

 community through conversation

SPECTRUM



A Year in the Life of the Church: The Unity Documents

Environmental Enthusiasm • *Why Reason Needs Religion* • Adventist Women and the Ministry

community through conversation
SPECTRUM

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ABOUT THE ARTWORK: CETACEA SEMPERVIRENS

"While exploring the Lost Coast of California, I came across a beached blue whale corpse. It was an overwhelming experience in every possible way. The scale of the animal was awesome. The smell was intense. The thought of living in a vast dark ocean with this animal swimming about was and is sublime in the true sense of the word. While there are many striking things about studying the form of a whale's heart, the one that really impressed me was noticing the structural similarity between the whale heart and all mammal hearts—even those of a tiny shrew. While insects don't scale up, mammals certainly do. Thinking about scale immediately led me to recall the moment of awe one experiences in the presence of the California redwoods. This print features the tallest plant and the largest animal on the planet. The title combines both of the Latin names, Cetacea Sempervirens."

Using gouges and burins, artist Tim Musso hand-carved this image in relief into the plate over a period of three months. He then hand-inked the finished carved 'stamp' and pressed it onto paper using a hand-operated etching press.

Edition size: 10; Paper: 22"x30" Rives BFK archival cotton paper; Price: \$400.00

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ABOUT THE ARTIST: TIM MUSSO



Raised in the wild foothills of the Motherlode, just 20 miles from where gold was first discovered in California in 1848, Musso's childhood was filled with exploring the forests, rivers, and mountains of the Northern Sierra Nevada. He earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and Master of Fine Arts degree in Graphic Design and Printmaking respectively at California State University, Long Beach.

While Musso enjoys living in the urban environment of Southern California, he finds it important to "run to the hills" for extended periods of time. In the wilderness he hikes (~4000 miles to date) sketches, photographs, and creates rubbings of natural objects. This extensive documentation of the natural world then becomes the reference material for his intricately detailed woodcut and lithographic prints. In addition to creating art, Musso is a professor in the Art + Design department at La Sierra University in Riverside, California, and is the Director of the Brandstater Art Gallery. Musso exhibits his work internationally with works collected by museums and private collectors.

ABOUT SPECTRUM

SPECTRUM is a journal established to encourage Seventh-day Adventist participation in the discussion of contemporary issues from a Christian viewpoint, to look without prejudice at all sides of a subject, to evaluate the merits of diverse views, and to foster Christian intellectual and cultural growth. Although effort is made to ensure accurate scholarship and discriminating judgment, the statements of fact are the responsibility of contributors, and the views individual authors express are not necessarily those of the editorial staff as a whole or as individuals.

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CONTENTS



Detail: *Cetacea Sempervirens*
by Tim Musso

Editorials

- 2 One Person Can Make All the Difference | BY BONNIE DWYER
3 Why Renewal Won't Happen, or Might | BY CHARLES SCRIVEN

Noteworthy

- 5 Historical Perspectives on Adventist Women and the Ministry | BY KENDRA HALOVIK VALENTINE

Bible

- 17 Why Reason Needs Religion | BY RICHARD RICE

Environmental Enthusiasm

- 29 Environmental Enthusiasm: An Intro | BY LORA E. GERIGUIS
31 The Tightrope: Living at Peace in a Beautiful but Vulnerable World | BY LESLIE MARTIN
34 The Birds of the Air and the Beasts of the Field: Animals and Culture | BY ANDREW HOWE
38 Naming Place, Mapping Space: Cherokee Stories of the Tennessee River | BY APRIL R. SUMMITT
43 Pollution and Poetry: Reading the Rise of Environmental Consciousness | BY LORA E. GERIGUIS
47 Reading the Bible with Green Eyes | BY KENDRA HALOVIK VALENTINE

In-Depth: A Year in the Life of the Church

- 51 The 2018 Unity Reports, Documents, Statements, and Responses
FEATURING WILLIAM JOHNSON, GEORGE KNIGHT, EDWIN TORKELSEN, MARY CHRISTIAN, WILLIAM ELLIS,
RANDY HARMQUIST, DANIEL R. JACKSON, BONNIE DWYER, AND ALISA WILLIAMS

One Person Can Make All the Difference | BY BONNIE DWYER

Searching for something to give to the past presidents of the Adventist Forum, I came across a plaque that read, “One person can make all the difference.” How true, I thought, each of them made unique, significant contributions: to get us organized and independent—Alvin Kwiram; to give us a place within the Adventist academic community—Larry Geraty; to help us branch out and take on ambitious projects—Glenn Coe; to provide transition from the Branson era on the East coast to the West Coast and new leadership—David Larson; to speak truth to power—Charles Scriven. These men piloted our organization in significant fashion, and we honored them at the fiftieth-anniversary conference at La Sierra University in September.

Then, at the Board meeting following the conference, Scriven announced that he would be stepping down from the Board chair position, and so a search began. In November, the Adventist Forum Board of Directors elected Carmen Lau its new chair. Scriven, who has served as chair for the past decade, will continue as a member of the Board and writing for *Spectrum*.

Lau joined the Board in 2011. She led in planning past conferences in Chattanooga and Silver Spring. A fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist, she first learned of *Spectrum* while a student at Southern Adventist University, where she graduated with a BS in Nursing in 1983.

At Loma Linda University, she earned an MS in Nursing, in 1988. She is married to the physician Yung Lau and they have three children: Christopher, Carissa, and Sarah. Birmingham, Alabama, is their home town and where she attends the First SDA Church and serves as a Sabbath School teacher. Recently, she enrolled in the University of Alabama at Birmingham MA program in Anthropology of Peace and Human Rights and anticipates graduating in 2019.

A *Spectrum* subscriber since her college days, she says, “Reading *Spectrum* showed me that I was allowed to ask questions and have doubts. It also showed me that an Adventist can be aware of issues, honest, and on a search for truth. I see *Spectrum* as a place that reports what is and imagines what can



L to R: Alvin Kwiram, Larry Geraty, Glenn Coe, David Larson, and Charles Scriven, September 2018.

be.” We look forward to imagining the future with Carmen. We know she is one person who will make a difference.

