  
treasurer@spectrummagazine.org

#### Bonnie Dwyer

EX OFFICIO  
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editor@spectrummagazine.org

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Riverside, California  
lgeraty@lasierra.edu

#### Carmen Lau

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#### Ken Peterson, Jr.

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**BONNIE DWYER**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ■ Adventist Forum  
P.O. Box 619047 • Roseville, CA 95661-9047  
tel: (916) 774-1080 fax: (916) 791-4938

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## Conversations Across the Generational Divide | BY BONNIE DWYER

It was one of the most difficult conversations I ever witnessed. It was immediately after the 2016 U.S. election, and a month after the General Conference Annual Council session in which there was consideration of the General Conference taking over the unions that had voted to ordain women. The surprise element of both events had been unnerving. When the Adventist religion scholars gathered for their annual conference, six young scholars were invited to address the question “Does Adventism Inspire Young Adventists?” for a panel discussion on Sabbath morning. Their responses were honest, direct, and heartbreaking. Yes, they had been inspired by specific individuals within Adventism and blessed by the support of the community. But there was more to say. They also addressed the racism, misogyny, and problems within the church that were driving their peers out the back door. When it came time for the audience to respond and ask questions, the difficulties took over. First, there were apologies. “You are our best and brightest. We are sorry for the bad experiences that you have had.” There were questions, “What is your problem, you all have jobs?” There were reminiscences from older faculty about enduring through past institutional conflicts with the implicit idea that they had put up with bad stuff, too, why couldn’t the younger generation just tough it out. And there were long pauses after each question with no one exactly sure how to answer.

At the 2017 meeting of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies, the Sabbath morning program again involved a panel of young scholars. This time they had been asked to review William Johnsson’s recent book *Where are We Headed? Adventism after San Antonio*. Again, the responses were honest and thoughtful. Because their questions were addressed to the book, perhaps

it was easier on the audience. But the divide was still there. “Millennials are not likely coming back any time soon (short of a miracle),” Matthew Korpman said. “There will not be a revival which we can plan to accomplish this. The damage has been done: spiritually, theologically, and personally.”

In this issue of *Spectrum*, we feature the words of these young scholars to lead our section on Looking Forward with the hope that we can keep this important conversation going. We also consider other difficult topics of the day such as guns in church and thank Terese Thonus for helping us think about the unthinkable.

“One of the best ways to persuade others is with your ears—by listening to them,” the statesman Dean Rusk famously said. We hope that reading and listening to the voices of the authors in this issue will enhance the generational conversation now ongoing within Adventism. There are very real divides over what should or should not be an issue. The one thing that I know is that we need each other. Listening to each other is crucial to staying in conversation together, whatever the topic and whether we like the topic or not.

Donny Chrissutianto concludes his response to Johnsson’s book optimistically, and I share his hope. “All of these conflicts in the history of the Church, whether doctrines or practices, could be settled by allowing unceasing discussion in a Christ-like spirit and through Bible study. From these facts, when we face the challenges that Johnsson has identified in this book, by showing the love of Jesus in our discussion and unending study of the Bible, I am confident by God’s grace, we also can have consensus in solving our differences today.” ■

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Bonnie Dwyer is editor of *Spectrum* magazine.

## Reading and Misreading the Bible | BY CHARLES SCRIVEN

Official instincts about proper Bible reading continue to be partly right yet crucially wrong. One problem is that, for lack of willingness to converse—to speak *and* to listen, we continue to talk past one another. This lack baffles me. It hurts everyone and everything, not least discipleship itself.

In the “Week of Prayer” issue of *Adventist World, NAD Edition*, dated November 2017, the General Conference president lauds those daring Reformers who took the risk of translating Scripture into the languages of ordinary people. In several cases, they gave their lives for doing so, such was the fury of the church authorities, who distrusted the membership at large and thought access to the Bible would make them wander into heresy.

The instinct behind such praise is right, incontestably; so is the instinct behind quoting, as the president does, Ellen White’s declaration that Christians should not “depend on the minister” to read the Bible for them. Formal authority gives no certain advantage in interpretation. Every voice counts. No single voice or group of voices can have the last word.

Trouble comes, however, when the idea of the “plain reading of the text” joins itself, as in the article, to the implication that our “critical” capacities give no help in the interpretation of Scripture. Here I insert the word “implication” because in official theology the word “critical” is never (at least to my knowledge) straightforwardly anathematized. It’s just that the conventional invective against

the “historical-critical” method, here trotted out as usual, creates misgivings about it. The “historical-critical” approach to the Bible is associated (plausibly, I might add) with skeptical assumptions about the reality of God. But a good bit of it is useful even when, as with *every* community of Adventist Bible readers that I know, such skeptical assumptions are themselves called into question.

“Plain reading” without “critical” assessment is verifiably disastrous, principally because it prompts fixation on fragments of Scripture that, taken apart from their immediate or overall context, offer seeming support to one or another of our prejudices. This way of reading, let’s remember, gave us Bible-backed anti-Semitism and genocide in Europe, Bible-backed apartheid in South Africa, Bible-backed slavery in the American South. It’s tiresome to have to constantly repeat the point that these doctrines depended on the “plain reading” of small bits of the Bible, just as it is tiresome to have to bring up, again and again to plain readers, such a passage as Psalm 137:7, 8, where the beleaguered poet screams revenge against Israel’s “devastator” Babylon. For this poet, payback, even against children, brings happiness. “Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!” Would a “plain reading” of these words, without help from our “critical” capacities, be at all edifying? If my finger fell by chance on these verses, would they be directly instructive for what I think of God or how I live my life?

**For lack of willingness to converse—to speak *and* to listen, we continue to talk past one another.**

I believe, with the author of 2 Timothy, that *all* scripture is “useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (3:16). But that can be so only if we also confront another of the official instincts about Bible reading that turns out, in fact, to be *true*, again incontestably. The Bible is “vital-ly important,” says the General Conference president, “because it brings us face to face with Jesus Christ.” Yes. But his remarks, as is undeniably conventional in Adventism, and also undeniably misleading, fail to pay serious attention, or *any* attention, to Hebrews 1:1–3. In these verses the Good Book declares that God spoke in the past “through the prophets,” but has now spoken “by a Son” who is “the reflection of God’s glory and the *exact imprint* of God’s very being” (italics mine). And if words so crucial for biblical hermeneu-tics go unnoticed, so do equally crucial words from Jesus’ Gospel Commission in Matthew: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (28:18). The same perspective on Christ’s authority, Zane Yi shows later in this issue of *Spectrum*, comes through in the story of the Transfiguration. Again, however, it doesn’t register.

But here, surely, is the true heartbeat of the idea that the Bible brings us face to face with Jesus Christ: He is the one point, the only point, at which the will and way of God come into perfect focus. That makes Him the lens you look through for *authentic Christian application of any biblical insight or story*. Now, knowing Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, you can consider, for example, the revenge theme in Psalm 137 and say (as C. S. Lewis did) that if such revenge is the “natural result” of suffering injury, it is nonetheless “profoundly wrong.” Its inclusion in Holy Writ may be God’s reminder that of all “bad men,” those who are religious are “the worst.” In any case, this psalm, in most ways so beautiful and mesmerizing, actually is, in its entirety, “useful” for teaching, correction, and training in righteousness. We get a reminder of how piety can go wrong.

At the November annual meetings, in Boston, of two of the church’s theological associations—the Adventist Society for Religious Studies and the Adventist Theological Society—speakers turned often to the theme of scriptural interpretation. At a Friday evening joint session, both presidents addressed the Bible, and one

of them, Olive Hemmings, of ASRS and Washington Adventist University, made a point similar to the one I am making. The right understanding of the Reformation *sola scriptura* principle, she said, upholds Christ as “the *logos*, the Truth, and the *telos*” of the written word. She was suggesting that Christ is the divine word, the divine reality, the divine purpose—made flesh. Christ alone, and no inanimate object, whether of wood or stone or paper, is God incarnate.

Again, and again, I tell myself: this should be the simplest of lesson in biblical hermeneutics. The Bible is a challenging book, encompassing different strands of thought and many kinds of stories. But the climax of its thought and stories is—Jesus, the “exact imprint” of divine being. Either this does not sink in, however, or conventional Adventist thinking simply doesn’t believe it, doesn’t believe that Jesus Christ, the Living Word of God, is the final criterion of Christian life and conviction. How can this be? How can it go on?

I myself wrote one of the papers presented in November. Shortly afterwards it hit me that I would personally speak to the need for more conversation about these matters. There is *scholarly* backing for a view similar to the one the General Conference president disseminates in his many articles and sermons. There is an official pronouncement, in the church’s Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, on the authority of the Bible. And in too much of what is said, reference to Christ is either inadequate or, as in the official statement of belief, missing altogether. So, I hereby announce that I am going to encourage representative people, along a wide range of opinion, into tangible, or *public*, conversation, either in print or in person, about these differences of hermeneutical outlook. I imagine something small, but I also imagine something *real*: something truly honest and forthright and something fully and appropriately responsive to the wisdom Jesus set down in Matthew, Chapter 18. I will move forward in hope, and, in time, I will report on what happens.

At my age and in my station, I am fully aware that the effort may be feckless or quixotic. But why should that matter? We are not called to success, but to witness. Surely we can agree, all of us, on that. ■

---

**Charles Scriven** chairs Adventist Forum.





Delegates at the GC Annual Council 2017 (Photo: Mylon Medley, ANN).

## Annual Council 2017: *The Unity Vote* | BY BONNIE DWYER

At 7:15 p.m. on Monday, October 9, the results of the vote by the General Conference Executive Committee were announced: 184 in favor of returning the document before them to the Unity Oversight Committee, with 114 opposed. The tension in the air over the proposal for “Procedures for Reconciliation and Adherence in Church Governance” disappeared as the delegates sang “We Have This Hope.”

But it had been a very long day, beginning with worship at 8:00 a.m., followed by a full morning agenda in which the state of the world church’s finances were reviewed, the 2018 World Allocations and Appropriations Budget presented, and the auditors’ analysis of 2016 shared. Paul H. Douglas, director of the General Conference Auditing Service (GCAS), made a key point for the day as he presented his service’s annual report. In their examination of financial documents and practices of divisions, unions, conferences, educational institutions, healthcare institutions, publishing houses, ADRA, and trust services, they found 81 percent of the entities had non-standard reports. In other words, there were instances of non-compliance with denominational policy. And the ten-year trend shows increasing non-compliance. In 2007, 62 percent of the entities showed non-compliance with the percentage dipping down into the fiftieth percentiles in 2008, 2009, and 2010 but then moving steadily upward for the next

five years, with 2016 being the year with the highest rate at 81 percent. It was a fact that was picked up and fed back into the six-hour afternoon conversation about unions that the GC wanted to discipline over “non-compliance” regarding the ordination of women. Was non-compliance really the issue?

Committee members were encouraged to return quickly from lunch to be sure to get a seat for the afternoon session. Promptly at 1:29 p.m., President Wilson began by leading the audience in singing of the early Adventist hymn “What Never Part Again.” Procedural instructions followed—please refrain from clapping or applause, “We want a quiet spirit,” voting will be by secret ballot (three color-coded ballots were given to each committee member), and a suggested time limit for comments of two minutes. An amendment was immediately proposed for three-minute speeches, but it went down to defeat. Then the chair proposed that a vote be taken at 5:50 p.m. That was shot down. The committee wanted to determine when it was ready to vote and not have a specific deadline placed on the proceedings.

Next, Thomas Lemon, the chair of the Unity Oversight Committee, presented his report of the committee’s actions in response to the vote in 2016. He said that he had had meetings in the North American Division, the Trans-European Division, and the Inter-European Division. While the South Pacific Division had requested a

meeting with Lemon, scheduling conflicts had prevented that from taking place. He said that he will meet with them in the future.

“As I listened (at these meetings),” he reported, “there was not one person who gave any hint of being in rebellion. Rebellion is an attitude before it is an action. I didn’t hear that anywhere. Concern but not rebellion. I want to allay that fear. We are children of God and we are in this together.” Later he added, “As I’ve listened to the stories, I heard an understanding of mission and a commitment to mission that would warm your heart. Commitment to mission is very, very strong.”

With these meetings, he said he felt that they had met the requirements of the action voted in 2016. Although at the beginning of his report, he had admitted that “If you want to ask if we dotted every ‘i’ and crossed every ‘t,’ you might say we didn’t do everything.” That the 2016 voted action set up at least three additional steps was not acknowledged.

At the conclusion of his report, he said it is time for Phase Two and to discuss what that is going to look like. He said he “was given” a document on September 14 that he took to the Unity Committee on September 18, where it was discussed for five hours, but the committee wanted more time, so the conversation continued the next day. Then it was discussed in the General Conference and Division Officers Committee (GCDO) for multiple days, changing along the way. In the end, he said the document was the best that could be put together by seventy people.

The fourteen-page document was finally distributed to the audience, and Associate Secretary Hensley Mooroven read it aloud in a measured and resonant voice. What the document proposed was that General Conference Executive Committee members be required to sign a personal declaration of loyalty and compliance with General Conference policy. “Those who do not sign the document for whatever reason, will forfeit their privileges of voice, vote and subcommittee participation.” The General Conference Unity Oversight Committee would be given the responsibility of responding to instances where the actions or statements of an Executive Committee member is inconsistent with the statement after signing it, initiating a pastoral process following the counsel of Matthew 18. The statement that Committee Members would be required to sign would have four items:

1. I agree to respect church structure and abide by the GC Working Policy which has been voted by world-wide representation.

2. Within my sphere of influence I will work with appropriate Church leadership to correct any non-compliance situations within my jurisdiction.

3. If my organization or entity has voted or has been engaged in actions, and/or unilateral activities or has released statements or pronouncements which are not in harmony with General Conference Session actions, General Conference Executive Committee actions, or General Conference Working Policy for global implementation through divisions, unions, conferences, and missions, which if not implemented, would adversely impact Church unity, for whatever stated reasons, I will use my influence as a member of the General Conference Executive Committee to reverse and reject those actions recognizing that normal and accepted administrative Church procedures are to be followed regarding any adjustments to policy of voted actions.

4. I understand that my membership on the General Conference Executive Committee is a sacred, spiritual trust and that I am bound to adhere to the General Conference Session actions, General Conference Executive Committee actions, and General Conference Working Policy.

Another section of the document addresses General Conference delegates not in compliance and requires unions to submit names of delegates who have signed a Statement of Commitment regarding General Conference Session actions. If an individual is determined not to be in compliance, the General Conference senior executive administration will report this to the GC Secretariat so that the union can choose a replacement.

The document took forty-five minutes to read. Elder Wilson asked his two fellow officers and the General Conference Chief Counsel to share their thoughts on the document. At 3:50 p.m. the floor was opened for discussion.

Christine Burt, a lay representative from the Trans-European Division, was the first to the microphone. She began by saying that she wanted, with love, to make a suggestion. “We’ve been here for seven days. To have this document thrust on us now is not the right approach. We could have used the LEAD conference time. We could have had time for sharing. We don’t have the opportunity to understand. In the future, we need to find other ways to approach this.”

Mark Johnson, of the North American Division, said, “We are being asked to approve a document that nullifies over a hundred years of church history, that creates a super group of persons to be able to serve on the GC Executive Committee. How does the Unity Committee decide whether or not we are fit to serve?”

Ron Smith, president of Southern Union, rose to speak against the document because it created new machinery that would impede mission in his territory. He urged the GC to pull the document off the table.

Brent Burdick (ESD) said he could not support the document, and he had a suggestion for what could be done. “We need a timeout on the topic of women’s ordination, including non-compliance. Take 2018 for a time out. No discussion, a Sabbath break on this discussion. Then in 2019, we could raise the issue again. If we take a time out, what is the worst thing that can happen?”

Lowell Cooper spoke against the motion for five reasons:

1. The document misinterprets or misapplies the GC Constitution and Bylaws (There is more than one example of this).

2. The proposal dramatically alters the ethos of the Church. Leadership accountability is inverted—instead of primary accountability to a constituency the proposal inserts accountability to a supervisory level of leadership.

3. The disciplinary measures in the document are focused on an individual who is considered to be out of compliance with policy. There is no recognition of constituency decisions that may conflict with policy. The document assumes that policy infractions will occur by an individual—and that such an individual can correct the matter. This is an insufficient comprehension of the issue.

4. The document envisions penalty as the only remedial measure for policy non-compliance. Perhaps this is an indication of an administration’s mindset primarily focused on authority and enforcement. The processes outlined in the document do not even hint at any room for innovation, creativity, experimentation, policy waivers, or policy development as a way of dealing with emerging realities or developments that render existing policy inadequate or irrelevant.

5. The proposal stifles the expression of dissent. Disagreement with policy constitutes sufficient ground for being branded as non-compliant.

“These five issues, in my opinion, rise to a level of significance far beyond mere technicality. They constitute a serious threat to the principles that undergird church structure, operation and the ‘body of Christ’ imagery that we prize so highly,” said Cooper.

Randy Roberts (NAD) asked for clarification on how the document reached the floor of Annual Council. “My understanding—which may be flawed—is that it was dealt with in the General Conference Division Officers meeting . . . and that when a vote was taken on whether or not to pass the document on to this body for consideration, it passed by a count of 36–35. Considering the weight of the issue before us today, that most narrow of margins is quite troublesome. When a body is that evenly divided, it seems the better part of wisdom to prayerfully reconsider how to approach it.

“But there is actually something that concerns me even more, and that is my understanding that a previous vote on the matter actually lost by a count of 29–26, following which several who were not in attendance, some of whom had not been able to read the document, were asked to vote. It was that vote, then, that passed by a count of 36–35.

“Would you kindly comment on two questions I have. One, is it normal GCDO policy and/or procedure to allow members who are not present to vote, especially if they have not been able to read the document on which they are voting? And two, as a leader, can you comment on the wisdom of pursuing the drastic measures we are considering today based on a one-vote margin within the key leadership team?”

President Wilson replied, “We have a very collegial process here at the GC. We try to achieve consensus, if possible. Votes are taken when consensus cannot be reached. The GCDO had quite extensive discussions on the document and were not able to come to consensus before the Adventist History tour. There were three members who are part of the IAD who could not be with us because of the natural disasters in their area. Canvassing of those members is what I told everyone early on. No one objected. We had various discussions. The discussions were very positive on getting to an appropriate goal. We canvassed those there and those who were not there. A very few who said they did not want to vote because they had not seen the document. The results are what you indicated. The vote that you mentioned. The fact you mentioned was



only known to a very few people. There have been leaks. People have misused information that has caused this to be very flammable. Private information has been taken and misused again. One final thing, the chair did not vote."

John Thomas opened his remarks by saying that he was one of the absentee individuals. But his great concern was for three large demographic groups: youth, women, and members who he felt would be questioning what the church is trying to do. "What are we going to do as a world church to explain to these three groups?"

Thomas Muller of the Danish Union commented on the "very good dialogue" that his division (TED) had with the chair of the Unity Oversight Committee and the hope that it could continue. He objected to a vote on this document before finishing with the document voted last year. "This process from last year has not been followed," he said. "The GC has not followed its own process. We want to pray and find solutions together. The process has not been followed, so it is far too soon to be taking this action. We can't vote on this document today."

Elder Wilson responded that it was the Divisions' responsibility to take the initiative on what was previously voted.

Mandia Matshiyae (SID) noted that the day before a request for the document had been made and turned down. "Today, we have expressed that we have not had time to respond to this document. Why couldn't it have been given to us. I speak against the document. Page 10, lines 37–40 I have a problem with."

Justine Ramas (SSD) was the first person to speak in support of the document. She asked how many as parents have had children disregard the rules? "I don't want my children to be selectively obedient. This church is my home. Wouldn't it be lovely to live in a home where there is structure, order, and unity?"

When Jan Paulsen, former president of the General Conference, was recognized by the chair, a total hush fell over the audience. "Since I made my comment at San Antonio, I have not made a public comment on the issue of Women's Ordination. I have prayed every day. With this document, we are making the Spirit's task more difficult. The quotes are not necessarily in harmony with what is in the document." Then he spoke about the loyalty oath being required. "My loyalty is written in my heart," he said. "I find the spirit of unity missing in this document." It needs to go back, he said. "I definitely do not see the hand of God in it."

Elder Wilson then asked Mark Finley to pray.

Suranjeen Pallipamula (SUD) said that there is discussion in his Northern Indian Union about non-compliance, but what irks him, as a lay member, is the loyalty signing. "Where I come from honor is important. In a meeting if I tell you I don't trust you to sit together in this meeting, that would be a problem." Specifically he questioned the use of the word "advocacy" on page 9, line 5, saying it has a much different meaning. "It is very much what I need to do and continue to do." He proposed an amendment to the use of that word which was voted.

Dave Weigley (NAD) affirmed the GC for not moving ahead with the nuclear action that had been proposed last year. But he suggested that taking away voice and vote from committee members violates the constitution. He asked to have the matter stricken from the agenda for violating the bylaws by taking away voice and vote. "If I am in error, correct me."

Elder Wilson said that the constitution is silent on privileges. He said the document was being presented under article 13, letter b on page 6. There is no Supreme Court to appeal to. It is up to this body to determine how its members would wish to proceed.

Weigley responded, "I still move to have the document sent to the Constitution and Bylaws Committee. If I have membership, I have voice and vote—without condition."

Dan Jackson requested to hear from legal counsel.

Todd McFarland came to the microphone and said, "The constitution is silent on this. There is agreement in the OGC that the ultimate decider is going to be this body. There is, however, a differing view on rights of individuals. When you start affecting individual rights, it requires a two-thirds vote. We are in unprecedented territory."

The motion to refer the document back to the Constitution and Bylaws Committee was then discussed, and during the discussion, an amendment was made to refer it back instead to the original committee from which it came—the Unity Oversight Committee. And that turned the discussion into a debate over which committee would be the best to refer the document to and a series of votes. The final vote was done by secret ballot, and the motion to refer the document back to the committee that originated it won, bringing to an end a very long day. ■

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Bonnie Dwyer is editor of Spectrum magazine.

The new North American Division headquarters in Columbia, Maryland (Photo credit: Pieter Damsteegt/INAD).



IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/INADADVENTIST/SETS/72157661424791098](https://www.flickr.com/photos/inadadventist/sets/72157661424791098)

## A New Building and a Renewed Hope: *The NAD Celebrates* | BY ALISA WILLIAMS

The Year-End Meetings of the North American Division (NAD) started with the grand-opening ceremony for the much-anticipated NAD headquarters, an event filled with much energy and laughter

The Allegheny East Pathfinders Drum Corps opened the proceedings with a rousing performance. Then John Wobensmith, the Secretary of State of Maryland, presented NAD President Dan Jackson with a Maryland State flag that had flown over the State capitol building in Annapolis.

After the raising of the flags and a stirring rendition of

the National Anthem, it was time to cut the royal-blue ribbon, which coordinated well with the blue glass and tile building. Past and present NAD officials took part in the ribbon cutting.

With the ribbon successfully cut, the crowd headed inside. Most were directed to the main auditorium (which seats 600), but an overflow room had also been set up to accommodate the estimated 700-person audience. The stragglers found themselves here, and one such individual jovially dubbed it the “loser room.” Though, with a wall-to-wall projector screen, we probably had a better view than some in the main room.



(Photo credit: Pieter Damsteegt/NAD).

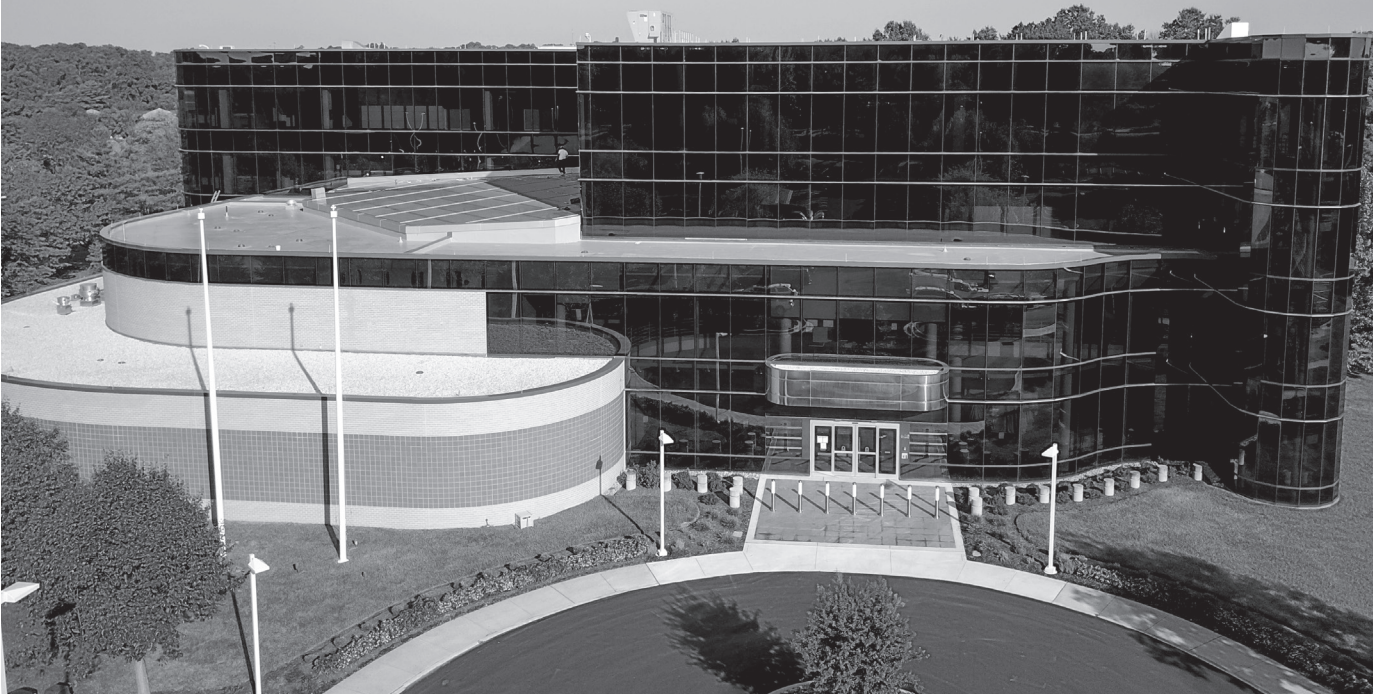


IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/NADADVENTIST/SETS/72157661424791098](https://www.flickr.com/photos/nadadventist/sets/72157661424791098)

It took a few minutes before we had sound, however. In the meantime, several individuals tuned into the Facebook livestream on their phones and cranked the volume up to max so the rest of us could just make out a tinny stream of music to match the processional onscreen. Despite the technological trouble, everyone's high spirits remained.

The sound came on in our room shortly after Dan Jackson took the stage in the main auditorium. He welcomed the guests and then Dave Weigley, president of the Columbia Union Conference, delivered an energetic address about his appreciation that the NAD had chosen the CUC for its new headquarters.

The highlight of the event was the "Historical Perspective" section. It was in 1913 that the "North American Division Conference" was formed, and it was in that same year that discussion first began on where the NAD headquarters should be. One hundred and four years later and we finally have the answer: Columbia, Maryland.

President Jackson, Executive Secretary G. Alexander Bryant, and Treasurer G. Thomas Evans all paid tribute to those who had gone before in their respective positions. Dan Jackson was joined on stage by the first NAD president, Charles E. Bradford, and his wife Ethel. Bradford

served as president from 1979 to 1990.

"Thank you so much for the ministry, the courage, the vision, that you utilized in bringing into being the North American Division. God bless you, God bless you," Jackson told Bradford.

Jackson then asked if Bradford had any remarks for the audience. "Well, I didn't see my name on the program," Bradford replied, laughing. He continued, saying that the one question he's gotten over and over again through the years has been, "where is the North American Division?"

"Well, thank God, I am able to say today, the North American Division is here! You can see it, you can feel it, you can hear it, and thank God you can be proud of it!" said Bradford, as the audience broke out in cheers and applause.

Jackson was then joined on stage by Scott McClure, son of Alfred C. McClure who served as NAD president from 1990 to 2000, and passed away in 2006. Don Schneider, NAD president from 2000 to 2010, was next to join Jackson at the podium where Jackson shared that he is often mistaken for Schneider when he visits churches.

G. Alexander Bryant followed and gave remarks on the three previous executive secretaries: Bob Dale (1979 to



1990), Harold W. Baptiste (1990 to 2002), and Roscoe Howard (2002 to 2008). All three are in poor health and so could not be at the ceremony.

Though Bryant never worked with Dale, he said he has heard many stories about his time with the NAD and described him as the quintessential secretary who carried books of meeting minutes around and could find exactly what was voted, and when, on any topic in question.

Baptiste is the longest serving secretary for the NAD (1990 to 2002). "We see many traces of his footprints in our office," said Bryant.