Whoever could have imagined what a year this would be in the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

As we chronicled the actions of the General Conference (GC) Unity Committee on our website, plus the responses, both from official organizations and individuals, the stories multiplied substantially as the year went by. By the time of the October Annual Council meeting of the GC Executive Committee, we had posted over a hundred stories on the topic. Alisa Williams, our web editor, was inundated, often posting five or six stories a day on the topic. She then organized all the stories in one place so readers could better follow what was taking place. In this issue, we began with her outline of the events as we compiled a section of key materials on the topic. She made a big difference to our readers as they endeavored to understand the situation.

This year, Sharon Fujimoto-Johnson returned to the *Spectrum* design position, one she held in 1998 when she helped us by significantly redesigning the journal. Then she left to concentrate on rearing children. Her nine year-old son, Ian, has also joined the team to assist with copy editing.

To all these people, my thanks for your willingness to help us reach new goals. You make all the difference.

Why Renewal Won't Happen, or Might | BY CHARLES SCRIVEN

Is it the pull of convention? Is it failure to learn? Is it cowardice? In the face of Adventist crisis occasioned by administrative overreach, what stands in the way of renewal? We'd better get clear about this, because our movement's integrity is at risk, and the fix won't come from the top.

Consider first these points, each incontrovertible: 1) In declaring all persons (not kings alone, as in surrounding cultures) bearers of the divine image, page one of Scripture affirms all embodied humanity and undermines all hierarchy and status-seeking. 2) The New Testament declares Jesus, a radical champion of the same vision, both Lord and Messiah, the exact imprint, indeed, of God's very being. 3) If utterances from the church, or even from the Bible, fall short of the ideal thus revealed, the Holy Spirit comes into play, nudging us (when we allow it) away from mistakes toward the Truth.

Here, then, are the rudiments of renewal, plain as weather: we know the goal and we know God's provision for turning us toward it. Still, as in any crisis, renewal is going to be difficult. For both insight and encouragement, we might well note that renewal is going to be difficult, too, for contemporary Roman Catholicism. Within that communion, widespread sexual abuse, dating to long before Pope Francis, has led to more and more handwringing and intransigence, not to mention cynicism. The story so far is disastrous, but analysis of the story does point to a pathway for us.

In the November 22 issue of *The New York Review of Books*, journalist Alexander Stille explains how the present pope's leadership is "now in a deep, possibly fatal crisis." The church has so long turned a blind eye to sexual abuse, and so long protected guilty priests, that a "true housekeeping" would reach into Francis's own circle of high-echelon allies and cripple his influence on the church's future. Quite apart,

moreover, from the abuse question, studies show that as many as 40–50 percent of Catholic clergy are, despite their vows of celibacy, sexually active.

This leads Stille to say that the ban on "priestly marriage" may be a key root of the sexual abuse problem. Celibacy, he reminds us, was not a firmly established requirement until the twelfth century; it was also a requirement that ran counter to the advice of the apostle Paul, who said that "it is better to marry than to burn with passion." What all this suggests is the need for re-assessment of the church's sexual theology. The prospect for Catholic renewal hangs, then, on the church's capacity for theological self-correction. Root problems must be rooted out.

Now consider our own situation. We all agree on the beauty of Christian unity, and we all agree that the risen Christ wants us to embrace such unity as one of His great gifts to the church. But over time ideas have crept into our life that have no basis in the New Testament, some of them directly pertinent to the present situation. One is belief that highly centralized bureaucratic control across the church's many congregations and other entities is essential to Christian unity. Another is failure to see that baptism, along with the attendant gift of the Holy Spirit, is one and the same for all.

Nothing remotely resembling the point about church-wide control appears in the New Testament. Persuasion toward consensus happens, but no bureaucracy and no bureaucratic enforcement. Jesus himself, moreover, explicitly rejected the "lording-it-over" style; Christian leaders serve, they don't control. As for baptism, as many as undergo it clothe themselves "with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." A

The New Testament declares Jesus, a radical champion of the same vision, both Lord and Messiah, the exact imprint, indeed, of God's very being.

similar point obtains with respect to the gift of the Spirit: it is from one God, and, as William Stringfellow said, it embraces the church in all its “diversities and divisions and separations.” In its several manifestations, whether as prophecy, healing, leadership or whatever, the gift comes without reference to whether the receiver is Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. It is one gift, and it is for all.

About the time the current General Conference president was a seminary student at Andrews University, Gottfried Oosterwal, a teacher there, was publishing essays which became the book *Mission: Possible*. One of his themes was that the distinction between lay people and the clergy is itself ill-conceived. The New Testament speaks of no class of Christians called clergy; everyone belongs to the laity, or the people of God, including pastors and administrators. What is more, everyone belongs to the priesthood, or the priesthood of all believers. Nevertheless, even though these arguments were being offered while the current president was himself at Andrews, and even though no Adventist scholar has ever refuted them, those who are today insisting on “compliance” enforcement are also insisting that one class of believers, namely women, cannot ascend to the level of spiritual authority they themselves enjoy. They are even saying Adventist entities that put the biblical view into practice must be disciplined.

I have objected to this again and again, and have always invoked the “equality” of all as a key argument. But now I’ve learned that during the American civil rights movement the aforementioned William Stringfellow made a somewhat different argument with respect to the race-based discrimination then roiling the country. For the church, he said, the issue is not just equality but, even more fundamentally, unity. Unity is Christ’s gift to the church, and unity means impartial welcome and respect; it means the end of diversities as a basis for allotting privilege to some and withholding it from others. And Paul, it turns out, does indeed make this point. The single baptism by which all of us enter the church

nullifies every self-aggrandizing appeal to human differences—“for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

In the name of restoring and preserving Christian unity, then, key General Conference leadership have broken with the New Testament doctrine of unity. All are the laity; all are the priesthood. No status conferred by the world can negate this, nor any fact of race or ethnicity, nor any biologically determined trait. This is the New Testament vision, an unmistakable echo of Genesis 1 and a truth indispensable, we may suppose, to any effort toward renewal.

Nothing remotely resembling the point about church-wide control appears in the New Testament. Persuasion toward consensus happens, but no bureaucracy and no bureaucratic enforcement.

In Roman Catholicism, beliefs hostile to the original vision turned into the misbegotten sexual “orthodoxy” whose evil fruit, says Alexander Stille, includes the scourge of priestly sexual abuse. Different beliefs, but ones equally hostile to the original vision, have become, for some General Confer-

ence leaders, an equally misbegotten orthodoxy. They now defend church unity by repudiating it. And we may be sure that for as long as their views hold sway, renewal, or at least church-wide renewal, won’t happen.

In our case as in the Roman Catholic one, the prospect for renewal depends on major theological re-assessment, or self-correction. Root problems must be rooted out, whatever the pull of convention or cowardice or sloth. The Biblical Research Institute and the church’s theological faculties, not to mention members of every Sabbath School class, should get on with the work at hand. Unless we open ourselves to Holy Spirit-directed self-correction, we risk sinking into a rut that must lead, sooner or later, to the death of the Advent Movement.



CHARLES SCRIVEN is chairperson of Adventist Forum.

historical Perspectives *on* Adventist Women *and the* Ministry

BY KENDRA HALOVIK VALENTINE



From L to R: Helen May Stanton Williams (1868–1940), minister-evangelist in the US and South Africa; Minnie Sype (1869–1956), minister-evangelist in Oklahoma Territory, Pennsylvania and the Northwest; Anna Knight (1874–1972), first black woman missionary from America to India; Jessie Weiss Curtis (1881–1972), founder of churches in North-eastern Pennsylvania; Mary E. Walsh (1892–1997), Bible worker/popular camp meeting speaker and minister.

Editor's note: This paper was presented at the Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration Conference of Adventist Forum, and some aspects of the oral delivery of this presentation have been retained.

Introduction

The year 1968 was a crucial one for Adventism. Not only was it the beginning of the Adventist Forum and *Spectrum* magazine (that is, the beginning of Adventism's independent press), it was also the year that an important statement by Ellen White was rediscovered.

Seventy-three years earlier, Ellen White, while living in Australia and witnessing the work that women were doing

throughout the then-new Australasian Union territory, had made this statement in 1895:

Women who are willing to consecrate some of their time to the service of the Lord should be appointed to visit the sick, look after the young, and minister to the necessities of the poor. They should be set apart

Remember Mohaven!

A special issue commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Council on the Role of Women in the Church, Sept. 16-19, 1973



MOST OF THE MEMBERS. Fourteen women and 13 men converged at the Ohio Conference's youth camp for the Council on the Role of Women in the Church, September 16-20, 1973. Twenty-two of the council members were on hand when N. R. Dower snapped this photo. (Back row, left to right): C. E. Bradford, Raoul Dederen, Josephine Benton, Kit Watts, C. Mervyn Maxwell, Marcella Anderson, Dorothy Beltz, Hedwig Jemison, Madelynn Haldeman, W. J. Hackett, Gerhard Hazel. (Front row, left to right): Ed Zinke, Gordon Hyde, Ron Watson, Betty Ahnberg, Hazel Damazo, Betty Stirling, Norwida Marshall, Leona G. Running, Doris Schmidt, Maybelle Vandermark Goransson, Kay Dower.

to this work by prayer and laying on of hands. In some cases they will need to counsel with the church officers or the minister; but if they are devoted women, maintaining a vital connection with God, they will be a power for good in the church. This is another means of strengthening and building up the church. We need to branch out more in our methods of labor.... Not a hand should be bound, not a soul discouraged, not a voice should be hushed; let every individual labor, privately or publicly, to help forward this grand work.

This statement was rediscovered in 1968, at about the same time that the Northern European Division asked the General Conference for advice concerning the possibility of ordaining qualified women who were having success as pastors in their division territory (Finland). Similar requests by church leaders in China came to the General Conference in the early 1970s.

Thus it was that in 1973, the General Conference created the Council on the Role of Women in the Church (made up of fourteen women and thirteen men), which met at Camp Mohaven in Ohio to consider the issues. They were called to deal with the rediscovered 1895 statement and the recent specific requests. The council included twenty-six study papers that reflected diversity, yet there was remarkable consensus on the following:

1) women should be ordained as deaconesses and elders;

2) a program should be initiated for women to serve in pastoral and evangelistic ministry in selected areas and that they be given ministerial licenses;

3) if the responses from local congregations were positive after two years, an action should be taken to the 1975 General Conference Session to approve the ordination of women as pastors in appropriate locations;

4) no scriptural evidence precluded women from ordination as ministers.

The Annual Council of 1973 “received” the report and asked for more study. The next Annual Council, in 1974, said that the “time is not ripe,” and encouraged yet more study. Then, in the Spring (March) Meeting of 1975 it was decided that:

Women could be ordained as local church elders and deaconesses with the following stipulations: each church was to take counsel with its local conference and when it could be demonstrated that the spiritual needs of the local church were best fulfilled with women elders and that women elders would not create disharmony in the church and, when a clear majority favored the ordination of women elders, they could proceed.



Josephine Benton's history of SDA women ministers

The “church was not ready to move forward” with regard to the ordination of women pastors. But things did not stop there. At that same meeting, policy was changed so that women ministers could no longer receive ministerial licenses. They could only receive missionary credentials, which meant that they were no longer on the track toward ordination.

One could ask why there was such a disconnect between the Mohaven Commission’s recommendations and the 1975 Spring Meeting. And we will return to that question. However, Pastor Josephine Benton, a woman minister in Potomac Conference who had her ministerial license revoked due to this 1975 decision, asked a different question. How long had women ministers in the Adventist church been holding ministerial licenses?

Women Ministers in Nineteenth-Century Adventism

Benton began researching at the General Conference Archives with the help of a young research assistant, Bert Haloviak. In her research she learned that Adventist women ministers had been receiving ministerial licenses for over 100 years, since at least the early 1870s (and within a decade of the founding of the denomination).¹

Since, by 1881, women ministers had been holding ministerial licenses for over a decade with successful ministries but

had not been ordained (and therefore were unable to conduct baptisms and other ordinances), the following General Conference session resolutions are not surprising:

RESOLVED, That all candidates for license and ordination should be examined with reference to their intellectual and spiritual fitness for the successful discharge of the duties which will devolve upon them as licentiates and ordained ministers.