When it came time to discuss Roscoe Howard's legacy, Bryant was overcome with emotion and had to pause while the audience murmured reassurances. "Roscoe and I are brother-in-laws," Bryant shared. "We married two sisters. He is having some health challenges today, and I just thought it would be good if the North American Division said a special prayer for him today." Bryant invited Elder Kibble to the stage to lead the audience in prayer for all three former secretaries.

After prayer, Bryant concluded by saying that he wanted the former secretaries to know that "whatever we have today, we have it because we stand on their shoulders."

NAD Treasurer G. Thomas Evans paid tribute to former treasurers George H. Crumley (1990 to 1998) and Juan Prestol-Puesan (1998 to 2007) who were both present at the ceremony.

During his dedicatory remarks, Dan Jackson shared the story of finding a document concerning a seventy-year strategic plan, written by Bob Dale, in the president's desk (which has been used by all former NAD presidents). After looking through it, as well as a book written by Bradford, he realized that his current administration was addressing all the same concerns the previous administrations had.

"It is no wonder that it took us 104 years to build a building, because we keep talking about the same stuff," Jackson quipped.

To close out the ceremony, Wintley Phipps sang "Amazing Grace", and then the NAD officials led the audience in an "Opening Litany" comprised of words from Solomon, David, Isaiah, Paul, Moses, Jesus, John, and Habakkuk.

Afterward, the audience was dismissed to tour the building. The 125,000-sq. ft. space was originally built by Arbitron Inc., the radio ratings organization. The



NAD paid \$19.5 million for it and spent an additional \$11 million in renovations. The total cost was paid for with reserve funds. Each division is required under GC policy to keep an amount equal to 100 percent of its yearly operating budget in reserve. It was this money the NAD dipped into to pay for the building, bringing its reserves down to 93 percent of its operating budget; an amount officials say they are confident they will bring back up to 100 percent soon.

Though the initial expense is sizeable, the NAD is on track to save money down the road, a strategy made possible both by paying for the building outright and by no longer paying \$1.2 million in annual rent to the GC for space a fraction of the size of the new facility.

It's clear much thought was put into the building, and the effort to showcase the unique aspects of the NAD is evident. The building is full of natural light from a glass-paneled roof that sends cascades of prismatic rainbows into the Charles E. Bradford Conference Center. Throughout the building are ten conference rooms, named after the nine North American Unions and the Guam-Micronesia Mission.

An Adventist health message wall, donated by the

Adventist healthcare networks, provides an interactive exploration of the Adventist dedication to health and wellness throughout history. On the wall across from the health message is a dedicated space for student art. Paintings by recent Pacific Union College graduate, Casey Speegle, are up right now. Artwork by Nathan Greene can be found throughout the rest of the building. Wooden paneling, hand carved by a local Adventist artisan, adds warmth and offsets the otherwise glass and metal structure.

I was most captivated by the C. D. Brooks Prayer Chapel, where the focal point is a glass mosaic created by Monte Church. Nine lambs appear in the mosaic, representing the nine unions. Fragments of glass shaped like each state and province in the NAD are scattered throughout and a series of dots and dashes along the bottom represent a prayer for help to the Lord in Morse Code.

After a break for lunch, the first business session began with the President's Report. Dan Jackson gave a rousing and joke-filled speech that elicited many "Amen's" and much laughter from the audience.

He began by telling the delegates that the chairs they were sitting in were the same chairs used at GC Session 2015. "I think the brethren sold them to us in the hope that their influence would rub off and that we would always be in harmony with the General Conference. It's another approach at unity!" Jackson told the chuckling audience.

On a more serious note, he added that he wanted every delegate present to feel comfortable speaking their minds throughout the sessions, whether that means agreeing or disagreeing with something someone else has said, as long as it's done with respect and love.

"This is a family. A healthy organization will have healthy discussion, and that includes disagreement," said Jackson.

"I tell my wife that if we always agree, then one of us is redundant," he added.

"Does she agree with that?" shouted someone from the audience, eliciting laughs all around.

Jackson spent time reiterating the NAD's strong commitment to mission and to unity, stating that the NAD "has absolutely no plan to agitate or promote separation . . . we are part of the world church and will remain so." He reminded the audience that everyone in the room is a believer—a "lifer." "We wouldn't be here if we weren't."

He discussed the Church's strengths:

- Great God
- Great human resources
- Excellent facilities
- Active laity
- Able youth
- Generous constituencies

The NAD's outreach initiatives, which include a \$14.7 million budget investment, thousands of campaigns, and evangelism efforts that have resulted in hundreds of baptisms.

Next, he discussed the proposed 2020 Strategic Initiatives, which include a renewed dedication to communication, youth, and ongoing leadership training.

And finally, Jackson wrapped up with the Missional Initiatives:

- Transformational Evangelism
- Young Adult Life
- Women in Pastoral Ministry
- Emerging Immigrant Populations
- Stewardship
- Social Media

These topics were a precursor for what to expect throughout the rest of the meetings, which went through end-of-day Tuesday, October 31.

After nearly two hours, Jackson apologized for going on for so long, but added quickly that he wasn't really sorry—the information he had shared was important and vital to the mission of the Church.

When Executive Secretary Bryant called for a vote on the President's Report it was heartily and unanimously approved by the body.

Since it was already after 5:00 p.m., the Secretary's Report, which had been on the agenda for the day's discussion, was bumped to the following morning.

I left the meetings feeling energized and optimistic for what is to come in the following days. It's hard not to be optimistic when the mood in the room, led by Dan Jackson's cheerful and corny quips, is as light and cheerful as the building we're in. ■

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**Alisa Williams** is managing editor of [SpectrumMagazine.org](http://SpectrumMagazine.org).





# READING THE BIBLE



# Christ and the Conflict of Interpretations: *Hermeneutics Transfigured* | BY ZANE YI



“CHRIST IN THE SYNAGOGUE” BY GUSTAVE DORÉ, 1866.

## Introduction

In his telling of the history of Adventism, George Knight divides the phases of Adventism’s development into three distinct stages, centering around three distinct questions. The pressing question for most of the pioneers of the denomination was “What is Adventist in Adventism?” The emphasis during the formative years of 1844–1885 was on the unique teachings that set Adventism apart from other denominations—the Sabbath, Sanctification, the Spirit of Prophecy, State of the Dead, and the Second Coming. This fifty-year focus on doctrinal distinctives,

however, led to sectarian tendencies, and the following phase of development served as a corrective, centering around the question of “What is Christian in Adventism?” Adventists during this time, 1886–1919, (re-)discovered the significance of the apostle Paul and the doctrine of justification by faith. This was followed by a third phase of development, 1919–1950, centered around a third question—“What is fundamental in Adventism?” Here Adventists grappled (and continue to grapple) with a host of contemporary issues, as do other denominations trying to find their way in the modern world: issues regarding discoveries in science, the role of women, and sexuality. Today, since 1950, Knight writes, all three of these questions are on the table for Adventists and there is confusion and disagreement about which of these questions is the most fundamental to Adventist identity—the beliefs that make them unique as a people, the beliefs they share with other Christians, or their beliefs about important issues being debated in society.<sup>1</sup>

Knight’s analysis clarifies the central theological concerns that have shaped the way many Adventists study the Bible and illustrate the more fundamental hermeneutical insight that what an individual or community takes from the Bible to teach, what they derive from the Bible, is largely determined by the questions and concerns they bring to the text. In what follows, I will be suggesting an alternate path of inquiry, one I take to be a more fruitful and faithful one, guided by a different question.

## Why the Conflict of Interpretations?

Why do conflicts of interpretation happen between well-meaning people looking at the same text? Simply put, as Hans-Georg Gadamer points out, all textual interpretation is shaped by the pre-judgements and expectations readers bring to a given text. And, because the meaning of a text is co-determined by the text and reader,



a degree of plurality of legitimate meanings cannot be eliminated, even with careful attention and scholarship.

“Not just occasionally, but always,” Gadamer argues, “the meaning of a text goes beyond its author.”<sup>2</sup> Once it is “in the wild,” as they say, the meaning of a text is no longer under the control of the author, because readers are now involved. Because humans are finite and historical beings, living in various places and times, they will approach texts with different prejudices which can be modified, but never entirely eliminated.<sup>3</sup> Thus, while not every interpretation is a valid one, an irreducible plurality of possible meanings still remains; one can narrow, but never eliminate the hermeneutical circle.

But beyond the subjectivity of the reader, which forms both the condition and limit for any kind of intelligible experience, is the diverse nature of Christian Scripture itself. The Bible is actually a collection of many texts, written and compiled over many years. This results in, as Paul Ricoeur puts it, “a polyphonic language sustained by [a] circularity of...forms.”<sup>4</sup> The Bible speaks in many voices about God, addressing different people in different contexts, and what these voices claim is often in tension, if not conflict, with each other, regarding the nature of God’s will. And this tension exists, not just *between* the two major divisions of the Bible—the first and second testaments—but *within* them as well.

Take, for example, the shifting standards for membership into the community of God’s people. Walter Brueggemann draws our attention to two texts: Deuteronomy 23:1–8 and Isaiah 56:3–8.

### Deuteronomy 23:1–8

<sup>1</sup> No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the LORD.

<sup>2</sup> No one born of a forbidden marriage nor any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, not even in the tenth generation.

<sup>3</sup> No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, not even in the tenth generation.

<sup>6</sup> Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live.

### Isaiah 56:3–8

<sup>3</sup> Let no foreigner who is bound to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely exclude me from his people.”

And let no eunuch complain, “I am only a dry tree.”

<sup>4</sup> For this is what the LORD says:

“To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—

<sup>5</sup> to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughter.

Deuteronomy, the earlier text, sets out the standard for membership into the Israelite community, and the liturgical acts central to the life of that community, along lines of reproductive capacity and proper bloodlines. Isaiah, however, according to Brueggemann “sets out to contradict and overthrow the ancient rules of Moses . . . by asserting a principle of inclusiveness against that of ancient exclusivism.”<sup>5</sup> In Isaiah, God goes on to promise foreigners “joy in my house of prayer” (Isaiah 6:7). Their sacrifices will be accepted in the temple. “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations,” God declares.

“This is an ancient text that corrects an even more ancient text,” Brueggemann observes.<sup>6</sup> The tension between these texts illustrate a wider, basic tension in the Old Testament, between the priestly and prophetic traditions. The priestly tradition conceives of holiness in terms of cultic purity. The prophetic tradition places the concern for justice, and more specifically protective justice for the most vulnerable of society, alongside that of purity.<sup>7</sup> Some of the later prophets argue that justice supersedes purity. Micah, for example, insists that God does not want sacri-

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fices at all, preferring acts of justice and mercy (Micah 6:6–8).

One could point out similar tensions in the New Testament. Again, one encounters a diversity of literary genres—parables, narratives, letters, visions, etc.—that seem to offer, at times, conflicting normative guidance. For example, Jesus, in the gospel of Luke, seems to recommend a renunciation of possession. “None of you can become my disciples if you do not give up all your possessions” (Luke 14:33). Compare this with what Paul says to the believers in Corinth (2 Corinthians 8:14), as he appeals for his collection for the church in Jerusalem. Here the recommendation is generosity, rather than renunciation.<sup>8</sup> Another example is the believer’s relationship to the state. Romans 13—“They are God’s servants . . . Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities” (vs. 4–5) and Revelation 13—“And I saw a beast coming out of the sea . . .” (vs. 1)—do not say the same thing. These are, as Richard Hayes points out, “radically different assessments of the relation of the

Christian community to the Roman Empire.”<sup>9</sup>

The diversity in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Old Testament with the New Testament is a major source for the diversity of interpretations about the Bible. Combined with the diversity of readers located in many times and places, conflicts of interpretations are inevitable. Diverse communities (and diverse individuals who comprise those communities) read diverse texts with a diversity of questions and expectations, facing diverse circumstances; hence, there is an inescapable diversity of interpretations about a single book.

### **Transfiguring the Conflict of Interpretations**

What should one do in the face of this inevitable conflict of interpretations? A story found in all three of the gospels and, arguably, alluded to in John—the Transfiguration—provides some suggestive hermeneutical insights.<sup>10</sup> The Markean version, most likely the earliest version of the story, provides the relevant details with its typical concision.

The message of the story, found in Mark 9:2–8, is enigmatic. Jesus takes His inner circle of students—Peter, James, and John—up onto a mountain top. There, Jesus’ appearance changes. “He was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them,” Mark recounts (vs. 2, 3). Two figures appear, identified as Elijah and Moses, and talk with Jesus. The disciples are terrified and one of them, Peter, proposes to build three shelters. Then a cloud appears and a voice speaks from the cloud identifying Jesus and issuing a command—“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him” (vs. 7). Suddenly, the disciples look around and they stand alone on the mountain with Jesus. “They no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus” (vs. 8).

The point of the passage emerges when read in light of the stories that immediately precede it and also the Old Testament passages it references and echoes. Two stories come before this



“JESUS PREACHING TO THE MULTITUDE” BY GUSTAVE DORÉ, 1866.

one. The first is one of Jesus questioning His disciples in light of His spreading popularity. “Who do you say I am,” he asks (Mark 8:29). To which, Peter responds, evidently correctly, “You are the Messiah” (Mark 8:29). This is followed by a story of Peter’s response to Jesus as he begins to speak of His coming suffering and death. This, understandably, causes some consternation with the disciples. Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes him (Mark 8:32). Jesus in turn, rebukes Peter, calling him Satan and declaring that His followers must deny themselves and take up their crosses (Mark 9:34). The wider narrative context for the Transfiguration story, in other words, is one where the disciples, with Peter representing them, are confused about Jesus’ identity and mission.

The story also alludes to numerous figures, passages, and images from the Old Testament. Moses and Elijah, the figures who speak with Jesus, simply put, are two of the greatest figures in the Old Testament. Moses is the leader who led the nation of Israel out of slavery from Egypt. He is the giver of the Law and was regarded as the author of the Pentateuch. Moses’ burial place was unknown (Deuteronomy 34:5–8) leading to the idea that he had been taken up by God.<sup>11</sup> Elijah was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. At the end of his life, Elijah is taken up into heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1–11).

Interestingly, both men had their own mountaintop encounters with God—Sinai and Carmel. Together, they represent the greatest leaders in the Old Testament. And this helps explain Peter’s confused suggestion (other than sheer fear, as Mark surmises). Peter wants to keep the conversation before him going as long as possible. He is amazed at the company Jesus keeps. As one commentator puts it, “The offer to build three tabernacles—one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah—would presumably encourage the stunning consultation to continue indefinitely.”<sup>12</sup>

Peter seems to either think that Jesus is *as great as* Moses and Elijah or that he derives His great-

ness from His relationship *with* Moses and Elijah. This confusion is addressed by the description of Jesus’ appearance and the voice from the cloud. When it comes to Jesus’ appearance, two passages from the Old Testament provide some relevant background. Exodus 34:30 describes Moses appearance after he had been with God on Mt. Sinai—“His face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him.” In another passage, Daniel 7:9, Daniel describes a vision, writing, “As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool.” Jesus’ appearance, where His clothes become a “dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them,” echo these passages, indicating the presence of the divine. Somehow God is with and in Jesus.

The visual cues are accompanied by an auditory declaration and command. First, the text indicates that clouds appear. In the Old Testament, clouds are an indication of God’s presence and glory. For example, Exodus 19:16 tells us that a cloud covered the mountain where God gave the Ten Commandments—“On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning cloud over the mountain . . . Everyone in the camp trembled.” When it comes to the voice at His baptism, recounted at the very beginning of Mark’s gospel (1:11), only Jesus (and the readers) hear the voice declaring Jesus to be “My son.” Now, the three disciples also hear the heavenly voice attesting to this relationship.

This voice gives very concise instructions. There is only one command: “Listen to Him” (Mark 9:7). The verb ἀκούετε is a present imperative, implying continuing action. “Keep on listening to Him” or “Continue to listen to Him,” the translation could go. (Interestingly, Mark’s ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ seems to echo Deuteronomy 18:15, where Moses predicts the coming of another prophet like himself and instructs the Israelites to listen to Him—αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε.<sup>13</sup>) What happens next makes the point clear. Moses and Elijah disappear. The sudden disappearance of the cloud and Elijah and Moses under-

**The wider narrative context for the Transfiguration story, in other words, is one where the disciples, with Peter representing them, are confused about Jesus’ identity and mission.**



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indefinitely.**

scores the point that the disciples are to look to Jesus to be their teacher. The heavenly voice implies that Peter's request to build the tabernacles was misguided, because he and his fellow disciples are to listen, ultimately, to God's Son. To drive home the point, Mark adds a redundant point of emphasis: "they no longer saw anyone, but only Jesus with them" (Mark 9:8).

"Listen to Jesus. Keep listening to Him." The same point communicated to Jesus' original students applies to the early Christians hearing this story—Mark's original audience. In a world of conflicting voices, and at times, when Jesus' teachings seem confusing, and at times when the way looks dark, they, too, are to continue looking to and listening to Jesus, over every other voice. This same point applies to professed followers of Jesus in every succeeding generation, in all times and places, including today. Taking the message of the Transfiguration seriously would transform the way Christians in the twenty-first-century deal with the polyphony of voices within Scripture and conflicts of interpretation about Scripture.

Like Peter, many of Jesus' students today face the temptation of a *flat hermeneutic*, where the voice of Jesus becomes one of the many voices of Scripture, rather than the authoritative voice of Scripture. Jesus' teachings are lined up with all the teachings of the Bible, systematized, and His voice competes amongst many other voices for attention.

His voice, at times, is muffled and interpreted through other voices; perhaps, if not by Moses and Elijah's voices, by voices that follow Him. The apostle Paul, for example, might become the ultimate theological authority. "Many Christians in our day treat the gospels as the optional chips and dip at the beginning of the meal..." N. T. Wright observes, "there's some nice stuff to crunch there, but then you go and sit at the table and have the red meat of Pauline theology. That's where we're all headed."<sup>14</sup> We could call this a *reversed hermeneutic*, where Jesus' teachings are interpreted through some other lens.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, with a *transfigured hermeneutic*,

Jesus is the ultimate authority—Jesus' voice, his teachings, take obvious and intentional priority over all other voices. Jesus receives hermeneutical priority over the rest of Scripture.

The same point is made in the opening lines of the epistle to the Hebrews:

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,<sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.<sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word (Hebrews 1:1–3).

The opening of the letter sets up a theme to be repeated throughout the rest of the letter—the superiority of Jesus to other revelations, powers, and ministrations. Addressing a community under severe persecution, the writer unleashes his rhetorical energies to persuade his audience to stay committed to their relatively new faith and not to return to former ways. This bold opening affirmation of who Jesus is, and His relation to other revelations, makes a clear point with profound hermeneutical implications—what Jesus reveals is superior and singular when compared to other previous revelations. All revelations may be inspired *by* God, but not all revelations are equal *before* God, including other revelations recorded in the Bible.<sup>16</sup>

### **Jesus and the Conflict of Interpretations**

So how, exactly, does looking to Jesus help us deal with the conflict of interpretations within and about the Bible? We should remember that Jesus was a teacher of Scripture, who, amongst other things, taught His students how to interpret Scripture. Christians, of course, affirm Jesus as being more than a teacher, but He was *at least* that and anyone calling themselves his students should treat Him accordingly, as their rabbi.



This would entail, as it did in second-century Palestine in Jesus' day, the serious attempt to learn their mentor's teachings.<sup>17</sup> Students would commit years to learning the teachings of their rabbi and committing them to memory. They endeavored to live out these teachings in their day-to-day lives. They would take notes as their rabbi debated other rabbis. By doing all this, they were learning a new skill—how to think like their rabbi and respond to new situations unaddressed by him in ways that were faithful to him. They would read sacred texts, new and old, like him.<sup>18</sup> Jesus' promise to His students, then and now, is that, once trained, they will be "like a householder who brings forth out of his storehouse treasure that is new and [treasure that is] old [the fresh as well as the familiar]" (Matthew 13:52).<sup>19</sup>

Glen Stassen and David Gushee, in their study of the Sermon on the Mount, provide an insightful summary of the interpretive principles that Jesus used to interpret Torah.<sup>20</sup> First,

they note, Jesus "understood the Law as an expression of God's grace, calling for a faithful response." Jesus loved His Bible and had the highest respect for it. (Jesus, I think, would respond as any teacher would today when students ask what part of a given reading assignment is really important—"All of it.") He clearly states that His teachings do not detract from anything the Torah teaches, but clarifies its true meaning (Matthew 5:17). Jesus, like the other rabbis of His day, viewed the Law as a gift from God. God had chosen to give it to them. This was abundant grace.

Secondly, with this said, certain teachings of the Bible were clearly more significant to Jesus than others. As Stassen and Gushee put it, Jesus "placed more emphasis on the moral than on the cultic aspects of the Law."<sup>21</sup> Take, for example, Jesus' teaching about neighbor love, which is drawn from Leviticus 19:18. If you look it up, it is actually a secondary clause to a larger teaching prohibiting revenge—"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but *love your neighbor as yourself*. I am the Lord."

What is even more striking are the instructions in the verse that immediately follows it: "Do not mate different kinds of animals. Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed. Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material." The rationale or the significance for these latter teaching is unclear; perhaps they were self-evident to those living in an ancient agrarian society. Commentators note that Leviticus 19 has, as a whole, no clear organizing thread. Rather it is a loose association of ideas. In many ways, it is a microcosm of the Bible, as a whole, or the way it seems to many people trying to make sense of it. The phrase "love your neighbor as yourself," in other words, is one easy to overlook; it is surrounded by all kinds of other instruction. Yet Jesus homes in on this one phrase and makes it central to His teaching. All laws are not created equal, it turns out.

Thirdly, and this relates to the second principle, Jesus "had a prophetic rather than a legal-

**Jesus "had a prophetic rather than a legalistic understanding of righteousness; true righteousness consisted of deeds of love, mercy and justice, especially to the most vulnerable."**



**One's neighbors weren't just faithful Jews; they included enemies, Samaritans, women, children, the demon-possessed, the imprisoned, tax-collectors, widows, and the poor.**



“THE APOSTLES PREACHING THE GOSPEL” BY GUSTAVE DORÉ, 1866.

istic understanding of righteousness; true righteousness consisted of deeds of love, mercy and justice, especially to the most vulnerable.”<sup>22</sup> This returns us to the tension between the priestly and prophetic traditions in the Old Testament. It would be inaccurate to say that priests did not care about justice and that prophets did not care about ritual; but they seemed to focus on or emphasize one as being important to fulfilling God’s will. How is one faithful to both these traditions when they come into conflict? Which should be prioritized over the other? Jesus clearly sides with the prophets. As Richard Bauckman points out, “Jesus does not reject the rules for priestly purity, but he downgrades them. Weightier considerations take precedence.”<sup>23</sup> This is clear in Jesus’ commentary on the punctilious payment of tithes by religious leaders. Jesus admonishes them for neglecting

“the *more important* matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23). This is why Jesus stretched His reading of Scripture to include as many people as possible. One’s neighbors weren’t just faithful Jews; they included enemies, Samaritans, women, children, the demon-possessed, the imprisoned, tax-collectors, widows, and the poor.

Lastly, Jesus “placed emphasis on the root causes of behavior, i.e. the heart or character.”<sup>24</sup> Take His teaching on the proper washing of hands and the eating of food: “Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them” (Mark 7:15). He goes on to explain to His students, who are just as mystified by His dismissive declaration as the religious leaders He is addressing, “Don’t you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside



can defile them? <sup>19</sup>For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.' (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)"<sup>25</sup> (How one interprets this parenthetical comment says a lot of about which of the three hermeneutics options that have been laid out—flat, reversed, or transfigured—they are opting for.)

Jesus continues, "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. <sup>21</sup>For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup>adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. <sup>23</sup>All these evils come from inside and defile a person." In this, and other, engagements with the scholars of His day, Jesus had the ability to engage in sophisticated and legal moral casuistry. But that wasn't His focus like other teachers. Rather than more head knowledge, His teachings were crafted to identify, challenge, and transform matters of the heart.

## Adventism and the Conflict of Interpretations

Jesus *appreciated* all of Scripture, but *read* it prophetically, focusing on how people treat others, especially those on the margins of society, and seeking to transform the character of His listeners. Early on, at its inception, Christianity was clearly a movement based on the teachings of Jesus. The New Testament had not been canonized, so believers were reliant on the teaching of the apostles, who, as students of Jesus, interpreted the Scriptures they did have, the Old Testament, like Jesus—prophetically, ethically, and transformatively. But something shifted as the growing community of Jesus' students encountered competing philosophical and religious groups. Christianity became creedal, more and more about the beliefs one had *about* Jesus than living one's life inspired by the teachings of Jesus.<sup>26</sup>

The number of doctrines that defined what it meant to be a Christian grew like a patch of unruly weeds. In addition to beliefs about God

and Jesus, were eventually added affirmations (and denials) about the precise meaning of Jesus' death, the appropriate mode of baptism, what happens when one takes communion, the best way to organize a church, what happens at the end of the world, the true day of worship, etc. These are all, undoubtedly, important issues. Are they equally important? And how does this way of reading the Bible reflect or relate to the way Jesus read Scripture?

The time has come to rediscover Jesus as a teacher of Scripture and to restore His teaching authority in the church that bears His name. Like most Christians, Adventists believe that God inspired those who wrote the Bible and, through it, has something to say to them. We have approached the Bible with important and interesting questions—returning to George Knight's summary: "What is Adventist in Adventism? What is Christian in Adventism? What is Fundamental in Adventism?" Such questions have led to the discovery of many new insights. It has also generated, as we are aware, many new controversies and debates.

Is it possible, to quote the great theologian Bono, who in "11 o'clock Tick Tock," sings: "We thought that we had the answers, it was the questions we had wrong." Is it possible there are better questions we could have been and could be asking? What if we seriously started asking a different question as individuals and a community—How did, and would, Jesus interpret the Bible?<sup>27</sup> ■



**Zane Yi**, PhD, is an assistant professor of religion at Loma Linda University's School of Religion, where he teaches courses in philosophy and theology and directs the MA in Religion & Society program. He serves as an officer in the Society of Adventist Philosophers.

## Footnotes:

1. George Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000).

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2. Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 269.

3. Gadamer argues that “[r]eason exists only in concrete, historical terms—i.e., it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates.” *Ibid.*, 277.

4. Paul Ricoeur, ed. Mark I. Wallace, “Philosophy and Religious Language” in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Fortress Press, 1995), 41. Through legislation, wisdom literature, narrative, epistle, hymns, etc., Ricoeur notes, “God appears differently each time: sometimes as the hero of the saving act, sometimes as wrathful and compassionate, sometimes as the one to whom one can speak in a relation of an I-Thou type, and sometimes as the one whom I meet only in a cosmic order that ignores me.”

5. Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 53.

6. *Ibid.*, 55.

7. *Ibid.*, 49. See also Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978).

8. Richard Hayes, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1996). Text as quoted by Hayes.

9. *Ibid.*, 190.

10. See John 1:14.

11. According to Origin (c.185–c.254), the dispute between the archangel Michael and the devil over Moses’ body in Jude 9 comes from a treatise entitled: “The Ascension of Moses.”

12. C. A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, Vol. 34B, (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2001), 37.

13. *Ibid.*, 38.

14. N.T. Wright, “Look at Jesus.” Interview for *The Work of the People*. <http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/look-at-jesus>.

15. Paul, according to scholars, was technically the first interpreter of Jesus, as his letters form the earliest writings of the New Testament. Chronology in writing, I am arguing, does not supersede the weight of content, nor does it discount the weight of earlier circulating oral traditions that inform the Gospels.

16. See also, John 1:16, 17: “Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

17. This, of course, would be done with an awareness that we each approach the Gospel texts with our own expectations and interests. Our understandings of Jesus, mediated through the Gospel writers, are interpretations of interpretations. Acknowledging this, and the possible plurality of interpretations that inevitably arise, does not mean that all interpretations are equally legitimate; interpretations of Jesus can still be *evaluated* on the parameters set by the text and, furthermore, *compared* with other interpretations. For a fascinating survey of the way Jesus has been interpreted in

American history, see Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003). See also Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) for a wider historical survey.

18. See Brad H. Young, *Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 28–37. Jon Paulien and the late Hans LaRondelle write: “For a Christian believer, Christ is the true Interpreter of Scripture. His way of understanding the Old Testament, therefore, becomes the true standard for understanding Scripture. Followers of Jesus must be taught by Him, surprised by His personal knowledge of God, and ready to accept His interpretation of the Scriptures...” See Hans K. LaRondelle and Jon Paulien, *The Bible Jesus Interpreted* (Logos Bible Software: 2014), 29.

19. *The Amplified Bible*.

20. Glenn H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: 2003), 92–3. See also Richard Bauckham, *Jesus: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 68–75 for a very helpful overview of Jesus’ interpretive approach to Torah. Richard Hayes also provides a summary in Chapter 7 of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 163–167.

21. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 92–3.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Bauckham, *Jesus*, 71. See 68–75 for another, similar overview of Jesus’ interpretive approach to Torah.

24. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 92–3.

25. Paul, in Romans 14:14, prior to Mark, also quotes Jesus: “I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.” See also Romans 14:17.

26. Justo Gonzalez summarizes the outcome of the first six major church councils: “In this process, the historical, loving Jesus of the New Testament was left aside, and the Savior had become an object of speculation and controversy; he was now described in terms totally alien to the vocabulary of the New Testament—‘hypostasis,’ ‘nature,’ ‘energy,’ etc.; he had become a static object of discussion rather than the Lord of believers and of history...” See *A History of Christian Thought, Vol. 2*, revised edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 90.

27. An initial version of this essay was presented for the 2017 Adventist Forums Conference on *Celebrating the Word* and I am grateful to the organizers of the conference for the opportunity to share it and the lively conversation with attendees that ensued. Additionally, I am grateful to Dr. Norman Young, who read and offered constructive feedback on the manuscript of my presentation, helping me better understand the dating of and relationship between the Jesus and Pauline traditions of the New Testament (See notes 15 & 23).



# LOOKING FORWARD

*Young People  
and Adventism*



# Millennial Reflections on William G. Johnsson's, *Where Are We Headed?: Adventism After San Antonio*

BY ZDRAVKO PLANTAK, DANIELLE M. BARNARD, MATTHEW KORPMAN, KATRINA BLUE, IGOR LORENCIN, IRIANN MARIE HAUSTED, AND DONNY CHRISSTUANTO



From left to right: Igor Lorencin, Katrina Blue, Donny Chrissutianto, Matthew Korpman, Zack Plantak, Iriann Marie Hausted, Danielle M. Barnard

## Introduction

by Zdravko Plantak

What a mutual friend called “an anguished cry,” William G. Johnsson called his “sharp points” of “a lover’s quarrel” out of “a heart of love.” After “a truly sad day for the Seventh-day Adventist Church” at the 2015 San Antonio General Conference Session, of which he and many genuine long-time leaders of the church were ashamed, Johnsson recognized the exposed and widened “fault lines

that have been developing for quite some time.” His highly affecting book, *Where are we Headed? Adventism After San Antonio* (Oak & Acorn, 2017), became his personal “Isaac,” as he early on warns some of his friends and colleagues in the leadership of the church that even though it may give them heartburn, his intentions are redemptive.

Through the chapters Johnsson tackles significant issues that seem to be dividing the church and out of which “two radically different versions of Adventism are com-



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peting for the future.” His attempt is to ask, and hopefully answer, the question of which of the two versions will prevail. Adventist Society for Religious Studies (ASRS) leaders have taken seriously Johnsson’s sturdy call, in which he tells it as he sees it “without beating around the bush.” We asked six younger scholars, from theological undergraduate education through the seminary and master level studies, all the way to PhD students, or those who have completed their degrees and have recently embarked on teaching Bible and theology in Adventist universities, to reflect on Johnsson’s thesis and respond for a Sabbath Morning Panel at the recently concluded 2017 Annual ASRS Convention in Boston, MA.

The intention was to have different groups represented from various geographic areas of the world. So, the African-American student

who is in the middle of her MDiv program at the Adventist Seminary at Andrews University, Danielle Bernard, responded first, followed by Dr. Katrina Blue, an Australian Systematic theologian and a professor at Pacific Union College. Donny Chrissutianto, an Indonesian who presently studies church history and historical theology at the AIIAS in Philippines, and a Puerto Rican, Iriann Marie Hanstead, PhD student in historical theology at Andrews University, brought Asian and Latina perspectives respectively. Finally, these young scholars were followed by a quadruple undergraduate major (religious studies, archeology, philosophy, and film & television) from La Sierra University, Matthew J. Korpman, and then a New Testament professor at the German Adventist institution of higher education, Friedensau Adventist University, Dr Igor Lorencin, who

**Johnsson is well aware of the struggles our church has had over the past several decades to preserve Seventh-day Adventism—not as the movement we love, but as an institution.**

originally came from Croatia and was, prior to his appointment in Germany, teaching at the Adriatic Union Seminary in Marusevec, after completing his doctoral studies at Andrews University in Michigan, in the field of social circumstances of early Christianity. You will be able to hear these six voices from Asia, Latin America, Europe, and Australia, as well as African-American and white voices from North America, as they reflected on the overall theme, or some aspects, of Johnsson's book, and built foundations for the conversation on *Where are we Headed? Adventism After San Antonio*. ■



**The SDA Drive for Self-Preservation**  
by *Danielle M. Barnard*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer penned these words to Eberhard Bethge, on May 21, 1944,

Our church, which has been fighting in these years only for its self-preservation, as though that were an end in itself, is incapable of taking the word of reconciliation and redemption to mankind and the world. Our earlier words are therefore bound to lose their force and cease, and our being Christians today will be limited to two things: prayer and righteous action among people.

Seventy-three years later, the words rang through my mind as I carefully read Dr. Johnsson's short but thoughtful work, *Where are We Headed?: Adventism After San Antonio*. In light of Bonhoeffer's statement, I observed Dr. Johnsson reflecting on several points of our Seventh-day Adventist drive for self-preservation in the first eight chapters. For each chapter I would retitle as follows: Chapter 1: The Preservation of Prestige, dealing with women's ordination; Chapter 2: The Preservation of Peculiarity, dealing with the Seventh-day Adventist tendency toward drastic exclusivity; Chapter 3: The Preservation of the Promise, concerning our constant, yet misguided preoccupation with "when" Christ will return; Chapter 4: The Preservation of Proclamation, where Johnsson examines the message we are called as a people to proclaim; Chapter 5: The Preservation of Power, about the structural and organizational problems we have and the need for major revisions within the organization; Chapter 6: The Preservation of Process, the Seventh-day Adventist battle with evolutionists to uphold a "young earth" and literal six-day creation; Chapter 7: Preservation of Purpose, a look at the nature of the "mission" we attempt to uphold; and Chapter 8: Preservation of the Prophet, examining our church's often abusive and misguided use of Ellen White in our hermeneutical practice.

As my personal re-titles have noted, Johnsson is well aware of the struggles our church has had over the past several decades to preserve Seventh-day Adventism—meaning Seventh-day Adventism not as the movement we love, but as an institution. Millennials such as myself would agree with Bonhoeffer that our attempts as a denomination to save ourselves from whatever "threats" of destruction we believe are there, have made the church, especially in North America, ineffective and "incapable of taking the word of reconciliation and redemption to mankind and the world." How are we as a church able to truly address the issues of members at the local church level if we are constantly on edge? Constantly looking over



our shoulder at evolutionists, rebellious unions, and other threats to unity!

We miss the fact that young African Americans (those who are not of Caribbean heritage, like myself) in our denomination have been leaving the church consistently. These young people are struggling to see the value of being part of a denomination that couldn't care less about them and finding solace in traditionally black denominations with a preached and lived gospel compatible with the God of justice they read in Scripture. We miss the opportunities we have as a church to partake in true revitalization and development of our neighborhoods through intentional community development and part-

nership with local development corporations. We miss ways to minister prophetically and passionately, living out the *now* of the kingdom while patiently, yet eagerly, waiting for the not yet. We miss so much when we believe our church to be so fragile that "unity in diversity" is seen as ending the church as we know it. I believe Dr. Johnsson sees this too, and I appreciate the way in which he communicates all of the above.

Dr. Johnsson concludes in the last two chapters with a call to be the movement God has called us to be. Dr. Johnsson calls us to move beyond our preoccupation with self-preservation and return to prayer, righteous action, and effectual kingdom living and ministry. ■



## The Soul of the Church by Matthew Korpman

Dr. William Johnsson's work can be described as many things: timely, needed, powerful, controversial, straight-forward, Christ-centered, and even apocalyptic (it definitely reveals many things about us as a Church). Its success lies in the fact that it truly gives voice and life to what I would call "the Adventist question." Johnsson's title, "Where are we headed?" informs us less of a fact (where he believes we are) than it raises us to the awareness of a need to stop and reassess where we are, and more importantly, where we are going (something we as Adventists have often taken for granted). Likewise, his title evokes a double meaning, a more worrisome one, for it questions whether we are going somewhere spiritually (in

the ultimate sense) that we may not wish to. It forces us to discover who it is that is guiding us to the direction we are going. Who is truly at the helm of our ship? The Spirit? Which? Like any good question, Johnsson's work opens up more questions than it provides possible answers to. Those questions are needed now.

What is at stake in this question of Johnsson's is nothing less than the soul of the Church he, and all of us, so dearly care about. It's an issue that I care deeply about. Many are surprised to hear me, a Millennial, sounding passionate about a subject such as this. It's certainly not common. Johnsson's book touches on the Adventist Millennial problem a number of times. Don't most of my generation reject the church because of what they see happening within it, you wonder? Aren't Adventists losing hold on them quicker than sand slips through the fingers? The answer: Yes! We are. And that's exactly why Johnson's work must be given ear.

Here's the diagnosis we don't want to accept: the Millennials are not likely coming back any time soon (short of a miracle). There will not be a revival which we can plan to accomplish this. The damage has been done: spiritually, theologically, and personally. We must learn and grow and only so that we have a potential chance to keep the ones we still have. That struggle is already one of our greatest.

Johnsson warns we are ready to lose the youth. He is most certainly correct. I know of countless Adventist millennials, both those still in school and those already employed in our church as ministers, who speak openly with me that they are losing faith in serving our church. They are ready

to quit or change denominations, especially since San Antonio's vote. Mind you: these are not disconnected youth who simply have stopped caring. These are deep-thinking and faithful servants of Christ (the future of our church)! They are some of the brightest Adventists I've seen. They are our future, prophetic voices for our church who Christ is ready to use for His causes, those who could steer our Church in the right direction. Yet just when we are in need of these voices and the light they bring, that star is fading and doing so fast.

They see the Adventist church as a patient dying in a hospital. This patient is not incurable, but the patient is obstinate, refusing to even acknowledge the true sickness it suffers from and thus, to accept the correct medication. They don't want to leave it, but they do not want to waste

their time sharing its fate when there is a gospel to still be preached.

Is Adventism already dead? I would argue no. It is however dead to many, even if not ultimately. Johnsson is reminding us in his work that there still is a future for this church. It doesn't have to be this way. We can find our soul again. Yet, as he also wisely notes, "the Lord will not save us from ourselves." We have to make the choice. Will Christ be at the helm of our Advent ship (keeping the main thing the main thing) or will a new sense of papal power, like an iceberg, threaten any potential God might still have for us? Johnsson's work is a gift because it helps us to start this much needed conversation (truly commence it) so that the Holy Spirit may have a chance to lead us to answers that God would have us hear. ■



## **The War's Not Over** by **Katrina Blue**

As a fellow, native Australian, I appreciate immensely Bill Johnsson's straight-forward, honest, personal, and at times cutting and critical reflections in his book, *Where are We Headed?: Adventism After San Antonio*. Having lived a life devoted to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its mission, a stellar resume under his belt combined with the wisdom of the aged, Johnsson, at the age of eighty-two, unravels his personal angst over the current state of Adventism following the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas. He offers much upon which

to ponder and reflect. In his own words, he engages in a "lover's quarrel" with the church he has served for decades. But, like many, Johnsson finds it increasingly difficult to identify with its processes and decisions. "Where are we going?" is a natural and pertinent question. I would like to comment on three areas Johnsson raises in his book to engage in further critical thinking.

First, the "war." Johnsson states, "The war is over—San Antonio settled it but not in the manner some Adventists would like to think. The war is over because the ordination of women pastors will spread rapidly throughout most parts of the world church" (12). I fear this jubilant claim is overly idealistic. It's not a war, it's a system, and it's not over. The idea that the Adventist church will surely steam ahead gloriously with the ordination of women pastors, in spite of San Antonio, overlooks the crippling impact yet again of such repeated General Conference decisions on the fate of women in ministry. Following 2015, women were ripped out of women's ministries leadership positions to be replaced by men in various parts of the world. Others were removed from the office of elder, while female pastors had to confront conflicting and confused responses from their congregants. A female pastor shared with me that her church members still say to her, "You're not my pastor."

It's an age-old issue: patriarchy. Whether you believe it was instituted by God in the creation order, or is an outcome of the Fall of Adam and Eve, the basic disharmony,

or dominance/submission model of relationships between males and females is deep-seated and widespread, in spite of modern day appeals to equality. Feminists argue that patriarchy is the basic social system and is near universal in scope across cultures. Women have been able to penetrate institutionalized forms of Christianity in only limited ways. San Antonio sent an unwritten, conflicting, non-verbal message to Seventh-day Adventist women: we still question if we want you. Or, we want you, but ... How do we move forward from this? The North American Division can set goals to include more women in pastoral ministry (to be applauded as a positive step toward promoting qualified and called women into ministry), they can subsidize more salaries, and find conferences to bring female pastors on board, but we must not assume that society or even the local church automatically understands or values them. We need to draw people's attention to God and the *imago Dei*, male-female equality in Christ, in marriage, and in the gospel-centered, Spirit-driven Church.

Second, a church in decline and the millennial generation. Like the Vietnam War which ran from 1955–1975, tiring many Americans of the atrocities of war, and engaging in combat with forces that did not lead to any meaningful solution, the younger generation does not get “the war” and many have had enough. Millennials are engaging in their protest march by marching out the doors of the church. Johnsson goes so far as to say that they are “laughing at Church leaders” out of the absurdity of the church’s official stance on women’s ordination (20). While I haven’t heard laughter, I have sensed and heard the deep-seated frustration and pain. It’s not just young people, the middle-aged and old are included too. They are tired of the institution and its inflexibility. Johnsson’s prognosis is stark: the institution simply cannot sustain itself (68). The statistics simply don’t warrant its long-term financial viability. Moving ahead the church may look very different in the next five, ten, or twenty years. And yet, Johnsson is con-

vinced that the Adventist Church will not merely survive, it will grow. If this is to be the case we need to find new ways to engage in face-to-face, meaningful Christian community.

Third, Johnsson highlights similarities between the Adventist church and the early Christian church. Adventists are now in our second century, he notes, the same point at which the early church departed from Jesus’ teachings and practice (53). Johnsson ends up with a study in contrasts which leaves the Adventist church looking not much better than the whitewashed tombs of Scripture. “What impresses me about Jesus of Nazareth,” he writes “is there’s no baloney. Organized religion is full of it. And we Adventists have developed our own variety. We specialize in Adventist baloney” (135). His statements are vitriolic and honest. Johnsson questions the validity of the church’s number crunching, both qualitative and quantitative. He questions the use and misuse of funds: \$45 million every five years for GC sessions that could be dedicated to the poor, community development, or mission evangelism. Dedicated persons at the Church’s highest level who travel the globe, sitting on committees, and dreaming up new programs that result in little success or advancement of the kingdom. It’s time to get honest.

Is Johnsson’s voice a prophetic warning? Whatever it is, his call is desperate. Instead of worrying which side we belong to, we need to rethink the church. Johnsson rightly points to the Kingdom of Heaven, as the reign of God in which the Church participates. But what about the Church? What kind of church are Seventh-day Adventists embracing? Johnsson identifies two radically different versions of Adventism competing with one another (15). We must be careful. Our weak ecclesiology coupled with “eschatological burnout,” as Johnsson puts it, could lead us down the wrong path. In the end, he falls back on the “Adventism will succeed no matter what” (36–69). (From the experience of the closure of Adventism’s longest running institution, the Review and Herald in 2014, Johnsson learned the fallacy of reason-

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ing “the Lord won’t let it fail.” He does think that the church may fade away in some regions of the world where it has been in existence for over a century and is currently on life support.) Though hierarchical forms of institutionalized Christianity are going out of vogue in our generation, we need to remind ourselves that Jesus founded the Church on Himself. Has the Adventist church begun to slip off its foundation? The answer may lay, in part, in further, careful reflections on what the Church is. We need to pray, think carefully, and act fast. The Adventist Church may need to radically change its form or be changed by the new forces shaping it. As long as Christ is the Head, and He remains the foundation, His Church will succeed. ■



### **Obeying Conscious Rather Than Policy** *by Igor Lorencin*

William Johnsson points in his latest book to the issues currently shaping the Adventist church. Chapter 1 deals with the ordination of women. He claims the following: It is a moral issue; our treatment is unjust and discriminatory; equality and inclusion is needed. Finally, Millennials laugh at our church and they leave. I believe Johnsson is making a big point here, since according to some statistics we lose 95 percent

of our young people in the western world.

Chapter 2 deals with the chosen or the remnant. According to Johnsson, such self-designation makes us arrogant and exclusive in the eyes of others—it separates us from the world. Johnsson, as a known expert in the epistle to the Hebrews, points out that Jesus died “outside the gate” (Heb. 13:12). He died in an unholy place. “Now,” says the Epistle to the Hebrews, “let us go to Him outside the camp” (Heb. 13:13). Johnsson believes that we are called to leave our comfort zones and go where Jesus has gone before—outside the camp, into the public square! My question would be, what is our contribution to the public square, when we are treating our own people unjustly and discriminatorily, being ready to present ourselves as arrogant and exclusive? How appealing is that to the young people of today?

Chapter 8 discusses interpreting the Scripture, distinguishing between (1) the flat literalistic approach, which centers on words and tends to deny the need to interpret and go beyond the literal meaning of the text, and (2) the nuanced approach, which centers on context and is aware of the challenges in understanding the text caused by time, place, and circumstances of the writing. I strongly agree with Johnsson’s claim that polarization over the role of women in our church to a large measure stemmed from different approaches to reading the Scripture. Culture and circumstances of the biblical author have to be taken in consideration when we read and interpret the Scripture. It must be acknowledged that words in different contexts could have different meanings.

In addition, our word “ordination” is not part of the vocabulary of biblical writers, but part of the King James Bible vocabulary and the hierarchy struggles of that time. Today’s culture must be taken into consideration as well, as we apply Scripture to the needs of our world. I would like to point to the tri-polar thinking, which, according to Fritz Guy, is what distinguishes Adventist theologians: (1) Scripture; (2) today’s culture; and (3) Adventist heritage. The main

question is, how can Scripture from the culture of the biblical author be relevant in today's culture, without losing our Adventist heritage?

Chapter 10 deals with unity and the danger of a major split of our church. The main question is, how to keep the big worldwide family together? What is the proper way of dealing with the rebellious unions? My pastoral experience in dealing with conflict situations leads me to agree with Johnsson's assessment, that the course of action that the GC leaders contemplate is wrong. Johnsson suggests that it is wrong in its theology, history, policy, spirit, and that it is more papal than Adventist. Finally, I agree with Johnsson that the issue is one of conscience. He claims straightforwardly, that the "faithful Adventist is bound before God to obey conscience rather than policy when policy conflicts with conscience." Using policy to resolve an issue of conscience does not lead toward a resolution, but toward escalation of the conflict and separation.

At the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, I do not observe a use of policy, but a dialog which brought both sides near, for the purpose of keeping the family together and advancing the work. The crucial moment at the council was the testimony of the working of the Spirit among the gentiles (Acts 15:8-9). Who can prevent the Holy Spirit from working? No policy can restrict women to be a blessing to our church, and we should recognize it and give them equal rights, like the Jerusalem Council recognized gentiles and gave them equal rights in the family of God. Paul's entire missionary work aimed at unifying different parties, as exemplified in 1 Corinthians, as well as in his collection of money among gentile Christians for the needs of the poor in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-27). I see Paul as a great unifier, as was our Lord Jesus Christ who reunited earth with heaven on the cross. Finally, we are called by Jesus to be peacemakers (Matt. 5:9), aiming at expanding and keeping the family together.

In conclusion, I am quoting George Knight's question from his 9.5 Theses, "how Catholic

do we as a church want to be?" In the light of the events at the Annual Council in October, Johnsson's book continues to be highly relevant. Issues pointed out in his book will decide about the future of our church. Successful leaders recognize strength in diversity and work at keeping the family together. We need diverse people and diverse approaches to reach the diverse world. Finally, we do not have one Gospel in our Bible, but four diverse versions of it, all aiming at the same goal. I pray for sensitive leaders who recognize strength in diversity and keep the big, worldwide family together, as we all together work toward fulfilling the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:19-20). ■



### **Polarization in Reading Scripture by Iriann Marie Hausted**

In a simultaneous critique and praise of Adventism, William Johnsson opens his experienced heart to us. His fierce critique is equally juxtaposed with a robust hope in what he calls "The Promise of Adventism." He describes it thus: "There is much to be proud of in this history, even if that history has chapters of regret and shame. Adventism has been a movement of promise. It can be again . . . Walk away? I would

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be the worse of ingrates. Adventism is a movement of promise.” (132)

It is in this context that Johnsson addresses San Antonio, not only concerning the role of women, but concerning how it has pointed to the polarization in approaches to Scripture. (2, 116).

Johnsson considers two “radically different versions of Adventism” that “are competing for the future” (3). He identifies these different versions of Adventism as (1) a camp that reads Scripture in flat/literalistic fashion and as (2) a camp that reads Scripture in a principled/nuanced way, ultimately centering upon what he continuously refers as the main thing: “Christ died for our sins” (64, 66). According to Johnsson, one camp “tends to deny the need to interpret, to go beyond the literal meaning of the text” (123), while the other “comes to the text aware of the challenges to understanding caused by time, culture, type of literature, and so on” (123). One “centers in words,” the other in “ideas” (120).

He seems to link the flat/literalistic approach partly with William Miller’s approach to Scripture. Although he argues that Adventism in itself has historically moved towards a principled/nuanced interpretation of Scripture as the orthodox position, yet he also argues that, in recent decades, Adventism has particularly welcomed a flat/literalistic approach, related to Fundamentalist influences and hard views of verbal inspiration.

Currently, Johnsson argues, there are challenges to Adventism’s orthodox “nuanced” approach. For example, the “flat” proponents consider this approach as “worldly.” Further on, conclusions arrived at by a “nuanced” approach to problematic texts, if non-traditional, are looked upon with suspicion on the part of the “flat” proponents. Johnsson asks, for instance: “if any book of the Bible is problematic for Adventists, shouldn’t we dig deep into it rather than avoid it?” (122). Elsewhere he argues—and I think it applies here as well—that “we Adventists find it hard to deal with negative developments” (71). We Adventist “aren’t good at this” (confronting the truth), but

“we like to hear a good report” (4).

Finally (at least when it comes to the points I want to highlight from Chapter 8), Johnsson states that most church members are not aware of differences present today in Adventism in terms of hermeneutic approaches: “they simply come to the Bible and read it as it is, glossing over passages they don’t understand” (122).

I found myself agreeing with the main tenets of Johnsson’s eighth chapter, particularly with his emphasis on the centrality of Jesus (also present throughout the book) and his encouragement for the church to better understand and pursue what he refers to as a “nuanced” interpretation of Scripture. Although it is true that Johnsson might be too simplistic in describing the interpretive practices of our denomination in terms of two camps, the flat-nuanced dichotomy is a good beginning to discuss the matter in a general fashion and in the scope of a short book.

I also found myself agreeing with Johnsson’s concern that a literalistic approach has and will continue to damage our church community, perhaps irreparably.

My main questions related to this discussion, then, are not so much regarding the logic, reasonableness, or content in his arguments, but have to do more with its application in the Seventh-day Adventist church at large. And this, basically, is the issue of theory versus practice. For example, how could elements related to a principled/nuanced interpretation of Scripture be communicated and discussed in terms of a worldwide church that appears to relate more to a flat/literalistic interpretation? In other words, how can the church successfully contextualize its orthodox “nuanced” understanding of interpretation to a large people group within it that does not yet completely understand that this, and not the “flat” approach, is most distinctive of Adventism?

For now, I can only come back to Johnsson’s question: “Where Are We [Adventists] Headed [After San Antonio],” particularly regarding the interpretation of Scripture? ■





## **In Search of a Christ-Like Spirit** **by Donny Chrissutianto**

William G. Johnsson, the author of this book, is an experienced worker, editor, and theologian for fifty years in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He calls this book his “Isaac” (i), since it came in an unexpected way, just as Isaac did. He wrote this book based upon his love for this denomination that he believes “is a movement of promise” (137). He wants to see the church become more effective to fulfill the three angels’ messages. He observes several obstacles that should be settled in order for the church to accomplish this task (v, vi).

The impetus for this book was the General Conference Session in 2015 at San Antonio, especially about women’s ordination. He sees the Session “as a moment comparable to the 1888 Minneapolis” (1). From this starting point, he argues that the conflict in San Antonio be described as one that could threaten the Church into other divisive conflicts. In addition to women’s ordination (Chapter 1), there are other issues that could divide or hinder the growth of the worldwide church. He identifies the exclusiveness of some people (Chapter 2), who say that we are the only people chosen by God in this world, and those who focus on the date for the Second Coming rather than the person of Jesus Christ (Chapter 3), as two factors which prevent others from seeing the truth that God has entrusted to us. He suggests that Adventists should concentrate on the death of Jesus Christ on the cross for their sins as the only thing that we should emphasize (Chapter 4). He recognizes some failures by the church that should become important lessons, such mistakes should not be repeated.

Johnsson emphasizes a check and re-check management style that is necessary in order to maintain organizational effectiveness. He proposes that organizations should anticipate world change that affects the church (Chapter 5). For instance, people have changed from reading papers to reading digitally. If this phenomenon could be anticipated, the loss of the Review and Herald and some other institutions would not recur. He calls the Church to compare their understanding with the ongoing facts and not merely their traditions. For example, the case of our world’s age as 6,000 years should be re-studied and redefined (Chapter 6), rather than unswervingly adhering to this time limit. He requests the Church to stop stressing the number of baptisms and focus on church mission (Chapter 7).

As a biblical scholar, William Johnsson calls the Church to give their best interest to Scriptures and apply it in their practices and all decisions. There should be no dichotomy between the Word of God and its application. He identifies many Adventists who pay more attention to Ellen G. White’s writings than the Bible (Chapter 8), while we believe the Bible is the supreme authority. He also desires that the Seventh-day Adventist Church live with no-baloney (Chapter 9) and follow the biblical leadership from bottom up (Chapter 10).

Johnsson’s notions on these ten potential fractures in the Seventh-day Adventist Church should get the attention of all Seventh-day Adventists. He identifies those potential threats as the upcoming danger. He calls it a tension between two different views in the church. Two poles conflicting in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are not new. Since the beginning, Sabbatarian Adventists who later become Seventh-day Adventists were always made up of two-sided views: whether we should have an organization or unorganized groups; when to keep the Sabbath (from sunset to sunset or 6 pm to 6 pm); Jesus as co-eternal or subordinate to the Father; atonement started at the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven or at the cross; verbal or thought inspiration; righteousness by faith only when we accept Jesus as our Savior or from the conversion to the end, etc. Thus, the two poles can fit many topics. All of these conflicts in the history of the Church, whether doctrines or practices, could be settled by allowing unceasing discussion in a Christ-like spirit and through Bible study. From these facts, when we face the challenges that Johnsson has identified in this book, by showing the love of Jesus in our discussion and unending study of the Bible, I am confident by God’s grace, we also can have consensus in solving our differences today. ■

# Growing Young Adventists | BY TIMOTHY A. FLOYD

Two-thirds  
of North  
American  
Adventist  
church  
members are  
over the age  
of fifty, while  
the average  
age in the  
United States  
is thirty-six.

## Defining Reality

Leadership guru Max De Pree once said, “the first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.”<sup>1</sup> In an attempt to define our present reality, let’s talk honestly for a few lines. In 1965, the Seventh-day Adventist church began studying the issue of why people leave the church. Since then, over thirteen million people have left the Seventh-day Adventist Church,<sup>2</sup> and 63 percent of those were young adults. According to David Trim’s team at the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, the top reasons given by those who left were perceived hypocrisy from members, lack of friends in the church, conflict, and doubts.

In 2013, the Church commissioned a research study by the Barna Group in an effort to better understand why our young people are leaving the church. The results of the study indicated that Adventist young adults who left the church did so because they perceived the church to be doubtless, exclusive, anti-science, overprotective, shallow, and repressive. This is not just an Adventist phenomenon either; according to Fuller Theological Seminary’s research, “no major Christian tradition is growing in the US today.”<sup>3</sup> But when compared with other religious groups, the Adventist respondents indicated higher perceptions of dissatisfaction than the national norm in every category.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Pew Research Center has discovered that the percentage of Americans who do not identify with any religious affiliation has risen from 16 percent in 2006, to 23 percent in 2016.<sup>5</sup>

While the youth and young adults are leav-

ing the church in staggering numbers, the older generations will only continue getting older, and will eventually begin to shrink the church membership from the other end. Andrew McChesney reported in the *Adventist Review* in 2016 that two-thirds of North American Adventist church members are over the age of fifty, while the average age in the United States is thirty-six.<sup>6</sup> This “graying” of Adventism is exemplified by the fact that in more than 1,000 local churches in the North America Division, there are no children or teenagers whatsoever.<sup>7</sup> Adding to the problem is the fact that our churches are not bringing in new members to fill these voids. Approximately 80 percent of all churches in North America have reached a membership plateau or are declining.<sup>8</sup>

As a church, we have over fifty-two years’ worth of data indicating that our church is mainly comprised of the older generation; the younger generations are leaving, and we know the reasons why they have left. It seems like we have more research on this single issue than we have proof texts for the Sabbath, and yet we have seen no changes being made to address the problem. If the current situation is allowed to continue, within fifteen to twenty years,<sup>9</sup> one wonders what will remain of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, with the older generations dying off and the younger generations leaving. Will what remains be sustainable?