RESOLVED, That females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry.²

While the first resolution was adopted, the second was not mentioned again. Church historians and administrators argue as to what the silence means. But, given this 100-year history and the Mohaven recommendations, why the regressive actions of 1975? Rather than move forward carefully but purposefully, the church actually went backwards and took away the ministerial licenses of women pastors after 100 years of granting them. Why? What was going on?

KEY DATES: ADVENTIST WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY

1968

Statement in 1895 by Elen White regarding ordination of women discovered: “. . . They should be set apart to this work by prayer and laying on of hands.”

September 16–19, 1973

Mohaven Council on the Role of Women in the Church

March 1975 Spring Meeting

It was decided that women could be ordained as local church elders and deaconesses.

December 1975

Neal Wilson writes to the IRS stating that “the role of the licensed minister has been re-defined by the SDA Church.”

October 20, 1976

Vote to allow divisions flexibility when it came to defining the duties of the Adventist ministers.

1990 General Conference in New Orleans

A change in the *Church Manual* policy was approved, giving commissioned ministers, without regard to gender, the ability to perform most of the ministerial functions of an ordained minister. In a separate vote, ordination of women ministers was turned down “at this time.”

1995 General Conference in Utrecht

NAD proposal to allow each division to decide the ordination matter was denied (673–1,481).

September 23, 1995

Sligo SDA Church ordains Norma Osborn, Penny Shell, and Kendra Haloviak. Also in 1995, Madelyn Haldeman (La Sierra University Church), Hallie Wilson (La Sierra University Church), and Sheryl Prinz-McMillan (Loma Linda Victoria Church) are ordained.

1996

Margo Pitrone is ordained at Garden Grove SDA Church.

2012

Columbia Union and Pacific Union constituencies vote to ordain qualified ministers without regard to gender.

2013

Southeastern California Conference elects Sandy Roberts as president. Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) begins two-year study process.

2015 General Conference in San Antonio

Delegates vote down proposal for divisions to be allowed to decide on ordination. “No” vote interpreted by union constituencies as maintaining status quo, but General Conference leadership understood the vote as declaring union constituencies no longer able to make this decision.

2017 Annual Council

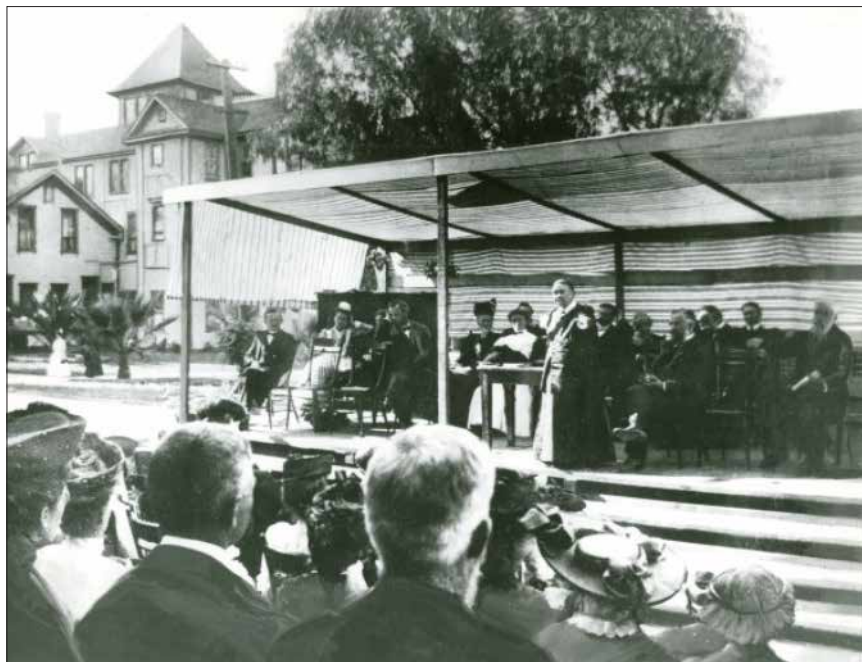
“Unity” document discussed, considering discipline for “non-compliance” by unions.

2018 Annual Council

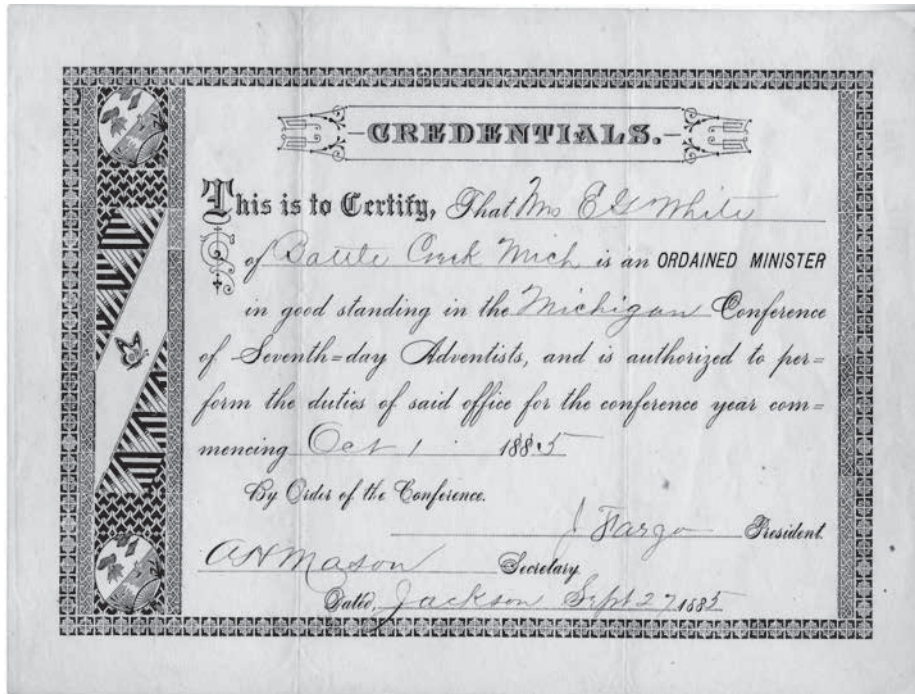
Compliance Committees approved.



Ellen White addressing the 1901 General Conference Session in the Battle Creek Tabernacle.



Ellen White giving the dedicatory address at the opening of Loma Linda Sanitarium, April 15, 1906.



This is the first known ordination credential issued to Ellen G. White by the Michigan Conference in 1883. The Ellen G. White Estate possesses seven credentials for Mrs. White, including five from the General Conference.

At least part of the answer to the question lies in our ignorance about Adventist history—a sad ignorance about the many women who, during the previous century, had served the church as licensed ministers. But there is another important aspect to the answer about what was going on in the church in 1975. This part of the answer involves money. There was a colliding back-story unfolding in the North American Division.

Until 1975, the Adventist church had one common understanding of the role and function of the minister. S/he received ministerial training (the same for men and women), and during a “testing time” received a ministerial license. If the minister demonstrated the fruit of achieving baptisms and there were no particular problems, then, after several years, a minister would be ordained and receive ordination credentials giving authority to baptize and to perform communion, marriages, burial services, and to organize

churches. Although there is no evidence that the “testing time” of women ministers ever came to an end, we do have evidence that Mrs. White received ordination credentials.

I am not suggesting that Ellen White participated in a service where male ministers laid hands on her. But I am suggesting that people raised their hands in voting her ordination credentials year after year. As far as published church policy was concerned and as evidenced in many church documents, women pastors as early as 1870 were trained the same as men pastors. They were paid by tithes and carried ministerial licenses, and at least one woman held ordination credentials during multiple years.

The Money Problem

During the 1960s, church leadership faced an escalating money problem with regard to its ministry. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) had notified the denomination

There is another important aspect to the answer about what was going on in the church in 1975.

This part of the answer involves money.



The ordination of Norma Osborn, Penny Shell, and the author (center) at Sligo SDA Church, September 23, 1995.

in North America that licensed ministers must be permitted and able to do virtually everything an ordained minister could do if such ministers were to be granted parsonage allowance and other tax benefits. If those holding licenses but not yet ordained were not quite the same as ordained ministers then they could not receive the tax benefits. In fact, the denomination would have to pay back taxes if they continued giving tax benefits to unordained pastors after being notified by the IRS. This would have been a very costly possibility... in the millions of dollars. Already some conferences had received demands from the IRS threatening the seizure of their property.

In 1966, when Robert Pierson became General Conference president and Neal Wilson became president of the North American Division, they inherited the IRS problem. The issue was, how could the church define those with ministerial licenses but not yet ordained in a way that met IRS standards? This problem took over a decade to resolve. But the need to resolve the problem came at a crucial moment—the same time as the Mohaven recommendations.

Just as the 1895 Ellen White statement was being rediscovered and just as Mohaven was recommending that nothing in Scripture or Ellen White prohibited women from being ordained (in fact, the 1895 statement encouraged the ordination of women as at least deacons), and

just as the Mohaven Commission suggested that the church move carefully forward with women pastors with the plan for their eventual ordination as gospel ministers, elders Pierson and Wilson were feeling great pressure to fix the IRS problem.

If the duties of the licensed pastor and ordained pastor were collapsed, the IRS would be satisfied; but then licensed women pastors could perform the same duties as ordained pastors. That proved to be a problem. Recall that

at the 1975 Spring Meeting, the revoking of women pastors' ministerial licenses was deemed necessary because the licensed ministers' duties were expanded. It was resolved at that meeting that where women "with suitable qualifications and

experience are able to fill ministerial roles, they be assigned as assistant pastors, their credentials being missionary license or missionary credential."

Just like that, after holding ministerial licenses for over 100 years, women ministers could no longer have ministerial licenses. They were no longer on the track toward ordination. At the same time men with ministerial licenses on their way to ordination, could perform communion services, baptisms and funerals—as long as they were local church elders.

North American Division President Neal Wilson wrote to the IRS in December 1975 stating that: "the role of the

Just like that, after holding ministerial licenses for over 100 years, women ministers could no longer have ministerial licenses. They were no longer on the track toward ordination.



An ordination service in the Columbia Union, which voted in 2012 with an 80 percent majority, to ordain qualified ministers without regard to gender.

licensed minister has been re-defined by the SDA Church.” What he could have added was that women ministers had also been re-defined by the church. When this change in the definition of a licensed minister needed to be ratified by the Annual Council in 1976, Elder Wilson’s proposal read: “A licensed minister is authorized by the Conference Executive Committee to perform all the functions of the ordained minister in the church or churches where he is assigned.” But the union presidents and division officers from the world field beyond the United States would not agree and they referred the proposal back “for additional study.” Later, when the report came back, it did so with the provision that Division Committees could assign duties to licensed ministers when “special circumstances” demand “special consideration.” This was voted on October 20, 1976 allowing divisions flexibility when it came to defining the duties of Adventist ministers.

At an evening session of the North American Division Annual Council delegates that same day, they (just the North American Division, meeting as part of their annual meeting) voted “yes” to Elder Wilson’s proposal. The definition of minister would be different in the North American Division than anywhere else within the world church. This action was not mentioned in the report on the General Conference Annual Council published in the *Review*.³ In a later article in the *Review*,⁴ however, Elder Wilson explained that “with the view of preserving the unity and strength of the church,” the Annual Council had “voted to amend the policy governing licensed ministers to provide for appropriate latitude and flexibility within each division of the General Conference.” Apparently, the world church would have to live with a diversity of policies when it came to defining the minister, at least where so much money was involved. The tax benefits issue had been resolved for male pastors, at the



In 2000, the Southeastern California Conference voted to issue the same “ordination-commissioning” credentials to all pastors. In 2005, Pastors Chris Oberg and Devo Kritzing received identical credentials in a service at La Sierra University Church.

expense of the women pastors. Our theology of ministry and practice of ordination was determined by economics not by scripture.

Of course, the majority of the church did not know this backstory; most do not even today. But as local churches gradually learned of the change in policy to allow women to be ordained as deaconesses and elders, that issue soon became the focus, especially as local congregations worked at getting a “clear majority” of their members to favor women elders. Those on the front lines of these congregational discussions have many stories they could tell about the first woman elder ordained and how the congregation celebrated, or took time to accept it. Perhaps you remember when a woman first held the position of head elder of your congregation. By the late 1980s, 960 women in North America would be ordained as elders and serve their local churches.