## Facing Reality

This is the reality we face. Now is the time for action. Now is the time for leaders and members

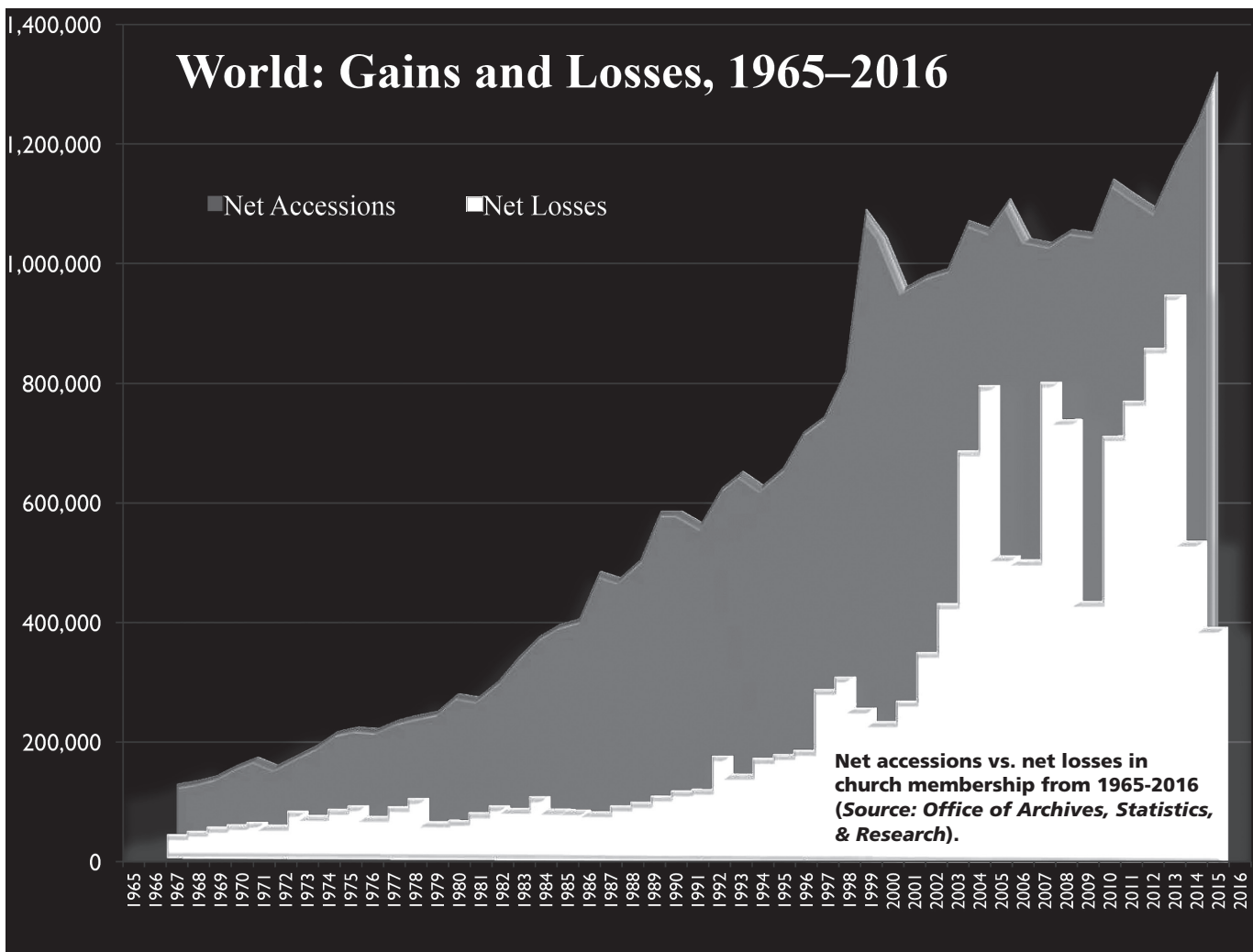


IMAGE SOURCE: OFFICE OF ARCHIVES, STATISTICS, & RESEARCH, GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

to take ownership of their churches and make the changes necessary, so we can continue to share the good news of Jesus’ second coming that we have been commissioned to share, and to be able to be a light in our communities.

The question that faces us is, what are we going to do about it? I can promise you that the solutions given at the recent General Conference Annual Council of “more literature evangelism” and “increase funding for Pathfinders” will only continue the business as usual mindset, and will accomplish nothing significant.

### Growing Young

In 2013, Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena CA, began looking at this issue within Christianity from a different perspective. They decided to stop focusing on the problem and start looking at what they call “Bright Spots” in ministry. These are congregations that are effectively loving and serving young people already. These congregations are engaging young people ages fifteen

to twenty-nine, and are growing spiritually, emotionally, missionally, and sometimes also numerically. Fuller describes these churches as “Growing Young.”<sup>10</sup> As they began studying, they determined that growing young churches doesn’t require a precise size, trendy location, modern building, or contemporary worship service in order to be effective. They found congregations from across the United States, from every ethnic group, and every demographic, of all shapes and sizes, to be growing young. In their research, they discovered six core commitments present in the churches studied:

1. Keychain leadership unlocked, so instead of centralized authority, power was shared, especially with young people.
2. Empathy with young people rather than judgment or criticism of them.
3. Jesus’ message taken seriously. Instead of asserting formulaic gospel claims, young people were welcomed into a Jesus-centered way of life.





IMAGE SOURCE: FOOTAGE FIRM, INC.

4. Warm and welcoming community. Instead of focusing on cool worship or programs, there were warm peer and intergenerational friendships.

5. Young people (and families) prioritized. Young people were involved in creative ways to tangibly support, resource, and be involved in all facets of the congregation.

6. Best neighbors. Instead of condemning the world outside, young people were at work with neighbors locally and globally.<sup>11</sup>

Fuller admits that there is no guarantee that these six commitments will change your congregation. However, they have thoroughly researched and established their case for effective culture change within a congregation in order to grow younger.

Beginning in 2016, a small group of Adventist pastors, teachers, and Conference and Union leadership began studying Fuller's book, *Growing Young*, in effort to find a solution for our own challenges. As we began reading the book, it quickly became clear that this was a different approach. The problem I had with the Barna collaboration in 2013 was that it focused so heavily on what was

wrong, without providing any sort of hope or direction to move forward from the despair of where we are. That may sound hyperbolic, but as a leader who sees the effects of a church losing young people every day, this is my reality. Slowly, this study group began to dialogue about possibilities of *Growing Young Adventists*. We realized that there was something special, hopeful, in this discussion. There was something we all resonated with, that gave us a direction we could all pursue together. So, a proposal was formulated from within that group. That proposal turned into an approval. That approval resulted in a group of Adventist leaders who joined a learning cohort with Fuller, with the intent of becoming certified trainers and speakers to take the lessons learned in Fuller's research and apply it to the North America Division.

Thirteen certified trainers and speakers for the NAD are in the first phase, which is leadership training. Our certified speakers and cohort churches are in a leader learning process through this year. In March of 2018, we will finalize our training with Fuller, and will move into the teaching phase where we will begin *Growing Young Adventist Congregations* throughout the NAD. By 2020, we hope

to have case studies of success stories where Adventist churches changed their course and began to “Grow Young.” We will present these case studies at the 2020 Called Ministerial Convention, and at the 2020 General Conference Session. From there, the plan is that congregations across the NAD will become inspired to change the culture within their own churches, and request certified trainers to come to their church and help them Grow Young Adventists in their own community.

## Conclusion

In the course of presenting *Growing Young*, I have been asked by church members, “Why do we need to focus so much on young people? What about us older people? Don’t we matter anymore?” I actually had one pastor tell me that he is losing members because they don’t want to be around “all of those young people.” Creating a hesitation for this pastor to do any level of focus on youth or young adults. This is actually sort of ironically funny; our church is literally dying, and this church refuses to accommodate the young people that it already has.

When Fuller looked at the power of churches that prioritize young people, they note this powerful statement—a statement that I think my pastor friend’s church could benefit from assimilating into their religious worldview. Prioritizing young people means:

Even when it means giving up preferences or shifting what in the past may have been considered nonnegotiable. Even when it means relinquishing traditional authority and power in order to embrace the young. Prioritizing teenagers and young adults has made the difference between ailing and thriving, not only for young people but also for the whole congregation.... Regardless of your context, our research has convinced us that the hinge point separating churches that grow old from those that grow young is priority. When churches

prioritize young people—and their families—everywhere, they take a step beyond both empathy and warmth. They allocate resources, energy, and attention to teenagers and young adults both inside and outside their walls.<sup>12</sup>

This should not be a surprise to any Adventist leader who has paid attention to young people over the last fifty-two years. Leadership author and speaker, Scott Cormode, told our *Growing Young* cohort, “leadership begins with listening.” When we listen to our young people, we all do better. When we listen to our young people, we realize that we have been putting them to the side, treating them as some “future church” rather than a present force in the Body of Christ.

One of the most powerful takeaways I gained from the Barna collaboration was a statement David Kinnaman made to the NAD: “You have to come to the point where you love your young people more than your traditions.”<sup>13</sup> Until we are willing to make our young people a priority (with time, energy, budgets, authority, etc.) we will not change. Our churches will continue to decline, and within fifteen to twenty years, we will be a shadow of what we once were. Or, we can take the steps to change our church culture now and salvage what remains. When we put Jesus (not traditions) at the center of our church culture, we begin to empathize with all members, this drives a warmer community, where we prioritize our young people, and we mentor them in leadership opportunities. As a result of that we become better neighbors to our communities, and we grow ... but we are *Growing Young*. ■



**Timothy Floyd** is the Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries for the Kansas-Nebraska Conference. He has served youth and young adults as a Religion Teacher and Chaplain in

Adventist Education, and Youth Pastor since 2006. Timothy is also one of the certified *Growing Young* speaker/trainers for the North American Division.

**Now is the  
time for  
leaders and  
members  
to take  
ownership of  
their churches  
and make  
the changes  
necessary.**

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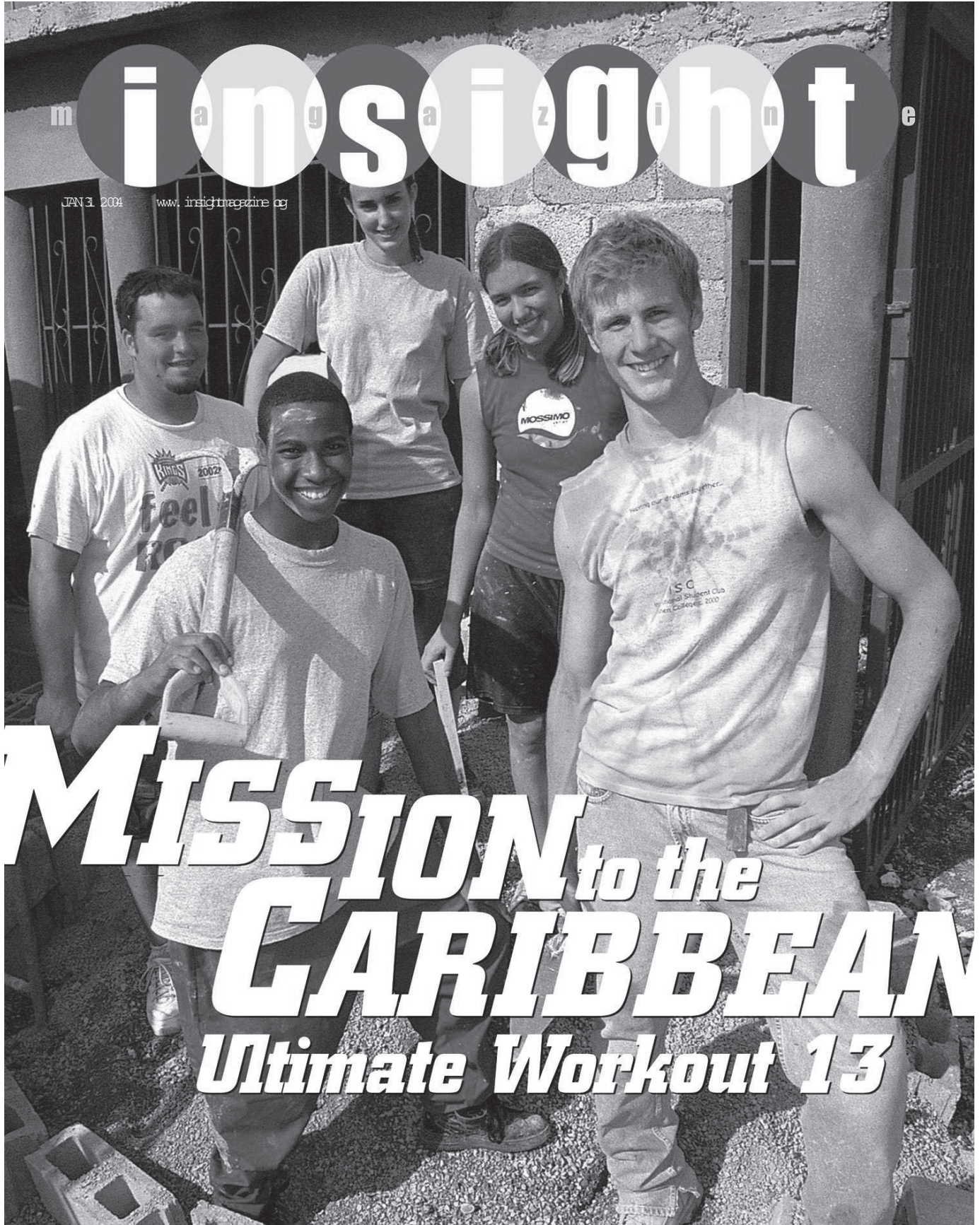
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*Insight* cover, January 2004. The magazine's last issue was published in July of 2017.



## The Demise of *Insight*: What Killed Adventism's Youth Magazine, and What We Should Do About It | BY TOMPAUL WHEELER

**Y**oung people are a problem. Toddlers in Beginners Sabbath School are fun and cute. The elementary age kids in Primary learn like a sponge. High school-age youth, though, are “difficult.” They require the most investment. They are ungrateful. They question everything you do. They’re apathetic. They push boundaries, and you see no return in your investment for decades. But their spiritual growth and involvement are an investment we must make.

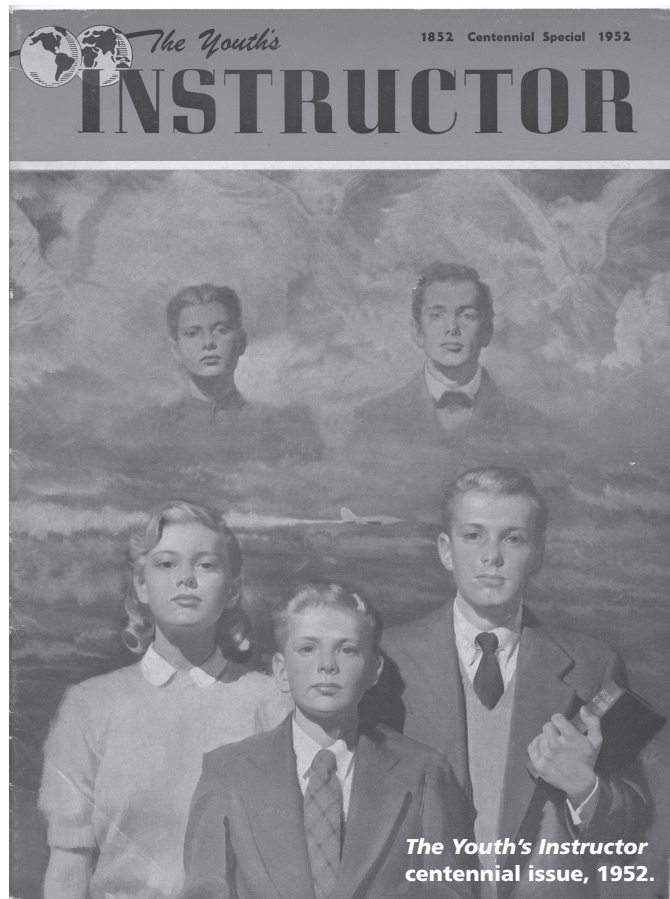
In August 1852, the fledgling Adventist believers started their second magazine, for young people: *The Youth's Instructor*. (Adventism's first magazine, *The Present Truth*, launched three years earlier, is now known as *Adventist Review*.) By the late 1960s, *Instructor* had grown far out of touch with young people, so, in 1970, a new magazine was launched: *Insight*. *Insight* aimed to meet youth where they were, addressing their issues with openness and honesty. It lasted forty-seven years. Its last issue was July 1, 2017.

Subscriptions had steadily declined for years. Pacific Press Publishing Association acquired *Insight* in a merger at the same time it became a North American Division (NAD) institution, in 2014, but deferred to the NAD as to the magazine's fate. The consensus of representative youth leaders was to discontinue the publication and, in January 2017, the NAD voted to end it. As of this writing, there are no concrete plans for anything to fill its void.

### What Killed *Insight*?

#### Fear

I recently read an Adventist blog<sup>1</sup> that stated, “you have to feed the culture you want to grow in a church. You don't make healthy churches by jumping through hoops for unhealthy people. Instead, you encourage



and support healthy people.”

When it was launched, aimed at high school and college-age youth, *Insight* was perhaps the most thought-provoking publication in the church. Over roughly the past fifteen years, however, I repeatedly witnessed an attitude of “Let's be careful about including this or that because the ‘gatekeepers’ may not approve (and then they'll stop subscribing for their youth).” That attitude took for granted that teens would keep reading a cautious magazine. The result, I believe, was a stale publication that teens increasingly tuned out of, and since they weren't taking them out of the classroom, the gatekeepers—individual churches—stopped

subscribing for their youth.

“It’s fear morphed to cowardice,” reflects recently retired Union College humanities professor, Chris Blake, who edited *Insight* from 1985 to 1993. “People who claim to be followers of the One who took constant criticism from the ultra-religious will now, to avoid criticism from the same type of people, balk and veer and cease and desist. It’s so bizarre. Cowardice owns the day.”

Blake sees a parallel in the unreleased General Conference video production *The Record Keeper*. A retelling of Adventism’s Great Controversy narrative targeted at young adults, *Record Keeper* garnered over 23,000 likes on its Facebook page based on just a trailer and short pilot episode, signifying a vast, untapped audience. Reflects Blake, “*Record Keeper* typified exactly the problems with the church trying to be creative. If all you care about is being right, then creativity will wither on the vine.”

In 1970, the Adventist church axed *The Youth’s Instructor* because, as Charles Scriven remembers, “the magazine was drab in appearance, highly conventional in outlook, and wasn’t reaching the kind of young Adventist that was beginning to have an impact in the sixties.” Scriven, who would go on to serve as president of Columbia Union College and Kettering College, served as part of *Insight’s* first editorial team. *Insight’s* first issue started with what passed for a bang on May 5, 1970—a cover image of a classical guitar, and the headline, “The Church and Huckleberry Finn.” The cover story, by merikay, “was about a kid who didn’t look quite right coming to church, getting a chilly welcome,” Scriven recalls. “It was a statement of identification with younger, more intellectually adventurous Adventists.”

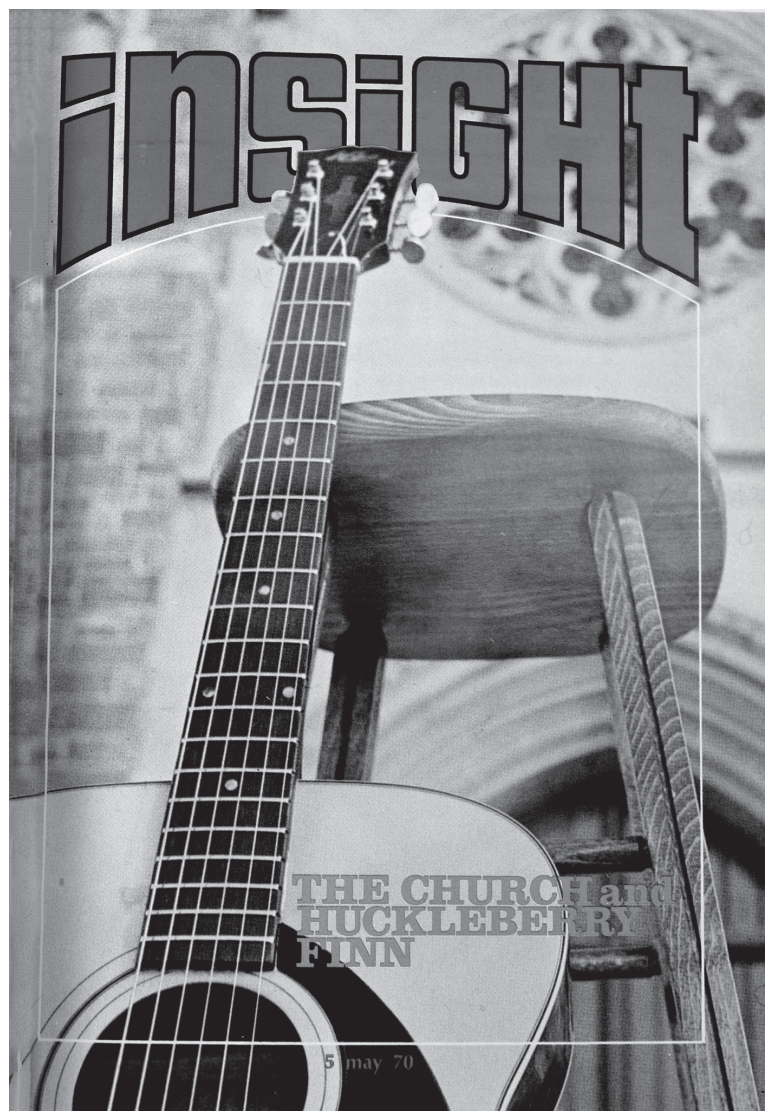
*Insight’s* early years didn’t shy away from the era’s controversial issues, from long hair and beards to racism, war, and abortion. It dug deep into hard-hitting subjects like sexual harassment and date rape. A 1970s issue featured an interview with Pastor Josephine Benton. In

## MAY WE SUGGEST

to all YOUTH’S INSTRUCTOR subscribers that the future is bright! Even though your magazine will cease publication soon, you will not go un-nourished by vigorous Christian journalism. The publishers of **INSIGHT**, a new magazine for young Adventists, announce with pleasure that, beginning on May 5, you will receive **INSIGHT** in fulfillment of your present subscription. We think you will be pleased by the unflinching candor and daring Christian commitment that will characterize the pages of

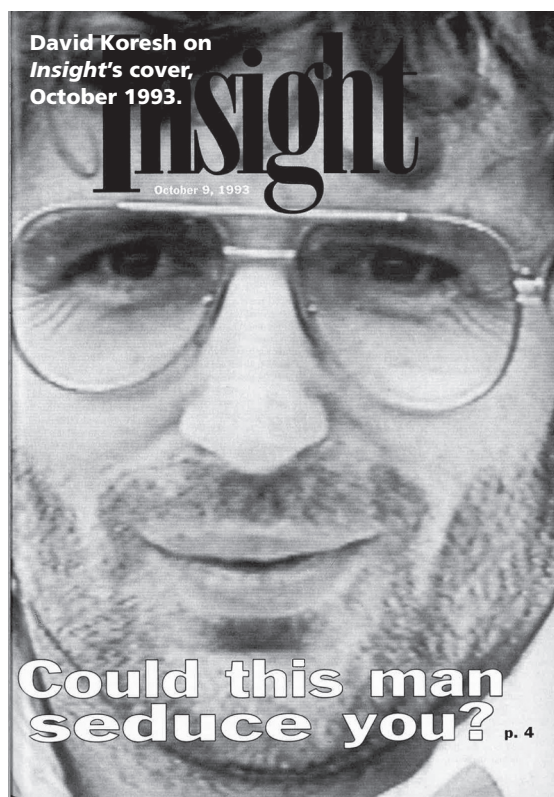
# INSIGHT

Launch ad for *Insight in Youth’s Instructor*. Below: the first issue of *Insight*, May 1970.





Wishing  
to avoid  
controversy,  
Insight ended  
columns  
reviewing  
music and  
highlighting  
artists, and  
readers had  
one less  
reason to turn  
its pages.



September 1980 she was interviewed again, alongside two others, for the article “Three Women in the Pulpit.”

*Insight* frequently tackled contemporary culture and current events. A 1980s piece explored the question “Would Mork like Adventists?” while other articles touched on such topics as Kurt Cobain and Princess Diana. A groundbreaking 1992 issue addressed homosexuality. The October 9, 1993 cover featured a grainy close-up of cult leader David Koresh and the headline, “Could this man seduce you?”

Author Trudy J. Morgan-Cole remembers the *Insight* of her youth as one which showed her how to “engage thoughtfully with popular culture, to use faith as the lens through which I could view and learn from the broader culture. It’s what I mainly associate with the *Insight* magazine of the late seventies and early eighties—thoughtful, critical engagement with the wider worlds, with political and social issues and questions of culture—that I didn’t see anywhere else in the church when I was growing up. It had a huge influence on the kind of Adventist I grew up to be.”

Under the editorship of Lori Peckham (1993-2001), *Insight* featured reviews of contemporary Christian music. Given the centrality of music to teen’s lives, it was a feature with great appeal, while helping to extend and build readers’ spiritual lives beyond Saturday morning. After Peckham’s tenure, wishing to avoid controversy, *Insight* ended columns reviewing music and highlighting artists, and readers had one less reason to turn its pages. In its last decade and a half, *Insight* explored real world issues less and less, gravitating instead to a more moralistic focus.

### **Neglect**

Alongside fear of criticism was the fear of the new and the unknown, even as the publishing world hurtled through change.

Chris Blake remembers an early attempt to get *Insight* ahead of the trends. “What I wanted was people on computers communicating with us, to make it interactive. So we had some interactive stuff and pages dedicated to what we heard from [our readers]. In 1992 Lori Peckham and I proposed to change *Insight* to an expanded format (32 pages) every other week and a more online presence (8 pages print) the other weeks. I was informed, after eighteen months of hopping through committee hoops and on the eve of our new launch, that this arrangement ‘wouldn’t work.’”

*Insight’s* demise came just three years after its former publisher, the Review and Herald Publishing Association, was merged with the Pacific Press Publishing Association. At the time of the RHPA’s dissolution, Pacific Press’s annual sales were about \$2 million lower than those of the RHPA. Though the RHPA was in debt, its financial woes hardly needed to be fatal. It produced a standout lineup of books year after year. The problem was, the church didn’t know what to do with it—and that doesn’t bode well for the future of church publishing, period. Until Adventist media is empowered at all levels to innovate, it will stagnate.

“Many good people worked at the Review

and Herald Publishing Association, but that wasn't enough, obviously," Blake reflects. "Despite some bright lights the RHPA was a dim labyrinth of hubris and mediocrity. Motivated mostly by fear, mired in the past and incompetent committees, lacking vision and accountability, the Review's most telling trait continued to be a dearth of fresh courage. Other than that, it was fine. Seriously, we can do better, but it will take brains and heart and backbone."

*Insight* finally launched a webpage in 1998. Over nineteen years, its look, format, and content barely changed. (Its most recent video content is from 2012.) In contrast, *Guide*<sup>2</sup> magazine, the Adventist church's magazine for ten to fourteen year olds, has regularly invested in fresh content for its website. In June 2017, *Guide* had about 11,000 visits to its site. *Insight* had 2,200. Over the years, *Insight's* editors made repeated attempts to increase their online presence, but were never given the support to do so.

For several years in the late 2000s, *Insight's* editor was simultaneously the vice president of the Review and Herald Publishing Association Editorial department. While that may have saved money at a time of tight budgets, it came at a great cost to *Insight's* quality and connection to its audience. *Insight* began to regularly reprint old articles rather than dream up fresh themes and content in tune with the times.

### Quality

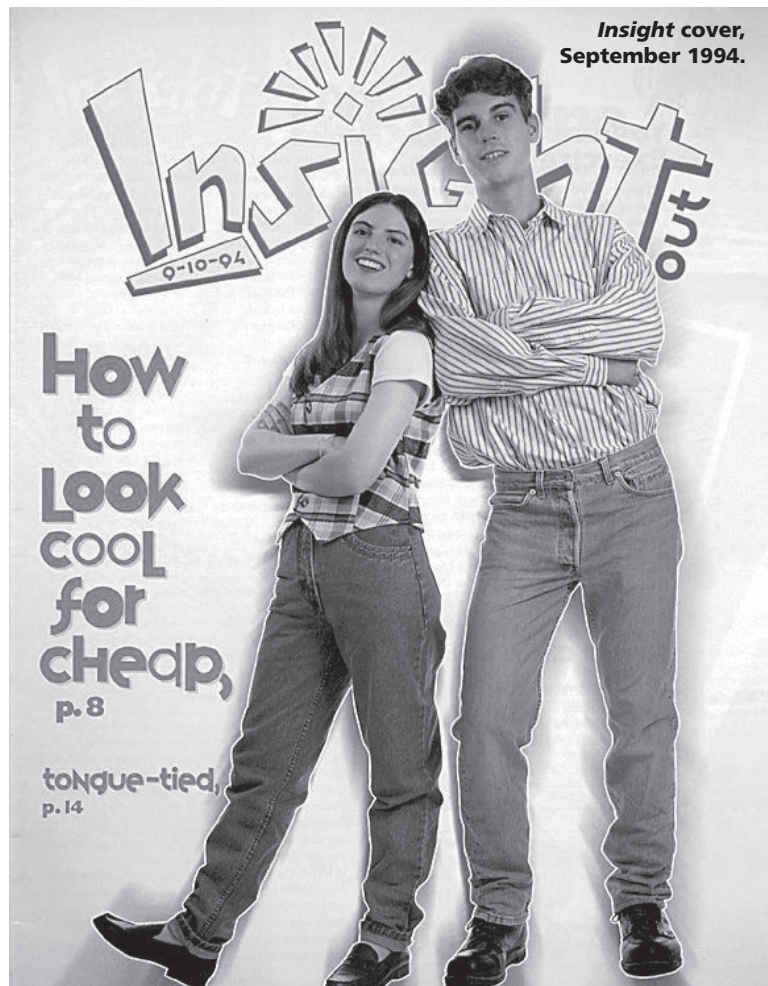
At its peak, *Insight* became a literary hub for Adventists. *Insight* featured the best short-story writing in Adventism, with exceptional and engrossing pieces by such authors as Joan Marie Cook, Arthur Milward, and Gary Swanson. It cultivated writing talent, particularly through its annual writing contest. Winners included future best-selling author Trudy J. Morgan-Cole, and Randy Fishell, who served as an editor for *Guide* magazine for over twenty-five years. The Review and Herald printed two book collections of "*Insight's* Most Unforgetta-

ble Stories." In the magazine's final years, such sharp, engrossing short stories became a thing of the past.

### Ignorance

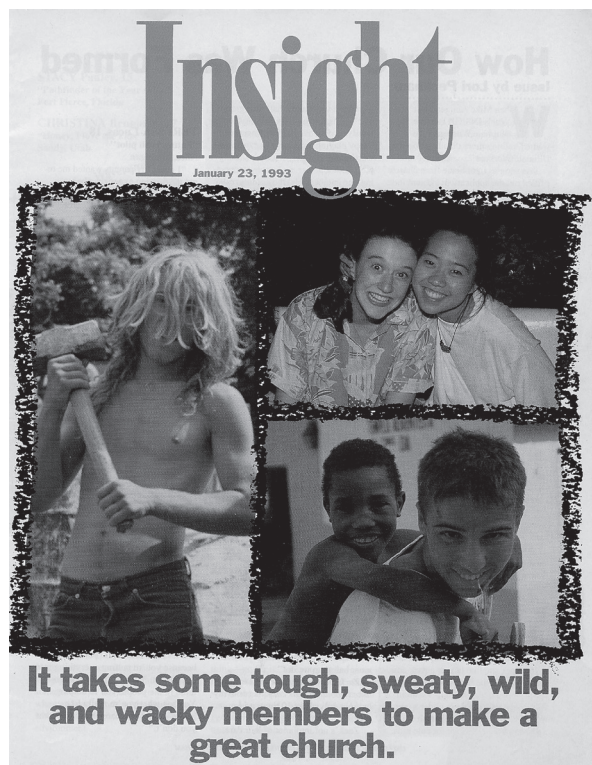
The church has long struggled with marketing (and the reality that its built-in market no longer takes a week's vacation every year to go to camp meeting and buy its wares). *Insight* faced its own challenges of a shifting market. For whatever reason, whether money, culture, or marketing, *Insight* never gained traction in areas where the church was growing. Of the approximately 1,000 Spanish-language Adventist churches in the United States (about one church out of five), only a single one subscribed to *Insight*. The reason churches gave for not subscribing? Because *Insight* was in English—despite the fact that nearly 100 percent of Hispanic teens in the U.S. can read English. First-generation immi-

**Insight needed  
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and timeless.**





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*Insight* cover, January 1993 (left). Charles Haddon Spurgeon on *Insight*'s cover, December 2015 (right).

grant Adventists in the U.S. had not grown up with *Insight*, and didn't know what their youth were missing.

### **Disconnect**

When I first saw the December 12, 2015 issue of *Insight*, with a sepia-toned cover image of nineteenth century "Charles Haddon Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers" looking like Ulysses S. Grant just awakened from a nap, I about hung my head. Somehow, *Insight* had morphed right back into *The Youth's Instructor*. The circle was complete.<sup>3</sup>

In an era of endless stimuli beamed straight into teens' hands and eyes through their smartphones, *Insight* needed to be both contemporary and timeless. For decades it had broadened minds and encouraged critical thinking. Somehow, in its final years, it simply withdrew into itself.

If you pick up a copy of *Guide*, you'll see a magazine that's both in tune with its audience and constantly reinventing itself. If that were still true of *Insight*, with a strong digital and

audio-visual presence bolstered by a healthy budget, I believe it would still be going strong.

### **What now?**

An Adventist hospital closes, and the story gets lots of publicity. A magazine/ministry that's been in production for 165 years folds, and . . . crickets.

Meanwhile, the church has spent untold millions over the past several decades propping up its media ministries aimed at adults. After all, no one wants to be the guy who killed "It Is Written." Literature for youth, apparently, is much more disposable in Adventism. Audio-visual media for young people in Adventism scarcely exists.

In his 2008 memoir, *Embrace the Impossible*, retired *Adventist Review* editor William Johnsson recounts the quarter century he spent trying to reverse the slide in subscriptions for the church's flagship magazine. Having peaked at over 100,000 in the early 1960s, when the church had just reached a million members worldwide, it had endured a slow but steady



decline, as the generation that once read it cover to cover died. In the mid-1980s, with worldwide membership at five million, Johnson dreamed of getting subscriptions back to 100,000. He tirelessly tried one thing after another to breathe new life into the magazine, but his creative triumphs had only limited impact on subscription numbers. Johnson ends his memoir with a surprise development: the General Conference request to publish a monthly magazine for worldwide distribution, *Adventist World*. Provided free to church members, *World* launched in 2005 with an initial press run of 1.1 million copies.

The Adventist church could have let its leading periodical die. Instead, it has continued to invest in it, believing it a vital resource for connecting and nurturing its community. For its last few years, *Insight* had one full-time employee. Today, *Adventist Review* has about a dozen, including a digital media director, who oversees regular fresh video content, available through its Apple TV app, AR TV. *Adventist Review* receives \$5.5 million in funding from the General Conference each year. The church has decided that's an investment worth making, and I applaud it—but surely we can spare a few dollars for media for young people.

The church needs to put its money where its mouth is. We talk about the parable of the sower, but we aren't willing to wait for the seeds to grow. We find millions for evangelistic series that bring in a handful of new members quickly, but we aren't willing to invest in the young people we already have—even when today's technology makes it easy to reach millions of young people outside the church while we're at it.

Here's my modest proposal. My conference, Kentucky-Tennessee, has roughly one percent of North American Division membership, and spends \$125,000 a year on evangelism. Assuming that's fairly representative, why don't we take a tithe of church evangelism funds—say, \$1.25 million a year—hire a team, and give them a budget to create media—magazines,

music, movies, and more—targeted at young people? It could easily become the church's most prominent outreach.

It's a matter of priorities. We find money for what we care about. In truth, we should invest far more. Right now, though, we spend essentially nothing on media for young people, and that must change.

Frankly, I don't understand how the church can have seen this coming from so far off and still not have done anything about it. *Insight* drifted for years without anyone saying, "Hey—What's happening? How can we better reach young people?" But now is the time to move forward. Hire a team. Give them a budget. Let them loose.

The Adventist church needs young people. Young people, I believe, need the church. Today's youth are plugged into media essentially non-stop, and the church has nothing for them. We must meet them where they are. The trouble is, if the church doesn't produce media that speaks to them, youth won't come looking for it. ■



**Tompaul Wheeler** is the author of the Adventist church's official 2018 teen devotional, *God Space*, and *Guide* magazine's weekly comic strip, "Bible Sketches,"

soon to be compiled in book form. When he was sixteen, he wrote and photographed a special edition of *Insight* that won third place for journalism from the Evangelical Press Association. A filmmaker in Nashville, Tennessee, he has a Master of Fine Arts in Film from Lipscomb University. He directed the documentary *Leap of Faith: The Ultimate Workout Story*, which tells the story of the Maranatha short-term mission trip for teens *Insight* magazine founded.

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1. <http://www.theotheradventisthome.com/2017/06/the-gospel-in-nail-polish.html>.
2. <http://www.guidemagazine.org>.
3. <http://www.insightmagazine.org/cover/index.asp?issue-ID=20151650>.

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## Heaven Sent Gaming Picks Up Global Fans | BY ALITA BYRD

*A twenty-something Adventist gamer has set up an online company with her husband to bring online comics, games, and novels with an ethical focus to fans from New Mexico to Japan. Isabel Ruiz Lucero talks about her work as an artist and how she uses the Fruits of the Spirit as recurring themes.*

**You and your boyfriend, now husband, Mario Lucero started Heaven Sent Gaming together. You met at Sandia View Adventist Acade-**

**my in Corrales, New Mexico, I believe. How old were you when you started the gaming company? What made you decide to put the company together?**

It was the summer of 2006, so I was seventeen years old, and Mario was eighteen. We had been dating for nearly two years by that time, and we always encouraged each other to pursue our passions. We both knew that we wanted to do God's work together, and we wanted careers in the video game industry and entertainment fields.

**Heaven Sent Gaming publishes comics, web serial novels, web video series, and even a New Mexico cultural Encyclopedia/Lexicon. What is the most popular thing that you produce?**

It's between our original productions and the New Mexico Cultural Encyclopedia and Lexicon. I think those are our most popular publications currently. Our original productions mainly center around our comics and novels.

The New Mexico Cultural Encyclopedia and Lexicon covers topics often undiscussed online and seeks to correct a lot of the information and misinformation about New Mexico, so it often appears in search results.

**Do you share all of your content through your website? How many views does your website get? Where are your fans located?**

Yes, we share most, if not all, of our content through our website. Our website's monthly unique viewers are anywhere between 15,000 (according to Cloudflare) or conservatively 750 (according to Quantcast).

Our viewers come from across the United States and internationally, particularly in the UK, Mexico, Canada, Germany, the UAE, Australia, and Japan.

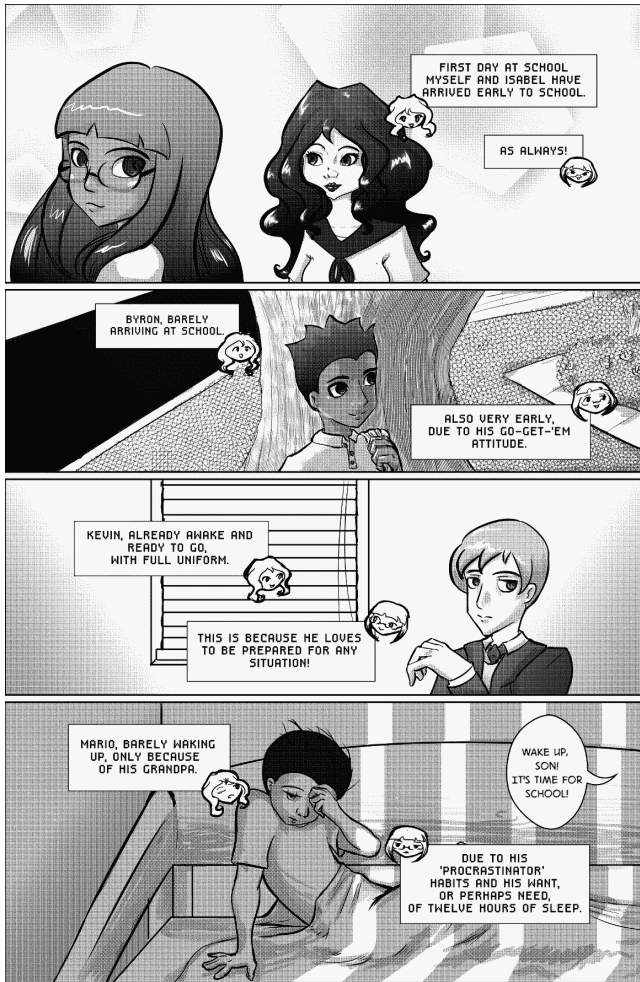
**How did you get into comics?**

I have been into artwork and comics for most of my life, starting with Peanuts and Garfield. My father introduced me to Japanese anime and manga when I was around eight. It wasn't long after that that I began to draw a lot.



Artwork from Heaven Sent Gaming's "Mouton"

HTTPS://MOUTONHEAVENSENTGAMING.COM/COMICFASHIONISTA-FRIEND/



Eventually, I wanted to practice by drawing comics, so I began to draw silly comics in high school, and that's when my friends saw them and encouraged me to pursue art.

**Why is your company called Heaven Sent Gaming? How does your Adventist faith influence your work?**

There's a lot of reasons for the name, but first and foremost, we wanted to reflect that we are Christians and that we are gamers. This is also a nod to one of our inspirations, Nintendo, which can be translated simply to "leave luck to heaven." My Adventist faith is represented through a common theme of temperance in my work.

**How is Heaven Sent Gaming different or similar to other gaming companies?**

In terms of secular companies that do something similar to what we do, perhaps the most successful is Rooster Teeth; their work really exemplifies the talent and passion within the gaming community.

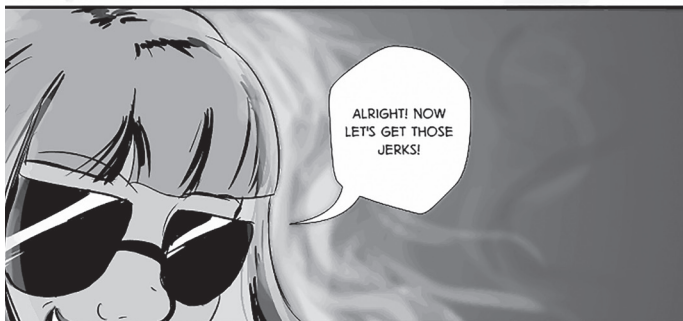
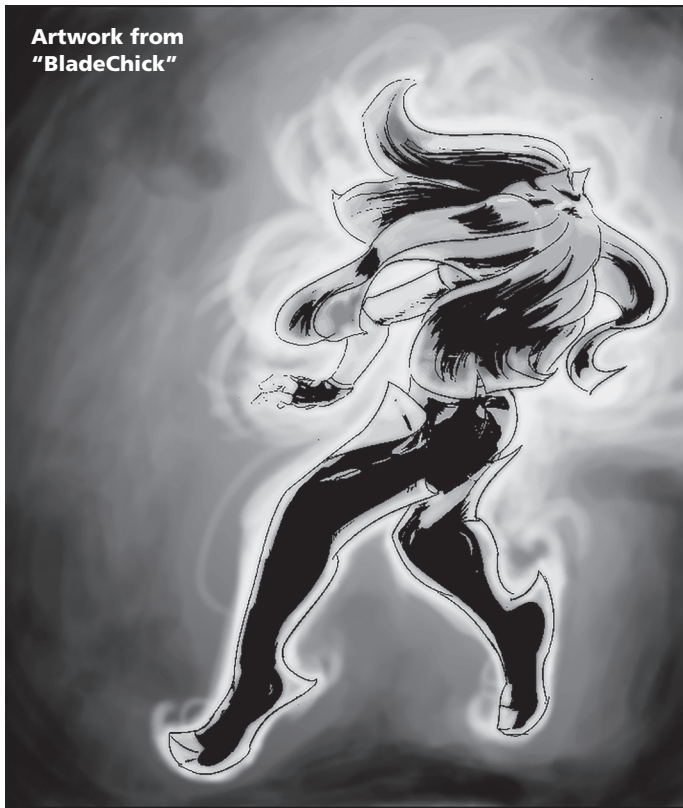
What separates us is, obviously, the recurring themes of Christianity, specifically focusing on the fruits of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. In each product we try to integrate Christian principles. Some are more subtle than others, because we aren't solely creating content for Christians, but for anyone to enjoy.

One thing we like to do is to show a classic hero archetype and what real villainy is like. The media seems obsessed with brainwashing people with grey-area heroes, which makes people think that their own morality is a grey area.

**Does Heaven Sent Gaming make money? Can you earn a living doing it? Is this the kind of work you always dreamed of doing?**

Currently, it does not make much money due to the fact that we are more focused on doing God's work than earning money. There have been a few chances to make a lot of money, but we wanted to keep our artistic integrity.





We are currently starting to focus a little more on how to make this into a fiscally stable venture so that we can dedicate more time to it. This is the work that I know I was called to do, and I love it. I get to work with my best friend (my hubby) and do what I love the most.

**What are the next projects you are working on?**

We're currently working on a video game which we will reveal soon. But some of our next projects are a toss-up; we're in the process of developing some potential new web video series, making a compendium book of all our current work, or maybe even ironing out a Bible translation we've been working on, called the *Heaven Sent Version*.

**Where do you see yourself and Heaven Sent Gaming, in five years?**

I see myself raising a family, and continuing my work on Heaven Sent Gaming. I want to eventually grow it

into something that can help others be able to achieve their passions.

**What advice would you have for young Adventist gamers and artists?**

I would like to tell Adventist gamers to continue to play and try to join local communities of gamers; there are plenty of gaming culture events around and plenty of video game tournaments to enjoy out there.

For artists, don't let your imagination or creativity die. God has given you this talent for a reason—don't let someone scare you into making you hide it away. We are called to grow our talents. ■



**Alita Byrd** is a member of the Spectrum web team, and is a freelance writer from Dublin, Ireland.

## Guns in Church: *No Sanctuary* | BY TERESE THONUS



IMAGE SOURCE: FOOTAGE FIRM, INC.

**I**t was on Monday afternoon that I first realized how deeply the fear had leached into my bones. I'd eased my Prius behind a Jeep in the near left turn lane at Clinton Parkway and Iowa. When the light changed, my foot slipped on the brake, and I "bumper-kissed" the Jeep. As I made the turn behind it, the angry male driver flipped me the bird and indicated that I should pull over. In that split second, I decided not to comply. As I sped away, my heart raced as I told myself first, "It's nothing," and then, "He saw my plate. The police will come knocking on my door." Then it hit me. I wasn't afraid of the police. I was afraid that the driver of the Jeep had exercised his Second Amendment rights and might have pulled out a gun and shot me.

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On April 2, 2015, Governor Sam Brownback signed into law the amended Kansas Personal and Family Pro-

tection Act, K.S.A. 75-7c01 et seq. *The Kansas City Star* reported, "Kansans soon can carry concealed weapons without permits or training." In part, the Act states:

(a) The carrying of a concealed handgun shall not be prohibited in any building unless such building is conspicuously posted in accordance with rules and regulations adopted by the attorney general.

(b) Nothing in this act shall be construed to prevent:  
1) any private employer from restricting or prohibiting by personnel policies persons from carrying a concealed handgun while on the premises of the employer's business...

(e) No public employer shall restrict or otherwise prohibit by personnel policies any employee, who is legally qualified, from carrying any concealed handgun while engaged in the duties of such employee's employment...

The Kansas State Attorney General reports that 109,258 handgun concealed carry applications were received between January 1, 2016 and January 1, 2017, with 88,587 licenses granted.

## Dear Pastor,

On Sabbath, October 29, I picked David up at Church W after service and potluck. On our way home, David informed me that he had seen a man with a weapon in the men's bathroom. He told me that he hadn't known what to do or whom to speak to about this. He was clearly shocked.

That afternoon, I called our Pathfinder leader and voiced my concern not only for David but for any person in the building that day. She mentioned that visitors from Church L may have been in attendance, and that perhaps one of them had packed a pistol into the church building ... I asked whether she might approach the church board to discuss whether Church W should have a policy re: guns on the premises. Since the Kansas concealed carry law was passed in 2015, some churches have placed "no weapons" signs at each entrance and made mention of their policies on church websites and in bulletins.

I would very much like David to continue to attend both Pathfinders and church services at Church W. The congregation and the Pathfinder leaders have been very kind to him over the past ten years and offered him many opportunities for spiritual and personal growth. However, I cannot allow him onto the property until the church makes a public determination about this issue. It is non-negotiable, in my view, just as important as the background checks required of church staff and volunteers who work with children.

Terese

Send

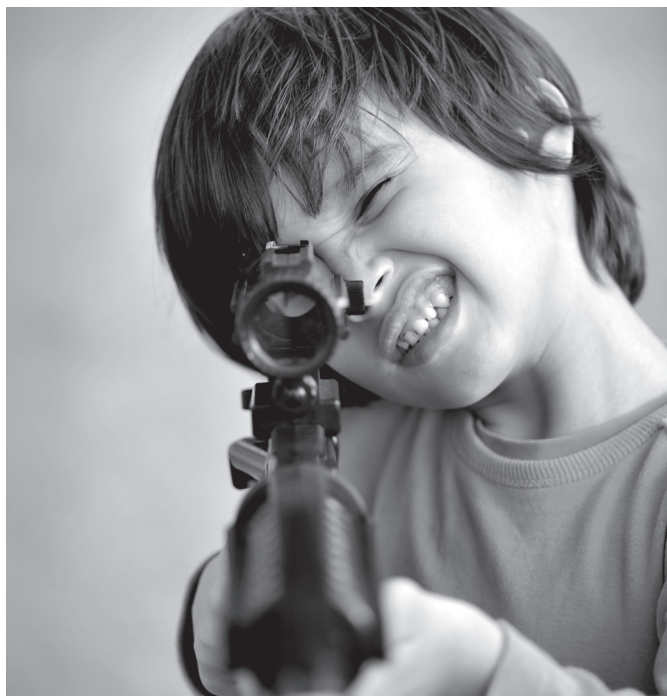


IMAGE SOURCE: FOOTAGE FIRM, INC.

It was August 29, 2016. David lives with autism, and because of his disability, I attend yearly Individual Education Plan meetings at his high school. As the meeting was winding down, David was excused from the room, with his counselor, case manager, and work experience coordinator remaining. "I don't know whether you've talked to David lately about this," P said, "but he seems less interested in welding and blacksmithing and more interested in gunsmithing lately. He wants to attend the Colorado School of Trades after graduation." "Gunsmithing?" I asked. "Where did he get that idea?" My heart sank. But I already knew. No matter that I preached non-violence and pacifism at home and minimized his exposure to violent films and videogames—like many boys, David was fascinated with weapons of all kinds. I tried to channel this interest into archery, with limited success. David spends a good part of every day at his "imagination station," crafting weapons out of cardboard, rubber bands, papier mâché, discarded plastic, PVC pipe, and lately, metal.

When David was fifteen, he stole my debit card and purchased a gun on Amazon.com. Fortunately, I intercepted the package and sent it back. Amazon wouldn't accept it, so I returned it to the gun manufacturer. "We can't give you a refund," they wrote. I replied, "I don't care."



Dear Elder S,

I'm wondering: Has the Kansas-Nebraska Conference created any policy or policies around firearms on church properties or at church-sponsored events? Thank you in advance for any information you can provide.

Terese Thonus

Send

Dear Terese,

You are not alone in asking about this. The short answer is that KS-NE Conference, Mid-America Union, North American Division and the General Conference have no written policy about this issue other than recommending each church follow the laws of the state where they are located . . .

We advise pastors that declaring a church a "gun free zone" is not a decision any pastor should make unilaterally. Also, no one speaking for the church should encourage someone to bring a weapon or to use a weapon in case an "active shooter" situation is anticipated or arises. Consult your leaders. Process any recommendation of those leaders through your board.

KS state law was amended this past summer . . . again. Now, like most states (only 2 states specifically prohibit guns in churches), KS law treats churches and houses of worship like any other private property, allowing that unless prohibited by the property owner, those with concealed carry permits or the legal authority to carry a concealed handgun may do so in a house of worship.

I hope this information helps.

Elder S

Send

## No Sanctuary

I remember

A steel belt buckle striking softer flesh  
Pants around ankles below fingered hand  
My mother's face, lifeless on one side,  
Med-evaced to Florida.

I remember

An asphalt runway sprouting bamboo huts  
People through fences behind barbed wire  
A mother's heart, childless on eight sides,  
Spirited to Bangkok.

I remember

A flash of steel striking innocent eyes  
Guns inside holsters beneath Sabbath suits  
Our children's souls, defenseless on all sides,  
Invited to church.

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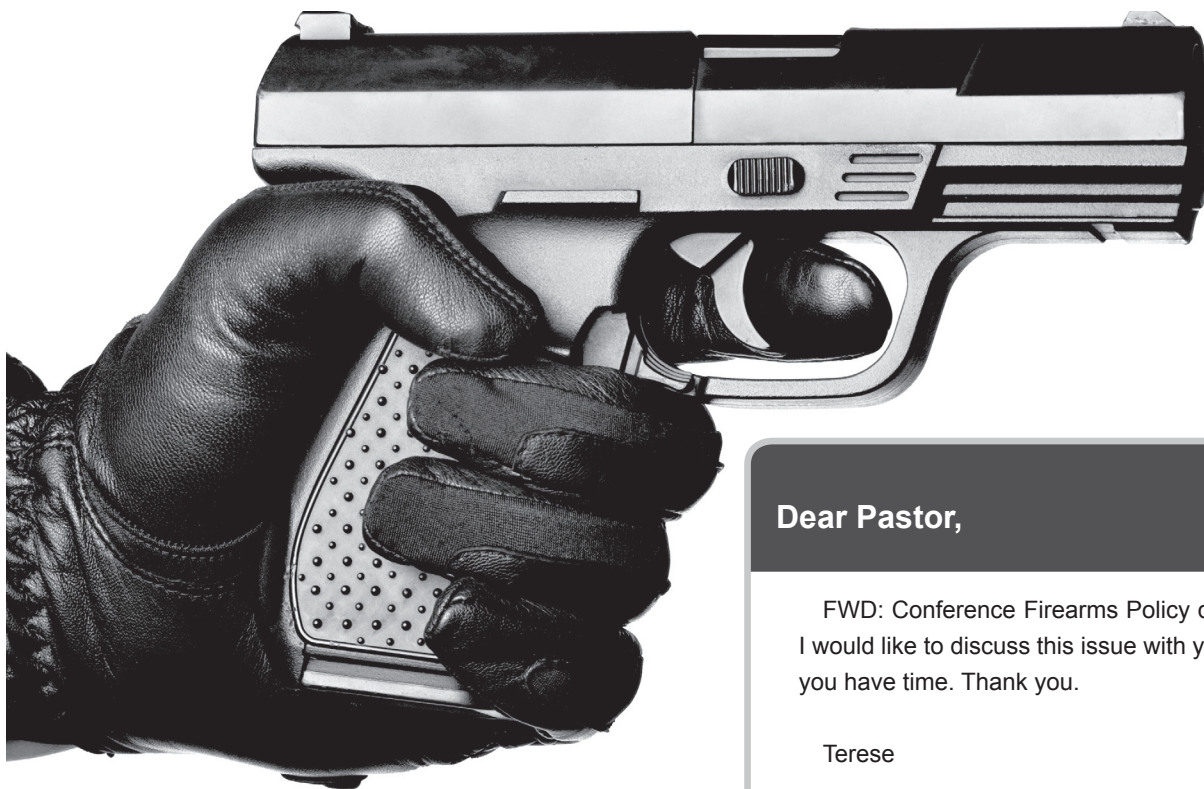
(3)(d) The governing body or the chief administrative officer . . . may permit any employee who is legally qualified to carry a concealed handgun into any building of such institution:

- 1) a unified school district
- 2) a postsecondary educational institution
- 3) a state or municipal-owned medical care facility
- 4) a state or municipal-owned adult care home
- 5) a community mental health center
- 6) an indigent health care clinic

Waivers for public institutions have been rescinded, effective July 1, 2017.