Women Pastors in the Baptistry

In the mid-'80s, the focus shifted once again to women pastors. On February 11, 1984, the Executive Committee of the Potomac Conference authorized eight ordained local elders—including three women—to perform baptisms at their local churches. I have not found anything suggesting that the five men who performed baptisms at this time created any controversy. However, in the 1980s, women pastors baptizing caused quite a stir. There is a long, complex story behind the summer events of 1984, and it can be read in *Spectrum*, which has followed this issue over the decades.

That fall the Annual Council voted to call a Commission on the broad question of the “Role of Women in the Church.” The first meeting of this new Commission took place in March 1985, concluding again that more study was needed. Elder Wilson is on record at this Commission as stating that his views had shifted on this issue. Where he looked favorably on the ordination of women immediately after Mohaven, he had now shifted in his views. I find this curious because it was some time in the mid-80s that I was asked to give a week of worships at the General Conference for the employees. I was attending the local day academy and held the position of pastor of the student association. (I

was around seventeen years old.) I remember sharing stories from the gospels that week at morning worship. I also recall Elder Wilson talking with me one of those mornings after giving the worship talk. He encouraged me not to give up. Changes were taking place, he said, and it would not be long now. Certainly by the time I finished college, he assured me.

In 1988, the Second Commission on the Role of Women took place, and then in 1989, the Third Commission on the Role of Women. While the Southeastern California Conference was beginning the work of its Gender Inclusiveness Task Force, the Third Commission was recommending an interesting combination of suggestions

Changes were taking place, [Neal Wilson] said, and it would not be long now. Certainly by the time I finished college, he assured me.

for the next General Conference Session: “no” to ordaining women pastors. However, in discussing the *Church Manual* at the General Conference Session in New Orleans in 1990, a change in policy from the Annual Council of 1989 was included: “Those who have, without regard to gender, been recognized as commissioned ministers or licensed ministers may perform essentially the ministerial functions of an ordained minister of the gospel in the churches to which they are assigned.”

I had finished college in 1989 and accepted an invitation to join the pastoral staff at the Seventh-day Adventist Church at Kettering (Ohio Conference) in May of that year. This meant that by the end of the next summer, for the first time, I could baptize someone I had prepared for baptism.

Voting to Allow Divisions to Decide

At the next General Conference Session in Utrecht (1995), the North American Division asked the world church to allow each division to decide the matter. It was denied (673 – 1,481; 31 percent to 69 percent). The following Sabbath in the Roy Branson Sabbath School class at the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church (Takoma Park, Maryland), I heard a panel of delegates who had just returned from Utrecht. They reported on what they had witnessed at the session. During the course of the class discussion, church members began to be convinced that, for our local congregation, “it was time.” Many conversations and prayer sessions followed, including a business session that voted overwhelmingly in favor of going forward with a local ordination service. This congregation had embraced women pastors since 1973. It was time!

On September 23, 1995, the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church ordained three women to gospel ministry in a local church worship service on Sabbath afternoon. Norma Osborn, Penny Shell, and I were ordained. This did not receive official affirmation from the Potomac Conference nor from the Columbia Union. Later that year, the three of us flew to Southern California to participate in the ordination services of Madelyn Haldeman and Hallie Wilson (La Sierra University Church) and Sheryl Prinz-McMillan (Loma Linda Victoria Church). In 1996, Margo Pitrone was ordained at the Garden Grove Seventh-day Adventist Church. In two years, seven women were ordained as ministers in the context of their local congregations.

There was a price to pay for this initiative. Some of the men involved in these early ordination services were reprimanded and pressured in various ways. Of course, the women paid in various ways too. But the majority of the conversations were celebratory and hopeful, not negative.

Not long afterwards, the Southeastern California Conference, whose Gender Justice Commission had been working for years, began issuing the same credentials for all pastors, regardless of gender. These credentials carried the wording “ordained-commissioned.” The action authorizing this

was voted in 2000. In 2005, I witnessed my first ordination-commissioning service at the La Sierra University Church when Pastors Chris Oberg and Devo Kritzingler participated together in a service that gave them identical credentials.

Union Constituency Meetings in 2012

Then in 2012, two union constituencies voted to ordain qualified ministers without regard to gender. In the Columbia Union a majority of 80 percent voted for this recommendation. In the Pacific Union a majority of 79 percent voted for this recommendation. Then, in these two unions, ordination services began taking place. And in the Pacific Union, those already commissioned or those who had asked for commissioned licenses in solidarity with their women colleagues received ordination credentials.

In 2013, Southeastern California Conference elected Sandy Roberts as their president (72 percent in favor). That same year, the international Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) met for the first time in Laurel, Maryland. The 106 delegates were told that this was the first study committee of its kind—with an intentional international representative delegation. By the end of the two-year study, in an apparent reversal of opinion

There was a price to pay for this initiative. Some of the men involved in these early ordination services were reprimanded and pressured in various ways. Of course, the women paid in various ways too.



Thirty-nine women in ministry in Australia.



Women pastors serving in the Southeastern California Conference.



Women pastors serving in the Pacific Union Conference.

seemingly designed to diminish its influence, we were told that even this group was disproportionately made up of North American Division delegates.

What is often not understood about TOSC is that simultaneously each division had Biblical Research Committees (BRCs) meeting regularly to discuss the question of women's ordination. The plan was that each division would share papers with the international committee, which would present a consensus statement to Annual Council in 2014, and then perhaps to the General Conference in 2015. The reports from divisions included six divisions who said "yes" to the ordination of qualified women pastors in their territories. Six divisions said "no," but were open to other divisions

doing so. And one division said "no" for any territory. The discussion at the General Conference Session in July 2015 in San Antonio did not reflect the overall emphasis of the division reports that had come in to TOSC.

What has become clear is that since San Antonio, some of the papers from TOSC have allowed for aberrant theology to be embraced by segments of the church, including headship theology with its heightened hierarchical focus and anti-Trinitarian tendencies. In the last six months, officers from two different unions have expressed their concern that so many of their pastors are now dealing with members who are embracing anti-Trinitarian views.