KU Campus Forum on Concealed Carry. 4-6 pm. Wednesday, February 15. Review questions that have already been submitted:

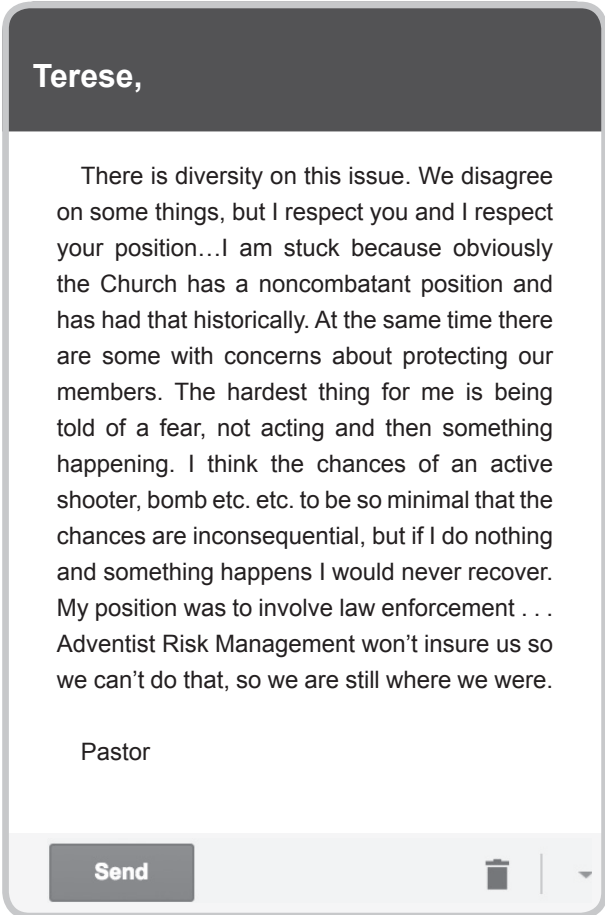
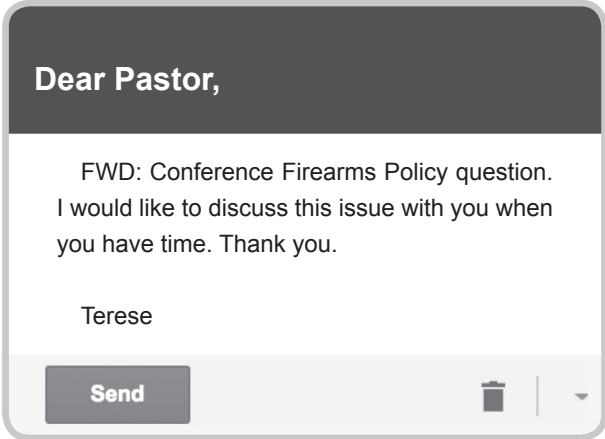
- Will instructors be aware of the identity of the individuals who have concealed firearms in their classes?
- As faculty are we allowed to suggest that people leave their guns elsewhere when they meet with us in our offices?
- What are we to do if a concealed gun accidentally discharges? Who will be held accountable?
- Am I responsible for disarming an active shooter?



It was a Wednesday night. David and I argued as we drove home from Pathfinders. “You’re embarrassing me,” he accused. “None of the other parents care whether someone has a gun at church.” I replied, “I’m waiting to hear from Pastor about what has been decided. I don’t want you or the other kids in an unsafe situation.” “Let me decide what’s safe or unsafe,” David stated. “You’re afraid of guns. I’m not.”

(c)(1) Any private entity which provides adequate security measures in a private building and which conspicuously posts signage in accordance with this section prohibiting the carrying of a concealed handgun in such building shall not be liable for any wrongful act or omission relating to actions of persons carrying a concealed handgun concerning acts or omissions regarding such handguns.

(2) Any private entity which does not provide adequate security measures in a private building and which allows the carrying of a concealed handgun shall not be liable for any wrongful act or omission relating to actions of persons carrying a concealed handgun concerning acts or omissions regarding such handguns.





## Active Shooter: How to Respond U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Good practices for coping with an active shooter situation:

- Be aware of your environment and any possible dangers.
- Take note of the two nearest exits in any facility you visit.
- If you are in an office, stay there and secure the door.
- If you are in a hallway, get into a room and secure the door.
- As a last resort, attempt to take the active shooter down. When the shooter is at close range and you cannot flee, your chance of survival is much greater if you try to incapacitate him/her.

Run. Hide. Fight.

---

It was my regular Tuesday afternoon therapy appointment. I told my therapist about the “bumper-kiss” at Clinton and Iowa and how I’d reacted. Changing the subject, I remarked, “You know, I’m thinking about working from home one day a week so that I can consolidate my research and writing. I got so much done yesterday at home.” A pause. She regarded me kindly. “Terese, what do those two have in common?” Another pause. “I want to be safe.” Another pause. “That’s right,” she said. “Safety.”

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Dear Pastor,

I think I need to more clearly state my concern(s).

1. This is not about whether Adventists should bear arms. They do. That ship has sailed.

2. This is not about whether people should have the right to open or concealed carry their guns. They have the right. It’s Kansas law. That ship has sailed.

3. This is not about liberal or conservative political beliefs about gun control. There’s been an election. That ship has sailed.

Here’s what does concern me:

As a private entity and house of worship, Church N has no policy about who may/may not step onto church premises carrying a gun either openly or concealed. And we need to have a policy, and our members and visitors need to know what it is, and all of us should participate in active shooter training.

The denomination offers no counsel other than what they can or cannot insure us for. I suggest we look at what other denominations are doing as well as to law enforcement for guidance. Here are some reports that I have found informative:

- FBI, *Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013*.
- Mennonite Mutual, *Guns in Churches*.
- The Daily Caller, *Concealed Carrier? Active Shooter Considerations*.
- The Truth About Guns, *Why You Shouldn’t Engage an Active Shooter and What to Do if you Do*.

I urge you to read this information and to discuss it with the church board. Not doing anything is the worst enemy of safety.

Terese

Send







IMAGE SOURCE: DREAMTIME STOCK

It was David's Sunday afternoon skate date. I volunteered to pick up two similarly awkward, unwashed, unshaven young men for the forty-minute drive to the rink. "Did you see Mr. \_\_\_ in church yesterday talking to Pastor?" one asked. "Dude, that was a cool holster he was wearing. Tooled leather. I think he had it made special." I asked no one in particular, "Do you think it's O.K. for someone to bring a gun into church?" David was silent. M answered, "Why not? They're not going to use it!" That moment, I realized we hadn't got a chance. ■



**Terese Thonus** is a linguist who directs the Writing Program at the University of Baltimore. Previously, she taught at Southwestern Adventist College, East Carolina University, California State University-Fresno, and the University of Kansas. One of the reasons Terese joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church at the age of 18 was its history of conscientious objection and noncombatancy. She is mother to David, 20, and Cassandra, 22. In the spring of 2017, the Kansas-Nebraska Conference addressed the issue of guns in church to advise pastors that they "can neither encourage nor discourage members from carrying weapons on church property." Partly because of this, Terese has since moved away from Kansas to Maryland, where she feels she can, "worship more safely."

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# ADVENTISM IN REVIEW

*New Books, New  
Understandings*

# John Calvin, John Wesley, and Ellen White's *Steps to Christ*: A Comparison | BY NORMAN H. YOUNG

For a religious book to go from being an immediate success to becoming a Christian classic, now in its one-hundred-twenty-fifth year since its publication in 1892, is indeed a rare literary phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> Published by the conservative Chicago firm of Fleming H. Revell, *Steps to Christ*, despite its brevity, went to a third printing “within six weeks of the first issue.”<sup>2</sup> It was to give the book a wide distribution that the Fleming H. Revell company was chosen.<sup>3</sup> The publisher began in

1870 and concentrated on practical aspects of the Christian faith. Revell was the brother-in-law of the evangelist Dwight L. Moody, whose writings and input influenced the practical Christian direction of the company.<sup>4</sup> The title does not indicate the scope of the book's range, as it not only describes the process of conversion, but also focuses on the life of the believer; that is, *Steps with Christ*.<sup>5</sup>

## The Human Predicament

It is in the practical Christian life that Ellen White reveals most clearly her “Wesleyan Arminian theological understanding,” but not uncritically.<sup>6</sup> In a well-known statement in a letter to John Newton, Wesley confessed, “I think on justification just as I have done any time these seven and twenty years, and just as Mr. Calvin does. In this respect I do not differ from him an hair's breadth.”<sup>7</sup> There are two areas where John Calvin, John Wesley, and Ellen White come within a “hair's-breadth” of one another: the depravity of humans, and the righteousness that is by faith. All three believed that the fall had so vitiated the human capacity to choose the good, that salvation of necessity depended wholly on the grace of God. It is this belief in the impotence, or bondage, to use Luther's term, of the will to initiate any independent move toward God where Calvin, Wesley, and White draw close to one another.<sup>8</sup>

Humans, according to Ellen White, were “made captive by Satan, and would have remained so forever had not God specially interposed.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, “it is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them.” “Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort ... are powerless” to change us from sin to holiness. Christ's “grace alone can quicken the lifeless faculties of the soul, and attract it to God, to holiness.”<sup>10</sup> The human predicament is emphasized when she de-



John Calvin



clares that “everything depends on the right action of the will”; but it is the will that is captive to sin, so how can we choose? Only with the help of the intervening (Wesley called it “prevenient”) grace of God. Thus, in the matter of human depravity, White reflects the language of Calvin and Wesley, as the quotations below demonstrate:

... whatever is in man, from the understanding to *the will*, from the soul even to the flesh, has been defiled and crammed with this concupiscence [lust]. Or, to put it more briefly, the whole man is of himself nothing but concupiscence (Calvin, *Institutes*).<sup>11</sup>

Yet so depraved is his [human] nature that he can be moved or impelled only to evil. But if this is true, then it is clearly expressed that man is surely subject to the necessity of sinning (Calvin, *Institutes*).<sup>12</sup>

Now he truly desires to break loose from sin, and begins to struggle with it. But though he strive with all his might, he cannot conquer: sin is mightier than he. He would fain escape; but he is so fast in prison, that he cannot get forth. He resolves against sin, but yet sins on: he sees the snare, and abhors and runs into it. So much does his boasted reason avail—only to enhance his guilt, and increase his misery! Such is *the freedom of his will*; free only to evil; free to “drink in iniquity like water”; to wander farther and farther from the living God, and do more “despite to the Spirit of grace” (Wesley, “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption”).<sup>13</sup>

The other [Christianity] declares that all men are “conceived in sin,” and “shapen in wickedness;”—that hence there is in every man a “carnal mind, which is enmity against God; which is not, cannot be, subject to” His “law;”

and which so infects the whole soul, that “there dwelleth in” him, “in his flesh,” in his natural state, “no good thing”; but “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is evil,” only evil, and that “continually” (Wesley, “Original Sin”).<sup>14</sup>

You feel that sin has separated you from God, that you are in bondage to the power of evil. The more you struggle to escape, the more you realize your helplessness. Your motives are impure; your heart is unclean. You see that your life has been filled with selfishness and sin. You long to be forgiven, to be cleansed, to be set free (White, *Steps to Christ*).<sup>15</sup>

### Righteousness by Faith

The second area that Wesley had in mind when he claimed he did “not differ from him [Mr Calvin] a hair’s breadth” is righteousness by faith.<sup>16</sup> Calvin believed that justification included reconciliation and definitely excluded any dependence on human works, whether ritual or moral; “the righteousness of faith is reconciliation with God, which consists solely in the forgiveness of sins.” “Consequently, such righteousness can be called, in a word, ‘remission of sins.’”<sup>17</sup> Wesley agrees with this and so does White, as the quotations below verify:

Therefore, we explain justification simply as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favour as righteous men. And we say that it consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness (Calvin, *Institutes*).<sup>18</sup>

The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins. It is that act of God the Father, whereby, for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of his Son, he ‘showeth forth his righteousness’ (or mercy) ‘by the remission of the sins that are past’ [Rom.

**There are two areas where John Calvin, John Wesley, and Ellen White come within a “hair’s-breadth” of one another: the depravity of humans, and the righteousness that is by faith.**

3:25] (Wesley, "Justification by Faith").<sup>19</sup>

In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe (White, *Steps to Christ*).<sup>20</sup>

He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are *accounted* righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned (White, *Steps to Christ*).<sup>21</sup>

He is waiting to strip them of their garments stained and polluted with sin, and to put upon them the white robes of righteousness: he bids them live and not die (White, *Steps to Christ*).<sup>22</sup>

### The Gift of Good Deeds

Calvin makes a clear distinction between the work of God *for us* (death and resurrection of Christ) and the work of God (Holy Spirit) *in us* (regeneration/sanctification). These for Calvin are distinguishable but inseparable: "Therefore Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify. These benefits are joined together by an everlasting and indissoluble bond, so that those whom he illumines by his wisdom, he redeems; those whom he redeems, he justifies; those whom he justifies, he sanctifies."<sup>23</sup> Having *obtained* justification (forgiveness and reconciliation or peace with God), the believer (the elect) does not *retain* it by works of the law. Good deeds in the believer are a gift of God and are never totally perfect. "There is no doubt that whatever is praiseworthy in works is God's grace; there is not a drop that we ought by rights to ascribe to ourselves."<sup>24</sup> Wesley, in part, and White concur with this:

What is "justification" (*sic*) ... it is not the being made actually just and righteous. This is *sanctification*, which is, indeed, in some degree, the immediate *fruit* of justification, but nevertheless is a distinct gift of God and of a totally different nature. The one implies what God *does for* us through his Son; the other, what he *works in us* by his Spirit (Wesley, "Justification by Faith").<sup>25</sup>

So we have nothing in ourselves of which to boast. We have no ground for self-exaltation. Our only ground of hope is in the righteousness of Christ *imputed to us*, and in that wrought by His Spirit working in and through us (White, *Steps to Christ*).<sup>26</sup>

### The Nature of Grace

All three agree that the solution to mankind's bondage to sin is God's grace, but Wesley and White differ from Calvin over the nature of that grace. Wesley and White believe that the believer, enabled by God, must accept God's grace, whereas Calvin taught that those elected to salvation could not refuse God's grace. Ellen White is clear on this: "He invites us to give ourselves to Him, that He may work His will in us. It remains for us to choose whether we will be set free from the bondage of sin, to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God."<sup>27</sup> "He does not force the will";<sup>28</sup> "Through the right exercise of the will, an entire change may be made in your life. By yielding up your will to Christ, you ally yourself with the power that is above all principalities and powers."<sup>29</sup> "It is peace that you need,—Heaven's forgiveness and peace and love in the soul ... It is yours if you will but reach out your hand and grasp it."<sup>30</sup> This is Wesleyan, but not Calvinism. Calvin's view requires a robust conviction of being the elect of God.

Besides this, the reprobate never receives anything but a confused awareness of grace, so that they grasp a shadow rath-

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er than the firm body of it. For the Spirit, strictly speaking, seals forgiveness of sins in the elect alone, so that they apply it by special faith to their own use ... Only his elect does he account worthy of receiving the living root of faith so that they may endure to the end [Matt 24:13] (Calvin, *Institutes*).<sup>31</sup>

Calvin believed that if acceptance of God's gift of grace was a human choice it morphed the gift into a reward. Yet Wesley and White denied this: "We do not earn salvation by our obedience; for salvation is the free gift of God, to be received by faith."<sup>32</sup> White, like Wesley, may get within a "hair's breadth" of Calvin, but that margin is crucial. In an unequivocal denial of predestination she asserts that "Satan will constantly present allurements to induce us to break this tie,—to choose to separate ourselves from Christ. Here is where we need to watch, to strive, to pray, that nothing may entice us to *choose* another master; for we are always free to do this."<sup>33</sup> The union between humanity and Christ "can never be broken by any power save *the choice of man himself*."<sup>34</sup> Both Wesley and White are hostile to Calvin's doctrine of predestination as the following quotations make clear.

We call predestination *God's eternal decree*, by which he determined with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or death (Calvin, *Institutes*).<sup>35</sup>

If all the passions, the tempers, the actions, of men are wholly independent on their own choice, are governed by a principle exterior to themselves, then there can be no moral good or evil. There can be neither virtue nor vice, neither good nor bad passions or tempers. The sun does much good—but it

is no virtue—but he is not capable of moral goodness. Why is he not? For this plain reason: because he does not act from choice (Wesley, "The Struggle with the Calvinists").<sup>36</sup>

It is *no arbitrary decree on the part of God* that excludes the wicked from heaven; they are shut out by their own unfitness for its companionship (White, *Steps to Christ*).<sup>37</sup>

What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice. Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can *choose* to serve Him. You can give Him your will (White, *Steps to Christ*).<sup>38</sup>

## Sanctification

One place where Ellen White comes closer to Calvin than to Wesley is in the area of sanctification.<sup>39</sup> Calvin taught that human holiness was never totally free of the contamination of sin and therefore never beyond continuing faith in the grace of Christ. Sanctification was through union with Christ, it was progressive, and the process of growth never ceased in this life.

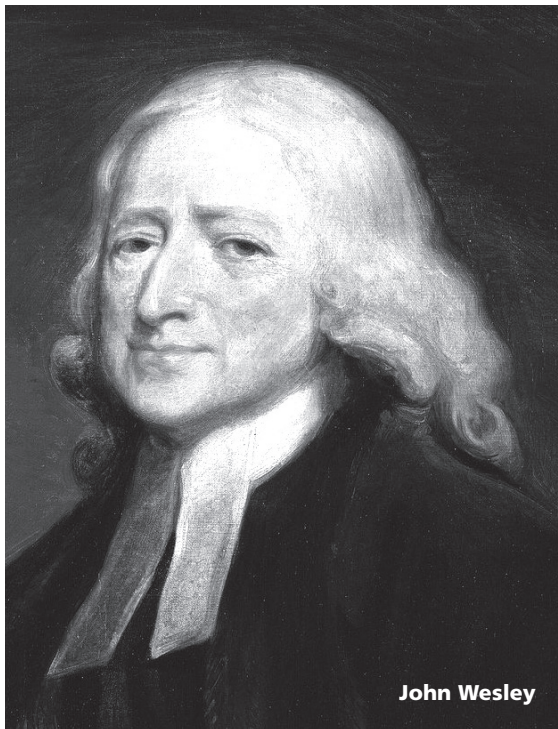
This restoration is not accomplished either in a minute of time nor in a day, nor in a year; but God abolishes the corruptions of the flesh in his elect in a continuous succession of time, and indeed little by little; and he does not cease to cleanse them of their filth, to dedicate them to himself as temples, to reform their senses to true piety, so that they exercise themselves all their lives in penitence, and know that this war never comes to an end until death.<sup>40</sup> (Calvin, *Origins*)

Wesley disagreed with Calvin over the matter

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**Sin for Wesley is “a voluntary transgression of a known law,” but an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown” is not properly a sin.**



of sanctification being a life-long process, even if they agree on many other aspects of sanctification. According to Wesley, when the repentant sinner comes to Christ by faith and experiences “peace with God,” “in that very moment—*sanctification* begins,” which coincides with being born again. The joy of this moment might lead some to think “that all sin is gone, that it is utterly rooted out of their heart and has no more any place therein!” But temptations come and sin revives “showing it [sin] was but stunned before, not dead.” So sanctification continues the battle against sin, the putting to death of our evil nature and focusing our lives on good works. It is thus “we wait for entire sanctification, for a full salvation from all our sins—from pride, self-will, anger, unbelief” (quotations are drawn from Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation” and “Thoughts on Christian Perfection”).<sup>41</sup>

In this process of sanctification there is a deepening repentance beyond that which preceded justification. It involves vigorous universal obedience, zealous keeping of all the commandments, self denial and daily taking up our cross, prayer, fasting, and a close attendance on all the ordinances of God.<sup>42</sup> For some this earnest endeavour will climax with an influx of the

Holy Spirit that abolishes sin, root and branch, in an instant. According to Wesley this “second blessing” has four aspects. First “that Christian perfection is that love of God and our neighbour which implies deliverance from *all* sin.” Second, “that this is received merely *by faith*.” Third “that it is given *instantaneously*, in one moment.” Fourth, “that we are to expect it, not at death, but *every moment*; that *now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation.”<sup>43</sup>

Following this instantaneous sanctification (or “Christian perfection,” “entire sanctification,” “perfect or pure love,” “the great salvation,” “the second blessing”), the recipient will still be encumbered with infirmities, ignorance, and mistakes.<sup>44</sup> But they will love God with their full strength, heart, and mind, which “implies that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions are governed by pure love.”<sup>45</sup> What need then of such a one of the mediation of Christ? For the omissions, shortcomings, mistakes in judgment, and defects of various kinds of the wholly sanctified, though these for Wesley are not properly sins.<sup>46</sup> Sin for Wesley is “a voluntary transgression of a known law,” but an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown” is not properly a sin.<sup>47</sup>

In a word, entire sanctification is a second blessing of God when love floods into the soul of the justified. It is “pure love reigning alone in the heart and life, this is the whole of scriptural perfection.”<sup>48</sup> Perfection means “perfect love. It is love excluding sin, love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul.”<sup>49</sup> Wesley was always about holiness and perfection, and his May 24, 1738, Aldersgate conversion did not change that. Justification was merely the door to sanctification; the latter was the “real religion.” “Justification was ultimately a means to this end [of perfection], not the end in itself.”<sup>50</sup> Calvin on the other hand united justification and sanctification through our union with Christ, but sanctification never superseded justification.

Early in her life Ellen White knew she had been justified, but she felt bereft of the later

blessing of “entire sanctification.”<sup>51</sup> In the days of the transition from Millerism to Seventh-day Adventism there were frequent outbreaks of extreme claims of “entire sanctification.” “Its advocates,” White warned, “teach that sanctification is an instantaneous work, by which, through faith alone, they attain to perfect holiness. ‘Only believe,’ they say, ‘and the blessing is yours.’ No further effort on the part of the receiver is supposed to be required.”<sup>52</sup> In writing this White rejects the central teaching of John Wesley, and sides more with Calvin on this point. Indeed, “there is no such thing as instantaneous sanctification. True sanctification is a daily work, continuing as long as life shall last.”<sup>53</sup> “Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a life time ... So long as Satan reigns, we shall have self to subdue, besetting sins to overcome; so long as life shall last, there will be no stopping place, no point which we can reach and say, I have fully attained. Sanctification is the result of lifelong obedience.”<sup>54</sup> Calvin would celebrate these words; Wesley would choke on them.

### Habitual Words and Acts

Ellen White, in *Steps to Christ*, is clearly Wesleyan in her understanding of the Christian faith and life. Even so, both Wesley and White reflect Calvin’s view of the power of sin over humans, and his understanding of justification by faith as totally dependent on God’s grace through His mercy and forgiveness of sins. However, Wesley and White reject Calvin’s denial of the divine restoral of the power of human choice, both in accepting and in abandoning the divine gift of salvation. Yet White departs from Wesley and draws nearer to Calvin in stressing justification’s continuing bond with sanctification, and especially her denial of any climax of sanctification in this life with an instantaneous gift of perfection. As she says, “the character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts [of the believer].”<sup>55</sup> She seems to allow more than Wesley when she

speaks of the character of the sanctified being “imperfect,” and “their life faulty,” with “shortcomings and mistakes.”<sup>56</sup> So Ellen White, true to her Wesleyan viewpoint, on occasion, exceeds her mentor in getting within a “hair’s breadth” of Mr. Calvin. ■

**Norman H. Young** is a Seventh-day Adventist theologian and New Testament scholar, and retired senior lecturer at Avondale College in New South Wales, Australia.



### Footnotes:

1. After I had submitted this manuscript, my friend Dr. John Skrzypaszek, Director of the Ellen G. White/SDA Research Centre at Avondale College of Higher Education, drew my attention to a recent edition of *Steps to Christ* with a 68-page historical introduction by Dr. Denis Fortin including, also by him, an introduction and notes to each chapter. Dr. Skrzypaszek kindly lent me his personal copy. This is a beautifully crafted edition in imitation nineteenth-century classic style. Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ: with historical introduction and notes by Denis Fortin* (One hundred twenty fifth Anniversary Edition; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press 2017). Quoted in the endnotes below as Fortin, “Introduction.” Within the text of this article I shall largely but not exclusively quote from *Steps to Christ*. The pagination is taken from the small pocket edition, with the copyright in the name of Ellen G. Wright (1908).

2. Revell himself enthused that just reading the book would enlist one in promoting and extending its circulation. It is, he said, an “eminently helpful and practical work” that inspired both the young Christian and the mature believer alike. Quoted in Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: Volume 4, The Australian Years (1891–1900)* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1983), 36.

3. It was reprinted seven times in its first year and is now translated into more than 165 languages. T. Poirier, “A Century of Steps,” *Advent Review* (May 14, 1992): 14–15; James R. Nix, “Steps to Christ at 125,” *Adventist World* (November 2016): 24–25.

4. The suggestion of Revell as publisher was made by G. B. Starr, an early Adventist, who at one time worked with Dwight L. Moody. See Russell Staples, “Steps to Christ” in Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon *et al.* (eds), *The Ellen G. White*

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*Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 1197–98. The Revell Company was taken over by the Baker Publishing Group in 1992.

5. See Michael Sokupa, "Mining *Steps to Christ*," *Adventist World* (June 2017): 24–25. The origin of the title is unknown, but it seems that a group of teachers and ministers endorsed the title when the manuscript was enthusiastically received by them in 1891 during a convention at Harbor Heights, Michigan. Nix, "Steps to Christ at 125," 24; Herbert E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific, 1998), 444.

6. The Wesleyan tradition balances divine sovereignty with human responsibility, righteousness by faith with sanctification through the Holy Spirit. See Staples, "Steps to Christ," 1198.

7. John Wesley, "To John Newton," Londonderry, May 14, 1765. Conveniently found in Albert C. Outler (ed), *John Wesley* (New York: OUP, 1964) 78. Cited as Outler.

8. Fortin, "Introduction," 28–31; 35–36.

9. White, *Steps to Christ*, 17, 43.

10. *Ibid.*, 18; italics added.

11. Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 2, Chapter 1.8, LCC, I.252; italics added. As quoted in John T. McNeill (ed) *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2 vols; London: SCM, 1960). Cited as LCC.

12. *Ibid.*, Chapter 3.5, LCC, I.296.

13. Wesley, "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," *Sermon* 9, Edward H. Sugden, *Wesley's Standard Sermons* (2 vols; London: Epworth, 1921), I.188–89; italics added. Cited as Sugden.

14. Wesley, "Original Sin," *Sermon* 38, Sugden, II.223.

15. White, *Steps to Christ*, 49.

16. Fortin, "Introduction" 36–40.

17. Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 3, Chapter 11.21, LCC I.751.

18. *Ibid.*, Chapter 11.2, LCC I.727.

19. Wesley, "Justification by Faith," Outler, 202. Ellen White also relates justification to pardon. "Whatever his profession may be he is not justified, which means pardoned." Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, 250; "As the penitent sinner, contrite before God, discerns Christ's atonement in his behalf, and accepts this atonement as his only hope in this life and the future life, his sins are pardoned. This is justification by faith." Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, 116.

20. White, *Steps to Christ*, 68.

21. *Ibid.*, 62; italics added.

22. *Ibid.*, 53.

23. Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 3, Chapter 16.1, LCC I.798.

24. *Ibid.*, Chapter 15.3, I. LCC 790. Compare Ellen White's statement that "This robe [of Christ's righteousness], woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising." Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 311.

25. Wesley, "Justification by Faith," Outler, 200–201.

26. White, *Steps to Christ*, 63; italics added. "The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven." White, *The Faith I Live By*, 116.

27. White, *Steps to Christ*, 44.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*, 48.

30. *Ibid.*, 49.

31. Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 3, Chapter 2.11, LCC, I.555–56.

32. White, *Steps to Christ*, 61.

33. *Ibid.*, 72; italics added except "choose."

34. *Ibid.*; italics added.

35. Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 3, Chapter 21.5, LCC, II.926; italics added.

36. Wesley, "The Struggle with the Calvinists," Outler, 480–81.

37. White, *Steps to Christ*, 18; italics added.

38. *Ibid.*, 47; italics original.

39. Fortin, "Introduction," 40–52.

40. Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:8 as quoted in François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Thought* (E.T.; London: Collins, 1963), 243.

41. For these two essays see Outler, 271–282; 283–298.

42. John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (London: Epworth, post 1767), 63.

43. *Ibid.*, 48–49; italics original.

44. Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (3rd ed.; London: Epworth, 2002) 396.

45. John Wesley, *Plain Account*, 49.

46. *Ibid.*, 52.

47. *Ibid.*, 53.

48. *Ibid.*, 61.

49. Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," Outler, 275.

50. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 391.

51. See *Life Sketches*, 28–29.

52. Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, 471.

53. Ellen G. White, *The Sanctified Life*, 10; *My Life Today*, 248.

54. Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 560–61.

55. White, *Steps to Christ*, 57–58.

56. *Ibid.*, 64.



George R. Knight, *Adventist Authority Wars, Ordination, and the Catholic Temptation* (Westlake Village, CA: Oak and Acorn Publishing, 2017)

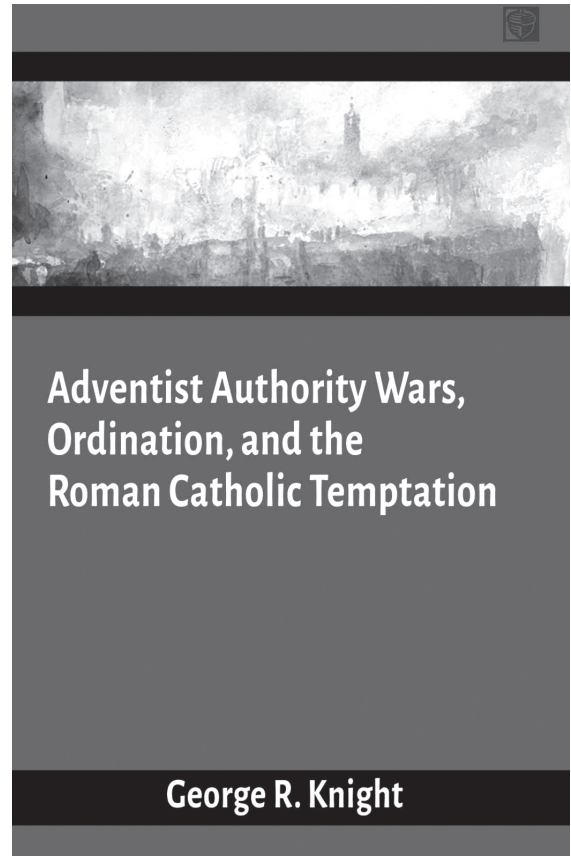
# Adventist Authority Wars, Ordination, and the Roman Catholic Temptation | BY DOUGLAS MORGAN

**Knight, seeming to write faster than some of us can read, has, over the past thirty years, established singular preeminence as an historian of Adventism.**

October 2017, the month that will bring the five-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's 95 Theses and the launch of the Protestant Reformation, will also bring the Adventist movement to a critical juncture in a struggle over its Protestant character. That is how George Knight sees it, anyway. In the run-up to the Annual Council of the General Conference, October 5–11, in an atmosphere rife with anticipation over the next phase of Adventism's protracted crisis over ecclesiastical authority, Knight, with an eye toward Luther and the Reformation's five-hundredth, has published this collection of essays centering on his 9.5 Theses to keep Adventism Protestant.

There is more: Knight's protest against the misconstrual and misuse of General Conference authority comes at a time when he is the author of the official companion book to the current Sabbath School lesson guides published by the General Conference for weekly study by the church worldwide. The topic for the fourth quarter lessons is the epistle to the Romans, the primary text for Luther's Reformation breakthrough to grasping that the righteousness of God is a free gift, not an impossible demand, received through faith alone.

Knight, seeming to write faster than some of us can read, has, over the past thirty years, established singular preeminence as an historian of Adventism. Never narrowly confined to the role of academic historian, he has also published numerous works of biblical exposition and analyses of contemporary issues in Adventism. *Adventist Authority Wars* (AAW) combines history



and homily in a bold diagnosis of Adventism's present crisis that includes a prophetic call to stand for a better future. It is a "tract for the times," similar in function to the weighty tracts in which the sixteenth-century Reformers marshaled scholarship in defense of their cause.

The book brings together three historically based essays on church governance and three essays of biblical commentary on the intersection of ordination and gender—the flashpoint for the broader and deeper conflict over authority. The heart of the book, containing its main polemical thrust, is Chapter 3, "Catholic or Adventist: The Ongoing Struggle Over Authority

**The need to place church property on proper legal footing led to selection of an official name and the incorporation of a rapidly growing publishing ministry.**

+ 9.5 Theses.”<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, presented at the Unity 2017 Conference convened by ten union conferences in London last July, Knight draws on the history of Adventist struggles over biblical and ecclesiastical authority to challenge positions taken in the document titled “A Study of Church Governance and Unity” (SCGU),<sup>2</sup> issued by the General Conference Secretariat in September 2016.

Since some of the essays conveniently assembled in this volume have previously been available separately and have been the focus of intense interest and discussion over the past several months, it does not seem useful to summarize them here. In fact, though I will briefly touch on matters of biblical interpretation, especially toward the end, this review will not at all do justice to Knight’s biblical essays. Instead, I will focus on selected aspects of his use of history to inform his polemic with SCGU revolving around two central issues—the nature of General Conference authority and, more briefly, its use.

### **The Nature of General Conference Authority**

It is the directional flow of authority that is at stake in the current “war,” Knight tells us. He aligns with what he sees as “the traditional Adventist position,” which grounds authority in the membership or constituents as a whole, from whence it flows upward. The SCGU, on the other hand, he observes, sets forth the position that authority flows down from the General Conference “to the constituent administrative entities of the denomination.”<sup>3</sup>

The upward vs. downward flow is a useful metaphor or sound bite for introducing the conflict. On closer look, though, the matter is more complex than a simple up or down alternative. The SCGU in fact agrees that “authority derives from the lowest level of structure (the local church) and flows upward through constituency-based units to the highest level, the General Conference.”<sup>4</sup> And, conversely, it would seem consistent with Knight’s position to say that the authority delegated upward to

the General Conference can rightfully flow back down in ways that call for recognition from the entire world church.

But what is the nature of that authority? Is the General Conference invested with plenary authority, including authority to define and, if necessary, to override that of every other governance structure within the world church? Or, is its authority more specifically demarcated to meet pragmatic needs—mission-driven, contingent, and limited?

In Knight’s telling of the story, the force that was powerful enough to cause an “anti-organizational people” to “organize in spite of themselves” (Chapter 1, amplified in Chapter 3) came from “the pragmatic necessities of mission.” As seemingly innumerable varieties of post-Millerite Adventism competed for souls in the early 1850s, the need to identify authentic representatives of the Third Angel’s message led to the issuance of certification cards to preachers. The need to place church property on proper legal footing led to selection of an official name and the incorporation of a rapidly growing publishing ministry. The need to coordinate the work of ministers led to organization of state conferences.

The call for representatives of the state conferences to meet in order to form a General Conference was likewise prompted by a specific and rather basic missional need, set forth by J. H. Waggoner in 1862: coordination of the evangelistic labors of evangelists who traveled from state to state. So, when James White, in previewing the 1863 conference, urged that it would only be worth adding the new General Conference if it could function as “the great regulator,” it was with reference to meeting the specific need “of securing unity and efficiency in labor, and promoting the general interests of the cause of present truth.”<sup>5</sup> One other major role for the General Conference was identified at the organizational gathering: to “take the special supervision of all missionary labor.”<sup>6</sup>

These functions were indeed broad and

made the General Conference, as James White had hoped, “higher in authority than State Conferences.” But they were also limited to that which the state conferences and local congregations by definition could not do. The General Conference was not created to manage, direct, or control the operation of the conferences and churches.

Here, as in his previous work, Knight places great stress on two hermeneutical moves by James White that were essential in enabling the “anti-organization people” to overcome their aversion to formalizing instruments of authority. First, White broke free of the Restorationist insistence upon explicit New Testament precedent or authorization for anything instituted in the church. Second, he drew attention to the fact that the meaning of “Babylon” was not limited to the early Adventists’ primary association of the term with the oppressive and persecuting ecclesiastical “established churches” that had harassed, expelled, and ostracized them during the 1843–1844 phase of the Millerite movement. That experience makes understandable their deep-seated resistance to any move in the direction of formal organization as the first step down the slippery slope to “Babylon.” But James pointed out that Babylon also stood for disorder and confusion, and that it was from this aspect that the disorganized early 1850s Adventists most needed to “come out.”

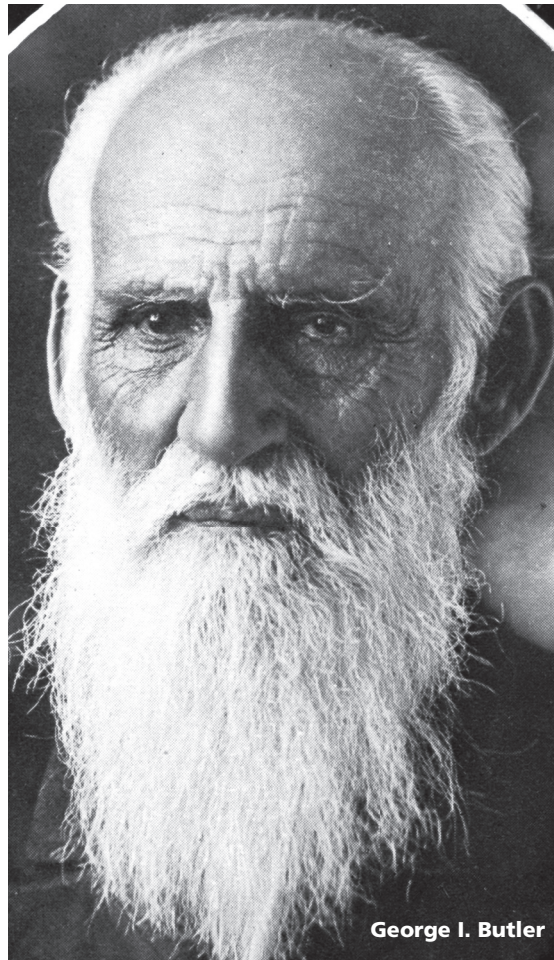
Nonetheless, the first meaning of “Babylon” was not dropped as obsolete. As Knight puts it, each organizational step was taken with “a cautious eye on higher ecclesiastical authorities removing their freedom in Christ.”<sup>7</sup> We also learn from Knight’s narrative that both James and Ellen White were among those vigilant against church organization reverting to the oppression characteristic of Babylon.

It did not take long for the concept of the General Conference as “highest authority” in crucial but delimited functions to morph into more sweeping conceptions of plenary authority, most notably those of George I. Butler, who served as General Conference president

for several terms, off and on, during the 1870s and 1880s. Knight brings out striking passages from “the originator of Adventist church structure,” James White, that pushed back against Butler’s position that loyalty to a single, great Leader was needed for the Adventist movement to thrive.

In 1874, White wrote 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.” In 1880, after re-publishing the same statement, he added,

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

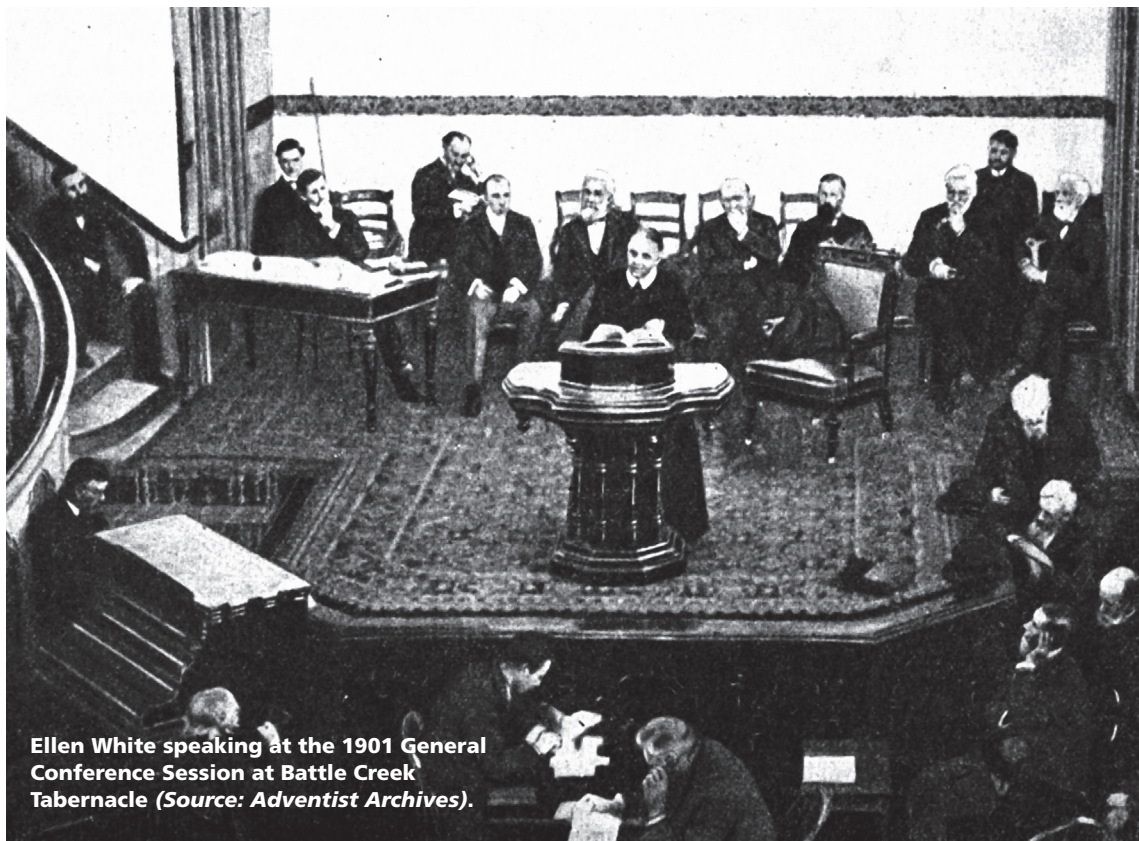


George I. Butler

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**Ellen White speaking at the 1901 General Conference Session at Battle Creek Tabernacle (Source: Adventist Archives).**

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>8</sup>

Butler does not seem to have altered his views in any fundamental way, however. A few years later, feeling threatened by the dangerous “new theology” of E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones, Butler detailed the reach of General Conference authority extending to supervision of every institution, periodical, Conference, society, and mission field throughout the entire church.<sup>9</sup>

Knight adduces many of Ellen White’s repeated rebukes of “kingly power” by one man or a small group of men who exerted domineering influence from Battle Creek over all aspects of the church’s mission that by then was far-flung over distant continents. “Gospel order” was the great need of the 1850s but, by the 1880s, order had turned into an authoritarianism directed against gospel renewal. Ellen White’s advocacy for the former had never meant capitulation to

the latter. Alertness was necessary against the possibility that the ecclesiastical repression characteristic of Babylon, which she herself had experienced during the early Second Advent movement, could resurface in Adventism’s own governance structures.

In 1889, Ellen White reflected on the fact that Adventists had been “reformers” when “they had come out of the denominational churches” in the 1840s. However, in resisting the “reformation” call stemming from Minneapolis in 1888, denominational leaders “now act a part similar to that which the churches acted.” She had “hoped that there would not be the necessity for another coming out.” She indeed wanted everything possible be done to maintain unity “in the bonds of peace,” but she also pledged that “we will not with pen or voice cease to protest against bigotry.”<sup>10</sup>

In his second chapter, Knight highlights Ellen White’s prophetic advocacy for major organizational changes that General Conference leadership opposed prior to the breakthrough in 1901. Clearly, she did not regard the divine

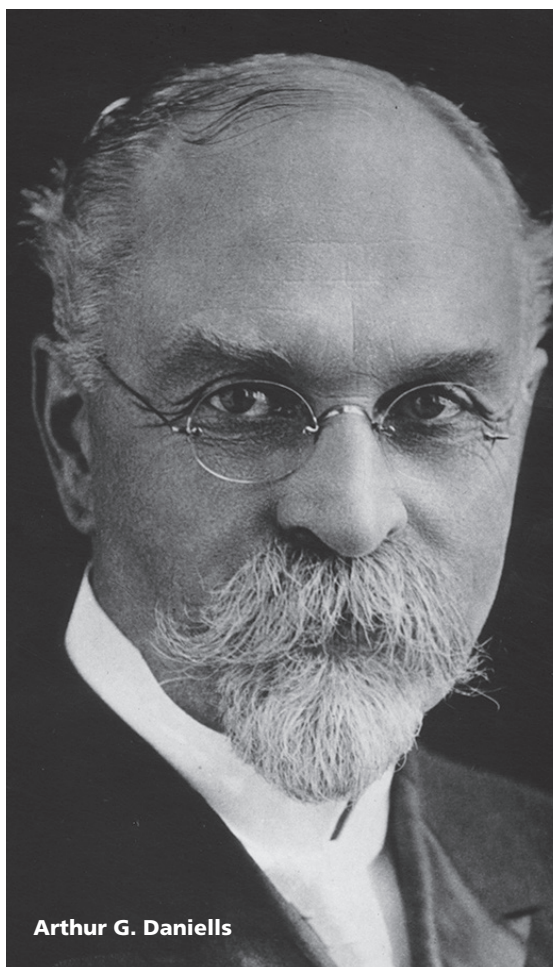
approval of the church organization formed in the 1860s as conferring sacred immutability on how its particular components were configured to best accomplish the unchanging goals of mission and unity in the original circumstances. Regarding the significance of union conferences and the departmental system for the various lines of church endeavor established in 1901–1903, Knight's gift for clarifying synthesis is in top form:

*Let it be remembered that both of the major innovations were developed in response to regional mission needs and both were developed in opposition to General Conference pronouncements and procedures. But they worked. The major lesson is that without the freedom to experiment Adventism would not have its present system of organization.*<sup>11</sup>

Drawing on the work of Barry Oliver<sup>12</sup> and the late Gary Chudleigh,<sup>13</sup> Knight drives home the radical shift of authority from the General Conference to the new union conferences envisioned and initiated in 1901. In the words of Arthur G. Daniells, elected to lead the denomination through the re-organization, the unions were invested with “full authority and power to deal with all matters within their boundaries.”<sup>14</sup>

But what should we make of the fact that the book under review, as well as Chudleigh's *Who Runs the Church?*,<sup>15</sup> were published under the auspices of the Pacific Union Conference? Is all this “revisionist history” with evidence cherry-picked and twisted out of context to justify the Columbia and Pacific Unions in defying General Conference authority by enacting gender equality in the ordination of women?

It is a fair question, notwithstanding the fact that Oliver's comprehensive study *SDA Organizational Structure: Past, Present, and Future*<sup>16</sup> has been in print since 1989. All historical writing is generated by some present interest or motivation. That factor must be taken into account, but such recognition neither substitutes for nor lessens the necessity of weighing evidence.



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Why does the newly prominent evidence concerning the 1901 outlook on the role of union conferences seem to clash so sharply with widespread assumptions about the central and pervasive authority of the General Conference a century later? Here Knight, drawing especially on Oliver, shows that the ideals of 1901 quickly became modified in the heat of the conflict with John Harvey Kellogg that escalated head-on confrontation the very next year. For A. G. Daniells, heightened General Conference authority became the unifying force needed to counteract the centrifugal influence of Kellogg in alliance with A. T. Jones. “That dynamic impelled Daniells to emphasize unity as he moved toward a more authoritative stance,” says Knight. In the century and more that followed, recognition of the General Conference as “God's highest authority” has been emphasized as the bulwark of unity.<sup>17</sup>

What, then, would warrant uplifting short-



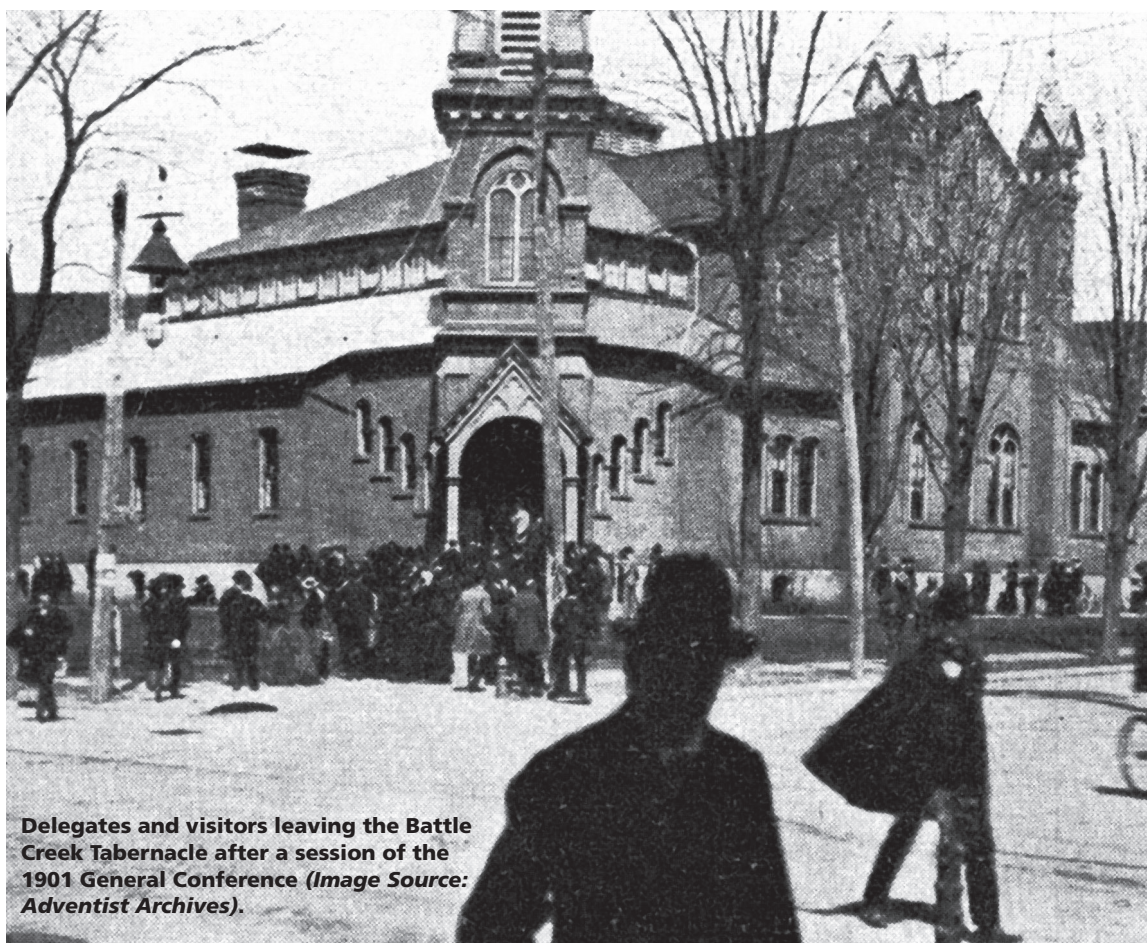
**The SCGU,  
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lived changes in 1901, quickly if not entirely rolled back, as inspiration for the present? Does not the SCGU's explanation concerning the “plenary authority” of the General Conference over the world church have a more convincing basis in a continuity that has been sustained for more than a century?

Everyone acknowledges and celebrates that some of the changes of 1901 have stuck. The SCGU grants that union conferences (and local churches and conferences) do have “their own constitution and constituency” and thus “decision-making authority in defined areas.” However, the SCGU, quoting the General Conference *Working Policy*, explains that the status of unions “is not self-generated, automatic, or perpetual” but instead comes by way of conferral from the General Conference. Whatever decision-making authority it has may thus also “be reviewed, revised, amended, or withdrawn by the level of organization that granted it” (B

05 03). So, the bottom line is that the unions, and conferences, missions, and local churches as well, have a responsibility “to comply with world Church ‘practices and policies’” that “supersedes all other considerations.”<sup>18</sup>

Along with decades of historical precedent, the SCGU's logic is clear and grounding and the GC *Working Policy* solid. On the other hand, Knight brings much to our attention that prompts questions. I find it difficult to reconcile the SCGU/GC *Working Policy* doctrine of General Conference plenary authority with Ellen White's observation, in a testimony to church leaders in April 1903, that it had been “a necessity to organize Union conferences, that the General Conference shall not exercise dictation over all the separate Conferences.” It seems her comment is part of a lament that the reforms of 1901 were not being sustained, for she also refers to “kingly authority” once again being manifested.<sup>19</sup>



**Delegates and visitors leaving the Battle Creek Tabernacle after a session of the 1901 General Conference (Image Source: Adventist Archives).**

IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTP://IMAGES.ADVENTISTARCHIVES.ORG/VIEW/ARA/ARA1944-P20-01.JPG](http://images.adventistarchives.org/view/ARA/ARA1944-P20-01.JPG).HTML





SDA General Conference Administration building in Takoma Park at the turn of the century (Image Source: Adventist Archives).

It appears  
that “highest”  
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encompassing.”

The plenary authority doctrine also seems incongruent with the resolution passed by the 1877 General Conference, with the support of Ellen and James White, as a corrective to G. I. Butler’s misguided theory of leadership authority. It affirmed 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>20</sup>

According to this resolution, actions duly taken by a General Conference in its capacity as “highest authority under God” are limited to a realm of “proper jurisdiction.” It appears that “highest” may not mean “absolute” or “all-encompassing.” At any rate, the 1877 resolution seems to check the exercise of even the “highest authority” in a way that is incommensurate with

the doctrine of plenary authority.

In sum, we might suggest that Knight’s account reveals two governance orientations, both deeply embedded in Adventist history. The *centralizing orientation*, accompanied by an emphasis on the General Conference imbued with divine authority as the supreme bulwark of church unity, was given voice early on by George I. Butler. I have to wonder, though, if it is entirely fair to Butler that the high profile resulting from his effectiveness as forceful leader has made him the historical whipping boy for excesses in this direction. He must have been drawing on wider currents in the church and was perhaps not entirely without basis for thinking that his approach was in line with that of James and Ellen White.

The *decentralizing orientation* (for lack of a better term), accompanied by an emphasis on flexibility and openness to innovation in the interests of mission, finds resonance in the distrust of formal authority characteristic of the “anti-or-



The  
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toward  
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as the apex  
of unifying  
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prevailed as  
a mentality  
throughout  
the twentieth  
century.

**Review and Herald building and General Conference buildings after 1919 expansion (Image Source: Adventist Archives).**

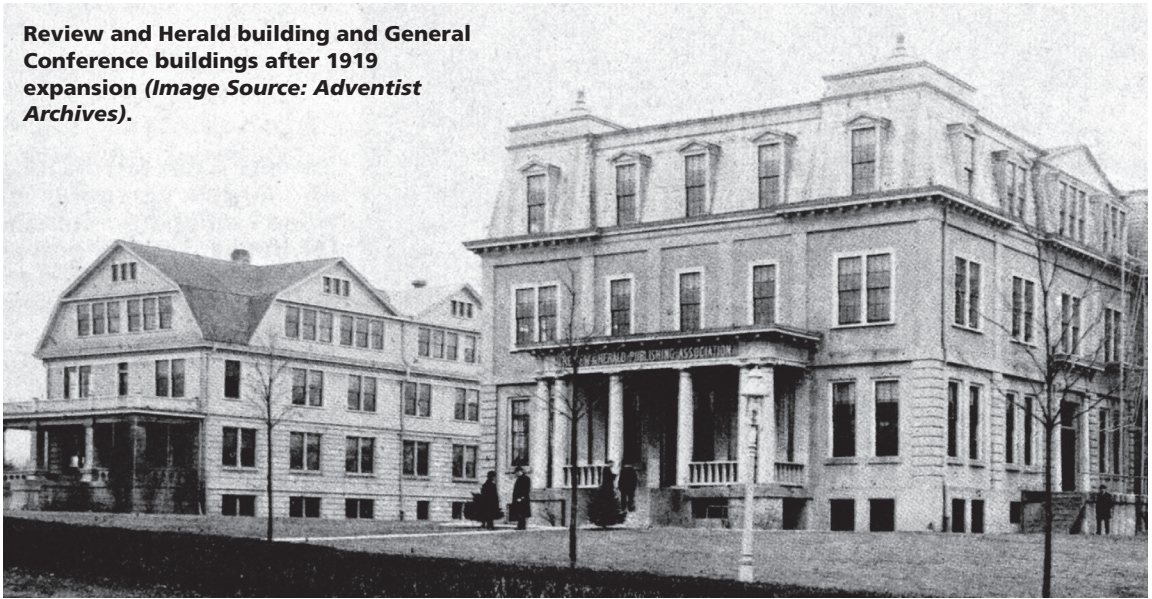


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ganizational people” who launched the Adventist movement. It accepts the consensus about gospel order that resulted in denominational organization but seeks the essential minimum when it comes to centralized power and the maximum possible scope of freedom for those “on the ground” to respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and is more reliant on that informal influence as the source of unity than on policy enforcement.

The 1901 reorganization was a breakthrough for the decentralizing orientation and, though scaled back, instituted lasting change. The centralizing orientation toward uplifting the General Conference as the apex of unifying authority prevailed as a mentality throughout the twentieth century. However, Knight, in an illuminating synthesis of recent history, traces a new thrust of the centralizing orientation begun in the 1980s to formalize and extend the scope of General Conference authority.

The Commission on World Church Organization, established in 1991, for example, sought to undermine the plenary authority of local churches over whom to include or exclude from membership. Though that particular push in the centralizing direction did not prevail, the Commission did, in 1995, succeed in codifying in the *GC Working Policy*, initiatives that began in the 1980s to bring union and conference gov-

ernance into greater conformity. The changes included “further tightening of control measures embedded in model constitutions” and, portentously, a new section (B 95) with a title that needs little elaboration: “Discontinuation of Conferences, Missions, Unions, and Unions of Churches by Dissolution and/or Expulsion.”

Though these initiatives engendered considerable debate and concern, the long-prevailing influence of the centralizing orientation may have limited the spread of alarm. Also, a more vivid controversy overshadowed these critically important but abstract matters of organizational policy at the 1990 and 1995 General Conferences. It appears that the pervasive centralizing mentality made it seem natural to ask the General Conference for permission to do something that, as Gary Patterson has persuasively argued,<sup>21</sup> was not formally prohibited and for which no special GC permission was needed in the first place—namely, to ordain female pastors.

Knight brings another critical feature associated with the centralizing orientation under scrutiny in responding to the use of Matthew 18:18 in the September 2016 documents issued by the General Conference Secretariat. In this passage, Jesus instructs his disciples about a correspondence between their decisions about “binding” (restricting) and “loosing” (permit-

ting) and that which is done in heaven.

The *Summary of the Study of Church Governance and Unity* declares: "Seventh-day Adventists believe the authority granted to the Church by Jesus enables Church leaders to make decisions that bind all members. Further, we collectively subordinate ourselves to decisions taken at GC Sessions and Annual Councils."<sup>22</sup> This use of Matthew 18 invests the functioning of a particular, fallible configuration of ecclesiastical governance with divine authority and by unavoidable implication castigates dissenters as rebels against Jesus (in other words, on the side of Satan, not to put too fine a point on it).

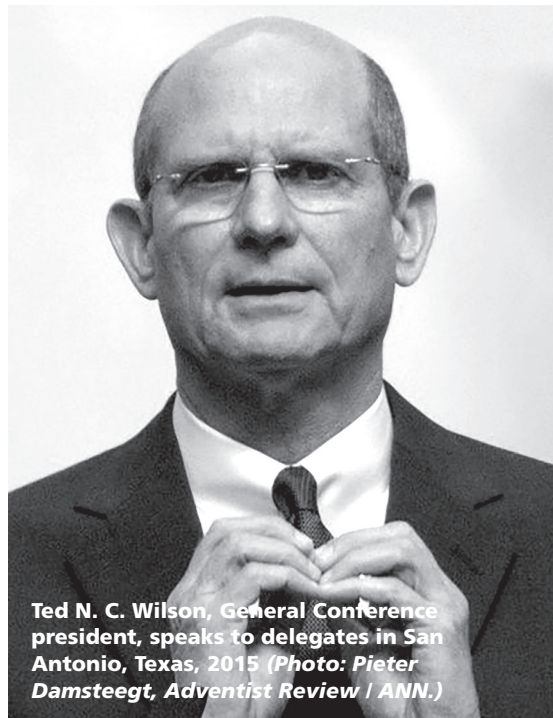
Ellen White also cited the passage on several occasions to admonish individuals to accept the counsel and authority of the church as God's appointed agency. Regarding such passages as placing divine favor on one side of a disagreement between conscientious church leaders over where to draw the boundaries of authority between denominational entities seems a shaky proposition.

Knight, with the backing of the *New American Standard Bible*<sup>23</sup> and *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, prefers to highlight Ellen White's explanation that the passage does not provide blanket divine confirmation for church decisions. Instead, "whatever the church does that is in accordance with the directions given in God's word will be ratified in heaven."<sup>24</sup>

This illustrates a contrasting pattern in the decentralizing orientation's use of inspired texts. It tends to scrutinize the present practices and policies of the church in the light of Scripture, and to uplift the abundance of striking examples in which Ellen White did the same.

### The Use of General Conference Authority

Perhaps the most provocative section of Knight's book, though, is not about the scope and character of church authority, but rather openness and integrity in its use. The defeat of Divisional choice in women's ordination at the San Antonio General Conference in 2015, its failure to reverse the behavior of the "noncom-



Ted N. C. Wilson, General Conference president, speaks to delegates in San Antonio, Texas, 2015 (Photo: Pieter Damsteegt, *Adventist Review* / ANN.)

pliant" unions, and the specter of punitive action raised in the Fall of 2016 have taken center stage in Adventism's decades-long struggle over gender equality in ministry. This is understandable, but it seems to me that in the process attention has been unduly diverted from the story of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC), one that is most crucial within the overall drama.

Regular readers of the *Spectrum* website will surely have some awareness of TOSC, and I may be overstating its relative neglect. But if the issues surrounding its role are less sharp and vivid in your mind than those specific to the San Antonio vote, I urge you to make a point of reading Knight's treatment of it,<sup>25</sup> and view the presentation on this topic by Drs. Kendra Haloviak Valentine and Gilbert Valentine.<sup>26</sup>

In the briefest terms possible, this massively funded project was, at its launch in 2011, touted as the process that would, through a scrupulously thorough, open, and fair process lead to a final resolution of the question of women's ordination by 2015. The work of study commissions in each division of the world church was followed by an overall, worldwide TOSC to produce the final report.

Regarding such passages as placing divine favor on one side of a disagreement between conscientious church leaders over where to draw the boundaries of authority between denominational entities seems a shaky proposition.

IMAGE SOURCE: HTTP://BITLY/ZBYYN9I



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would  
credit any  
organization,  
much less one  
that claims  
to be God's  
“highest  
authority.”**



**SDA World Church  
Headquarters, present day.**

IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTPS://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FILE:GENERAL\\_CONFERENCE.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:General_Conference.JPG)

Knight quotes, with full agreement, the SCGU's description of the work of TOSC: "Voices from around the world and from all sides were heard; the arguments and supporting documents of all perspectives were made freely available online to church members for their own study and prayerful consideration. The process was unmatched in both breadth and depth."<sup>27</sup>

But then, to Knight's astonishment and mine, the SCGU moves immediately to this conclusion: "When, after such a process, a GC Session takes a decision, one obviously intended to apply to the world (since variation of practice was part of the motion put to the Session), it cannot be disregarded." But this conclusion apparently does not apply to the nearly two-thirds majority vote (62-32) of the world TOSC to allow divisions the option of ordaining on a gender-neutral basis. So, it turns out that the SCGU has extolled the virtues of the TOSC process to buttress the legitimacy of a 2015 GC vote that, in denying divisions choice, went precisely op-

posite to the TOSC recommendations.

Little was said about the TOSC recommendations preparatory to the vote in San Antonio either. Knight concludes, "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>28</sup>

It is difficult to conceive how such a procedure would credit any organization, much less one that claims to be God's "highest authority." Unfortunately, it is not an isolated case. Knight details a pattern of what he calls "manipulation of data" associated with efforts to defend or heighten General Conference authority in the 1880s and then beginning again in the 1980s.

One more issue involving the use of authority needs mentioning due to its current relevance.

The aforementioned addition of section B 95 to the GC *Working Policy* in 1995, itself arguably an overreach in centralizing authority, set forth procedures for disciplining, and if necessary, dissolving administrative units such as conferences, missions, and union conferences that persist in noncompliance with world church policy. However, this apparently sweeping policy had one shortcoming as the basis for action against the allegedly noncompliant unions in 2016: it specifies that such action be initiated by the division.

Since the North American Division, it seems, could not be counted on to take the desired action, the currently pending process adopted at the 2016 Annual Council for dealing with noncompliant unions had to be initiated by the General Conference administration rather than by following the policy outlined in B 95. Based on the analysis of attorney and retired Associate General Counsel of the GC, Mitchell Tyner,<sup>29</sup> Knight concludes that “*the General Conference presidential office had to step outside of pol-*

*icy to make its case for punishing those it deemed to be outside of policy.*”<sup>30</sup>

### A Place to Stand

Both Knight’s contention that authority, not female ordination, is the core issue, and my own inclinations, have led me to concentrate my commentary there, to the neglect of his chapters on biblical interpretation. But the authority relation of the unions and General Conference is not finally the central issue either. That debate is of vital importance, for if the charge of noncompliance against the female-ordaining unions cannot be sustained, then the impasse is dissolved, and the denomination’s existential crisis goes away.

Yet Knight, in the stirring conclusion of his 9.5 Theses, does not appeal for a stand with Luther and the Confessing Church on the true interpretation of GC *Working Policy* B 05. Conversely, if the 2015 vote had been more like 80–20 in the negative, or if there had not been a favorable TOSC supermajority, it seems un-

**Knight, in the stirring conclusion of his 9.5 Theses, does not appeal for a stand with Luther and the Confessing Church on the true interpretation of GC Working Policy B 05.**



**Committee members pray prior to casting their ballots at the Seventh-day Adventist church’s Annual Council in 2016. (Brent Hardinge/ANN)**

IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTP://WWW.ADVENTISTREVIEW.ORG/ASSETS/PUBLIC/NEWS/2016-10/29/639386213\\_F0AAECD86C\\_K.JPG](http://www.adventistreview.org/assets/public/news/2016-10/29/639386213_F0AAECD86C_K.JPG)

**Would not  
unions still be  
in a position  
to use their  
authority  
to exclude  
women whose  
names are  
sent for  
approval from  
a conference?**

likely that the Columbia and Pacific Unions would have reversed course on equality. Nor would they likely do so if the 2020 General Conference entirely eliminates any basis for ambiguity by passing an explicit prohibition against ordaining women.

On the other hand, if the unions were to win the debate over whether there is no gender limitation in their authority to approve recommendations for ordination, it is not a foregone conclusion that all would always include women. Would not unions still be in a position to use their authority to exclude women whose names are sent for approval from a conference?

The core issue does finally lead us back to the Protestant Reformation and the question which holds priority: ecclesiastical authority or biblical authority? Knight's most telling argument in this regard is that Adventist ecclesiastical authority has created an extra-biblical category called ordination, reserved to males only, and insisted on conformity based on bare assertion of General Conference authority—itself defended with Scripture passages but devoid of any clear, substantive basis in Scripture on the disputed issue itself.

So, is Adventism really on the road to Rome if it fails to heed George Knight's 9.5 Theses? A case for an over-sensationalized title and framing of the issue might be made, but he is serious about getting our attention. And might it be the case that wise, confident leadership would feel no need to overreact, give some scope for the element of rhetorical and marketing strategy, and discern the love at the heart of the message?

I want to suggest that if the Adventist movement is to be instrumental in bringing the reformation of the church begun five hundred years ago to its culmination, it makes sense that we should neither be bound by the limitations of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, nor lose the bearings of its definitive insights, such as, 1) salvation by grace through faith alone, 2) the supreme authority of Scripture, and 3) priesthood of all believers (and the

only New Testament "royal priesthood" I know about has no gender exclusions).

Along with Knight's 9.5 Theses, I think the 1877 General Conference resolution cited above could be useful toward that twin goal. The resolution both affirms an appropriate scope for the General Conference as the "highest authority" of a united world movement and honors the Protestant principle of individual conscience guided by the supreme authority of scripture. It does not provide a formula for easy resolution of tension and conflict over how these sources of authority interact "on the ground." It does, I would hope, continue to provide a viable touchstone for unity. ■



**Douglas Morgan** holds a PhD from the University of Chicago, and teaches at Washington Adventist University.

## Footnotes:

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5. James White, *Review and Herald* (April 28, 1863).
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15. Chudleigh, *Who Runs the Church?*, (2013).
16. Barry Oliver, *SDA Organizational Structure: Past, Present, and Future* (Andrews University Press).
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19. AAW, 52-53; 87.
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23. <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+18%3A18&version=NASB>.
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26. <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/2017/07/07/professors-valentine-expand-upon-chapter-1-where-are-we-headed-adventism-after-sa>.
27. AAW, 97; SCGU, 41.
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29. <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/2017/05/01/gc-litigation-eforts-two-current-examples>.
30. AAW, 105.

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BOOK REVIEW

George R. Knight, *Adventist Authority Wars, Ordination, and the Catholic Temptation* (Westlake Village, CA: Oak and Acorn Publishing, 2017)

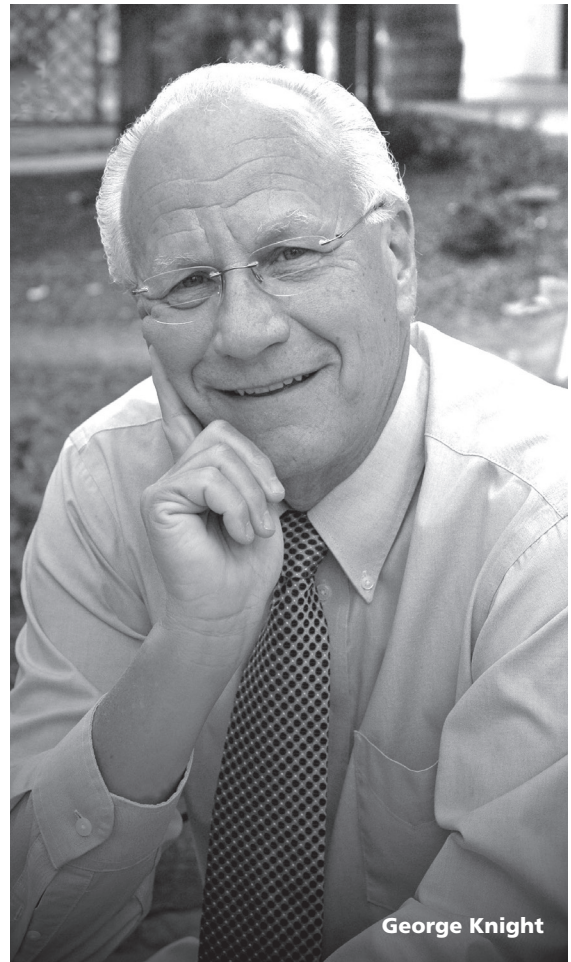
# Has George Knight Gone Rogue in Rogue River?

| BY JONATHAN BUTLER

**Fortunately, conference officials quickly gained the victory over their temper tantrum.**

**N**ot really. In this slim, thought-provoking volume, Knight reflects on women's ordination without thinking only about women's ordination. He encourages a wide, well-informed view. He wants Adventists to reflect on their history in order to properly deal with this intractable, contemporary problem. But he has not gone rogue. If Knight were a different sort of person, he could easily have turned volatile and strident in this book, as if he were a bloviating cable-television host. Instead, he maintains his composure. Ever the prudent professor, he mostly confines himself to balanced historical narrative, some sound biblical exegesis, and, here and there, a soothing pastoral tone. He understands that regardless of whether Adventist women become ordained ministers, there is a deeper question of the nature of ecclesiastical authority. Does ordination emanate from the top down or the bottom up? Does church hierarchy bestow it through the "laying on of hands"? Or, rather, do only God's hands single out men and women for the ministry, which leaders and laity alike are left simply to acknowledge? He also understands that when Bible-believing Adventists quote scripture on opposite sides of the same argument, it can be unsettling to the faithful. Or worse, how can Adventists believe in the "Bible alone" if they confront such a significant issue and the Bible offers no unequivocal word?

Knight was coaxed from an idyllic little village of 2,100 people along Oregon's Rogue River, where he enjoys retirement, to speak at the Adventist Unity Conference in London, a city of nearly nineteen million, where all the



residents of his hometown could fit on a single subway platform. He spoke on the provocatively titled topic: "Catholic or Adventist: The Ongoing Struggle Over Authority + 9.5 Theses." For Knight's trouble, the Michigan Conference chose to be more medieval Catholic than modern Adventist and placed his heretofore popular and admired books on its Index of Forbidden Books. Fortunately, conference officials quickly gained the victory over their temper tantrum. In *Adventist Authority Wars* (AAW), Knight

IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.ANDREWS.EDU/JAGENDA/35986](https://www.andrews.edu/jagenda/35986)

rightly titles his preface, "You Must Read This First: It Sets the Stage." And there seems nothing disingenuous about the way he concludes it: "I love my church and only want the best for its leaders. And 'best' always means being faithful to the Bible, the prophetic gift of Ellen White, and the great principles demonstrated in Adventist history."

That does not sound like a man who has gone rogue. Knight acknowledges that he can rub people the wrong way. But he rightly points out that his critics come at him from both the Adventist "right" and "left," which is a good indication that he stakes out a middle ground from which the largest number of Adventists can benefit. His flamboyant style, however, can be mistaken for heretical substance. In fact, he is more like the pastor who wears flashy clothes to the church picnic, but he is still in a suit and tie. I have read and appreciated all of Knight's historical books. What I most value in him as an author is that, in making his argument, he supplies his readers with enough evidence that they can form their own differing opinions on the same subject. They can reach more liberal or more conservative conclusions than he does. As a writer, he is unflinchingly generous in this way. This is certainly true with *Adventist Authority Wars*. I do not view him as swinging a wrecking ball at the church or its leadership. Even when compelled to oppose the brethren here, he is part of the loyal opposition. Thinking of his role within Adventism in the language of contemporary politics, it is as if Knight were a fan of Ronald Reagan and distressed that his party has been taken over by Donald Trump.

Knight reminds us that the "authority war," which enlists Adventists at the moment, is hardly their first one. Despite their noncombatant stance militarily, Adventists have been historically prone to "war" in both doctrine and practice. In the 1850s, they fought over whether to organize at all. In 1888, they went to "war" over the law and the gospel and, surprisingly to a later generation, the meaning of the ten horns in Daniel 7. By the early 1900s, a new "author-

ity war" was waged to establish a more modern corporate identity. For many Adventists around the world, Adventist leadership needed to be responsive to a wider constituency, with more flexibility and less autocracy. By 1901, Adventist plutocrats were passé; populists wanted their day in the sun.

Knight makes clear that Adventism's initial organization in the 1860s was the brainchild of James and Ellen White. Drawing my own conclusions from his narrative, I see the church's first couple as distinctly heavy handed in dealing with vociferous opponents of ecclesiastical structure. And in the White campaign to establish an organization, things got ugly. After all, any organizing had been anathema among Adventists, including a younger James White and Ellen Harmon, since suffering abuses as Millerites at the hands of the organized churches. But in a familiar turn of events, the Whites were anti-establishment until they were in charge of the establishment; they then became the thing they had once despised. Knight emphasizes the startling fact that James White had no qualms about making such a momentous change in Adventism without the "Bible alone" as a basis, though others (including his wife) euphemized the process by evoking the term "gospel order." Nothing would deter the Whites from organizing the church, not even Bible-toting fellow believers.

For a couple of decades, institutional Seventh-day Adventism mostly involved a mom and pop store in which James wore many hats and Ellen supported him with her invaluable gift for publicly branding the enterprise. In his coverage of this period, Knight goes easy on the Whites. He could be a lot more critical of James White, who proved as authoritarian as any nineteenth-century Adventist leader, and of Ellen, who submissively backed him, in public at least, as a Victorian wife was expected to do. In time, both of the Whites would complain of G. I. Butler's brief for an autocratic leadership model in his book *Leadership* (1873), but Butler had only articulated in principle what James White had practiced for years. White had practiced what

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**When White died, however, his widow cut quite a different swath among church leaders than she had when her husband was alive.**

Butler preached. When White died, however, his widow cut quite a different swath among church leaders than she had when her husband was alive. She complained vehemently of ecclesiastics who mirrored the very qualities she had defended in her husband. Ellen White came to denounce “kingly power,” and she gravitated towards the innovative and more representative “unions,” promoted by her son Willie and A. G. Daniells; she saw this as a structural fix. But my sense is that the real solution for her was always more personal than structural. She complained of “two or three men” controlling everything if, in her eyes, they were the wrong men. With the reorganization of 1901, Daniells was her pick to lead the church, but by 1903 he had disappointed her. A revamped church structure had not bullet proofed the church against the wrong man in power.

Knight offers a revealing illustration of how early Adventism’s interpretation of the Bible—its hermeneutics—actually worked. Adventists clearly brought to the scriptures their own experience, their own perspective. They did not simply read the Bible; they read into it what they wanted to find there. When they read

Revelation 14:8 or Revelation 18:2—that “Babylon is fallen,” and they should “come out of her”—they believed these passages represented the churches that had disfellowshipped them and the civil authorities that had harassed and arrested them. James White and his wife Ellen had suffered these very indignities in the 1840s and embraced the first Adventist interpretation of “Babylon.” In the late 1850s and a decade and a half older and wiser, however, they returned to the same texts in Revelation but from a quite different vantage point. They saw “Babylon” as their own church, crippled and confused by its disarray, and they preached that Adventists should come out of the “Babylon” they had become. Reading Knight’s account of this, it is impossible to picture James White quietly secluding himself in his study to seek a fresh exegesis of these passages in Revelation. Rather, White had been embroiled in the pragmatic demands of his active life as an Adventist churchman. He had been kept up at night by the concerns of paying off mountainous bills and avoiding frightening financial liability, and his wife had stayed awake with him.

What resulted was a dramatic new Adven-



**Whore of Babylon illustration from Martin Luther’s 1534 translation of the Bible.**

IMAGE SOURCE: [HTTPS://COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKI/FILE:WHORE-BABYLON-LUTHER-BIBLE-1534.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Whore-Babylon-Luther-Bible-1534.JPG)

tist interpretation of scripture, and not just any scripture. This was rock-ribbed Adventism—the second of the vital three angel’s messages. Introducing such a revolutionary paradigm shift might have called for a little finesse, but the Whites were not inclined that way. Both of them could be harsh, unsympathetic, and unduly personal in their criticism of detractors. For the Whites to transform “Babylon” from an onerous symbol of the “Other” into that of Adventists themselves, at inconveniently the same time the couple hung “Laodicea” around the necks of their fellow Adventists, demanded much of an already self-critical people. Ellen White further bolstered the ad hominem attack on opponents of organization by writing that they “revealed a great lack of moral courage,” among other character flaws. In the 1840s, the Whites had been as important as anyone in solidifying the “three angel’s messages” as a basic tenant of Adventist faith. By the late 1850s, however, they had turned their backs on the sacrosanct “second angel’s message” and bitterly undercut their critics for biblical arguments they had once embraced.

Knight does get around to women’s ordination, and it is worth the wait. He wastes no time in insisting, “ordination is not a biblical topic.” And “laying on of hands” became linked to the word “ordain” in the “post-apostolic history of the church.” Therefore, the “usage is not biblical but post-biblical.” In New Testament times, Paul and Barnabas were ordained, according to Ellen White, “as a public recognition of their divine appointment.” For White and Knight, the Roman Catholic view implies that, by way of ordination, some sort of “magical, and even god-like power” has been added to the one being ordained. The Protestant view, on the other hand, suggested “nothing is added except public recognition of what has already taken place in a person’s calling and ministry. . . .” Knight argues that ordaining a woman only becomes a problem for a Roman Catholic, not a Protestant. In Catholicism’s sacramental practice, ordination is a gift from the hierarchy. In



James and Ellen White

Protestantism, ordination is an ordinance that recognizes a gifted person and celebrates his or her gifts.

Knight remains baffled by the irony that Seventh-day Adventists, by and large, refuse to ordain women when “the most influential person in the history of Adventism has been a female—Ellen White.” On its face, it seems as if a female prophet would be an advantage to Adventist women. Her empowering role in the community should have empowered them. Yet it is worth mentioning that, to Knight, the prophet may have proven an unintended obstacle to Adventist women’s ordination. In the first place, as Knight notes, she herself declined the brethren’s “laying on of hands.” But Gil Valentine, Knight’s most productive protégée, informs me that his professor could be splitting hairs here on the prophet and ordination. She declined the formal “laying-on-of-hands” ceremony, but she agreed that the brethren in

**Knight argues that ordaining a woman only becomes a problem for a Roman Catholic, not a Protestant.**



council could “raise their hands” in public to acknowledge her credentialing as an “ordained minister.” The difference seems negligible; though raising hands from the audience may have been slightly more populist than the hierarchic “laying on of hands.” She had nevertheless rejected the more formal ceremony, and I think that this was a mistake on her part, which Adventist women have probably paid a price for ever since. As Knight puts it:

She held that her ordination came from God. While she held a certificate of ordination from the General Conference, she had never been ordained by a man. She didn’t need it. She had been called and ordained (appointed) by God.

Yes, but in declining the “laying on of hands” had she not conceded that, even for Adventists, the practice had taken on a sacramental, Roman Catholic character? She declared that, in the long history of the church, ordination had assumed “unwarranted importance,” and then her refusal of it suggested that the same had happened to Adventists. But in Acts of the Apostles, she made clear that ordination was Protestant for Seventh-day Adventists—a public recognition of a “spiritual gift”—not a sacrament transmitted by hierarchical clerics. There was no need, then, to revert back to a medieval or patriarchal worldview. No Adventist minister—man or woman—needs ordination. He or she accepts it as an acknowledgment of what is already plain to their community: that God alone has called them to the ministry. But if Ellen White rejected the “laying on of hands,” how could other Adventist women seek ordination?

The fact that Ellen White was such a special case may have hurt Adventist women as well. She was a woman who displayed extraordinary spiritual gifts. It does not necessarily follow, then, that other women, with lesser gifts, will receive the recognition they are due. She did not so much provide a mold, which could contour the lives of other Adventist women; in a sense, she broke the mold. The racial metaphor comes to mind here. We make an exception for the gifted black or Hispanic athlete on the field of play, but we nonetheless remain racist in our ordinary lives. The gifted female prophet likewise does not dismantle the patriarchal system in which she existed or the misogynistic biases we maintain. Ellen White herself was a Victorian woman. She also saw her time as the

very end of time. Her writings and her life enhanced the lives of Adventist women, spiritually and socially. But the prophet did little to transform Seventh-day Adventism’s patriarchal nature. She no doubt felt that there was little time to do so. And as God’s messenger for the last days, she seemed to have formed an implicit social contract between herself and the brethren. She supported them in their privileged position as long as they supported her in hers. And she provided little in the way of coattails for Adventist women in her time or a later time she never imagined for this world.

George Knight has gone back to Rogue River, but I hope he continues to get out and serve as a gadfly of Adventist thought. He is no rogue, which will delight many and disappoint some. But his book provokes serious thinking on a whole range of topics; I am still thinking about it. In his breezy, conversational style, he throws his readers into the deep end of the pool on women’s ordination. I am grateful to him for it. ■



**Jonathan Butler** is a historian of religion, and holds a PhD from the University of Chicago.

## Footnotes:

1. George R. Knight, *Adventist Authority Wars, Ordination, and the Catholic Temptation (AAW)* (Westlake Village, CA: Oak and Acorn Publishing, 2017), 10.
2. *AAW*, Chapters 1-3.
3. *Ibid.*, 28-37.
4. *Ibid.*, 84-85.
5. *Ibid.*, 89-90.
6. *Ibid.*, 42-59, 100.
7. *Ibid.*, Chapter 1 and pages 149-155.
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9. Cited in Barry Oliver, “Reorganization of Church Structure, 1901–03: Some Observations,” *Spectrum* (Summer 2017): 16.
10. *AAW*, Chapters 4 and 5.
11. *Ibid.*, 121-122.
12. *Acts of the Apostles*, 161-162; cited in, *AAW*, 123.
13. *AAW*, 131.
14. *Ibid.*, 134.
15. *Ibid.*, 132.





ELLEN G. WHITE

## Meanwhile in Paris...

BY MICHAEL PEARSON

Tuesday 22 October 1844 becoming Wednesday.  
Lively adventist expectation becoming deep adventist anxiety.  
Became profound disappointment.  
Crops rotted. Hope too.  
Jesus return – cancelled? Postponed?  
Ellen White – messenger-preacher-prophet.  
First vision. Paris, Maine. Hope revived.

Meanwhile Paris, France,  
another great disappointment.  
Sarah Bernhardt born very same Tuesday becoming Wednesday.  
Illegitimate. Unwanted.  
Raised in convent. Would-be nun.  
But another calling.  
Actress. World's most famous.  
Theatre, film. Star Hollywood's 'Walk of Fame'.  
Vegetarian-eccentric.  
Touring, treatment in Battle Creek Sanitarium. Adventist-run.  
Small world!

Ellen, Sarah - different women.  
Pulpit, stage.  
How different! How, different?  
Two flames burned. Long and bright.  
Extinguished, the tallow still smokes.



**Dr Michael Pearson** is Principal Lecturer Emeritus at Newbold College of Higher Education where he has spent a lifetime—some of it as Vice-Principal—but most of it teaching Ethics, Philosophy, and Spirituality. He is spending his retirement writing, teaching, and enjoying being with his family, free from the demands of endless committees.