The reports from divisions included six divisions who said "yes" to the ordination of qualified women pastors in their territories. Six divisions said "no," but were open to other divisions doing so. And one division said "no" for any territory.



From left to right: Kelera Rokeva (Suva, Fiji), Charissa Fong (Adventist Media, Australia), Jacinta Epok (Western Highlands Mission, Papua New Guinea)

Questions of Governance and Discipline

In 2016, the conversation shifted from the ordination question to one of governance and discipline, as union constituencies saw the “no” vote at San Antonio as maintaining the status quo—that is, ordination remains decided at the union level (which was the actual wording of the vote), but General Conference leadership understood the “no” vote as declaring union constituencies as no longer able to make this decision.

A “unity” document was discussed at Annual Council 2017 considering discipline for “non-compliance” by unions. The key underlying question is: who can set apart ministers? The Annual Council delegation sent back the unity document last year. What will happen with the revised version this year?

Will the oversight committees be allowed to further centralize power? Will discipline of non-compliance become the focus of our General Conference? Will Adventism become more authoritarian rather than adventurous in its search for present truth?

This weekend we celebrate the past fifty years of Adventism. In 1968, an Ellen White statement about ordaining women was rediscovered. She wrote the statement after witnessing the work of women ministers. In some ways, we have been wrestling with the statement’s meaning for the last 50 years. Meanwhile, women ministers are ministering... in Southeastern California Conference, in the Pacific Union, in the Australian Union, throughout the South Pacific Division and all around the globe.

May our independent press keep finding ways to stay engaged with a church that needs to continue to wrestle with its history.

Community through conversation.

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End Notes

1. In addition to Benton, see Brian Strayer, “Sarah A. Hallock Lindsey: Advent Preacher on the Southern Tier,” *Adventist Heritage* 11:2 (Fall, 1986): 16-23; and Gilbert M. Valentine, “Finding Their Voice: The Expanding Role of Women—Early Adventism in Context (1865–1875),” *Spectrum* 44:4 (2016): 53-64.

2. *Review and Herald* (December 20, 1881): 392.

3. *Review and Herald* (November 11, 1976).

4. *Review and Herald* (December 30, 1976).



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Detail: *Cetacea Sempervirens* by Tim Musso

Bible

The more science enlarges the scope of human knowledge, the more it reveals the vast scope of our ignorance. So, the more we learn, the more we realize how much we don't know.



BY RICHARD RICE

Introduction

Some issues are persistent because they are inescapable. And the relation between faith and reason is undoubtedly one of them. Whether we are motivated by religious devotion or scientific integrity, we cannot avoid the responsibility of taking responsibility for our beliefs—of applying standards of rationality to everything we believe. As a theologian, one of my major concerns has always been to show that reason is essential to faith—that reason provides answers to the questions that faith poses. In the following discussion, however, I want to reverse this priority, and argue that reason poses questions for which faith, or religion, provides answers. So, instead of arguing that faith alone is not enough, we must have reason, too; my thesis is that reason alone is not enough, we must have faith as well.

Now, how shall we approach our topic? There are different ways to experience the Grand Canyon. You can

take a day and hike from the rim to the bottom and back out. I've done that, twice. You really get to know the terrain that way. Or you can look down from 30,000 feet on a cross-country flight, and for a few minutes make out the deep scars carved by the Colorado River far below. Most

So impressive are the results of scientific investigation that many now believe that all real knowledge is scientific knowledge.

of us have done that, perhaps several times. Or you can take a helicopter from Las Vegas and survey the canyon's features in an hour and a half without having to climb into it. I've never done

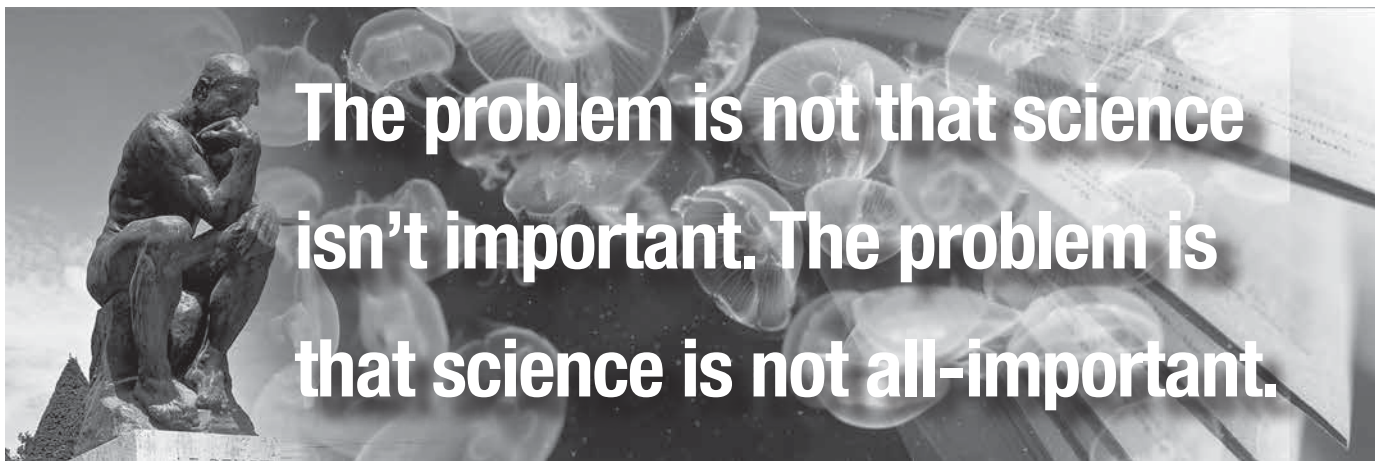
that, but some of you probably have. In certain ways my approach here will be more like the helicopter tour than either a down-and-out hike or a sky-high fly-over.

There are risks in doing this. Scholars of any stripe—from laboratory scientists to philosophers—typically focus their attention on a very specific question, define it with extreme precision, move from premise to conclusion, step by careful step, and end by defining the boundaries of their

limited achievement. That's how you remain in the comfort zone of scholarly discussion. Whatever you do, don't try to say too much. That's always been my goal. But in this discussion I want to be more expansive than usual and cover a lot of territory. The downside of this approach? You can't avoid making claims that are open to criticism and second guessing at every turn. The upside is the prospect of saying something that's thought-provoking, whether or not it's persuasive. So, I'm going to risk a lack of precision and probative security for the sake of greater interest. Instead of a tightly constructed argument, what follows is a single, sweeping proposal. I think reason really needs religion... for lots of different reasons.

points to the expectation that knowledge will increase, and the most obvious form of increasing knowledge is knowledge of a scientific nature. In fact, there are those who argue that the only area of demonstrable human progress has been in the area of science. By comparison, some argue, there is no evidence of anything similar in other areas of human endeavor, such as art, music, literature, social relations, or morality.

In today's world, the suggestion that there is something worth knowing that science can't tell us has proven to be controversial. So impressive are the results of scientific investigation that many now believe that all real knowledge is scientific knowledge. Only claims capable of empirical verification (or falsification) are cognitively significant, and therefore worthy of belief. Everything else someone believes



For starters, let's take science as the clearest example of human reason—OK, as *the* manifestation of reason in its most vivid and impressive form. Once people realized that the world was humanly understandable—a conviction that goes all the way back to the Greeks of the sixth century BC—and once people combined that belief with empirical investigation as they did in the sixteenth century AD and thereafter—the progress of human knowledge has been breathtaking.

There are several things that account for this. The claims of science are open to public investigation; they are cumulative—the more we know, the more we can know; they are subject to revision—science is self-correcting; and the results of scientific inquiry have been enormously beneficial. To cite the motto of the University of Chicago, my alma mater, *cre-scat scientia vita excolatur*, the official translation of which is “Let knowledge grow from more to more; and so be human life enriched.” (As mottos go, I have always preferred Harvard's one-word motto, *veritas*, meaning truth.) Chicago's motto

boils down to the product of social conditioning, an expression of wishful thinking, or merely a matter of personal preference. In such an environment, obviously, religious ideas do not find a receptive audience. So, the connection between religion and reason in the form of scientific knowledge suggested in our title is highly problematic.

To quote Ian Barbour:

The first major challenge to religion in an age of science is the success of the methods of science.... Many people view science as objective, universal, rational, and based on solid observational evidence. Religion, by contrast, seems to be subjective parochial, emotional, and based on traditions or authorities that disagree with each other.¹

Writer Jon Krakauer speaks for many when he describes faith as “the very antithesis of reason,” “impervious

to ... argument or ... criticism.” And when religion enters the picture, anything can happen. “Common sense is no match for the voice of God....”²

In such an environment, religion is obviously on the defensive. The authority of reason is a given; the value of religion is questionable.

This represents a dramatic shift in their historic relationship. For millennia, the authority of religion was taken for granted; the reliability of reason was problematic. There was a point, however, when the burden of proof shifted. As one of Tom Stoppard’s characters puts it, “there is presumably a calendar date—a *moment*—when the onus of proof passed from the atheist to the believer, when, quite suddenly secretly, the noes had it.”³ Ever since, the claims of religion are regarded with suspicion, while the conclusions of science are warmly embraced.

Today I’m taking a different tack. I want to put the shoe on the other foot and argue that religion has important things to offer that science can’t provide. Science isn’t everything some people think it’s cracked up to be. It isn’t the solution to every human problem, the answer to every question. It does not account for the full range of human experience.

I have no desire to denigrate the value of science. Science benefits us all and we should be grateful for its blessings. That is a given.

(No one wants to live in a pre-scientific age.) The problem is not that science isn’t important. The problem is that science is not all-important. A close look at science itself gives us a more realistic picture of its role. And a careful look at human experience reveals dimensions and values inaccessible to scientific inquiry.

Some of the people who stress the limits of science are scientists themselves. Scientists often display admirable modesty when it comes to assessing what we actually know.⁴ Science doesn’t know everything, and the clearest evidence of that is the fact that scientific knowledge is constantly growing. And the more science enlarges the scope of human knowledge, the more it reveals the vast scope of our ignorance. So, the more we learn, the more we realize how much we don’t know.

This is how Marcelo Gleiser puts it in his book, *The Island of Knowledge: The Limits of Science and the Search for Meaning*: “As the Island of Knowledge grows, so do the shores of our ignorance—the boundary between the known and

the unknown....” Indeed, “science advances because of our ignorance and not because of our knowledge.”⁵

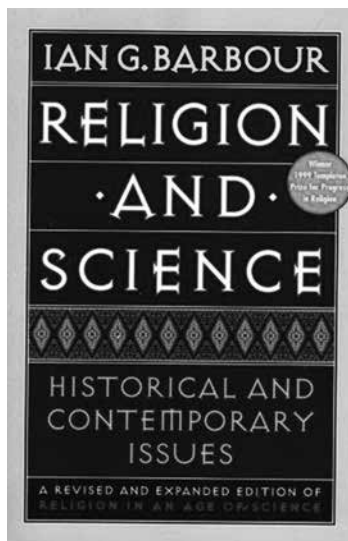
Not only do scientific advances reveal how little we know, says Gleiser, there is more to human life than science can account for. Indeed, there is more to science than science can account for. Although reason is the tool we use in science, it is not its motivation. Its motivation is what makes us human—the urge to know, the joy of discovery, the disturbing sense that we know so little.⁶ So, even if science is “the best tool we have for describing the world,” it is “deeply misguided” to hope that science will answer all our questions. To assume this would “shrink the human spirit, clip its wings, rob its multifaceted existence.”⁷

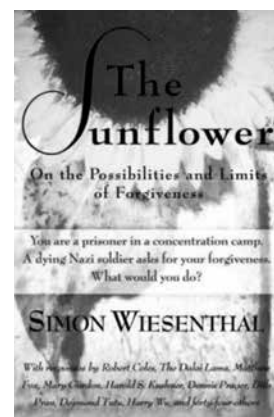
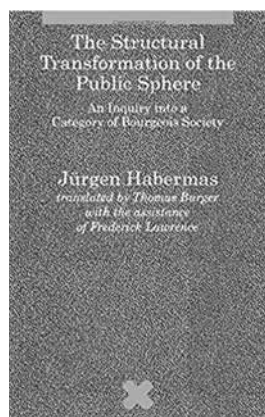
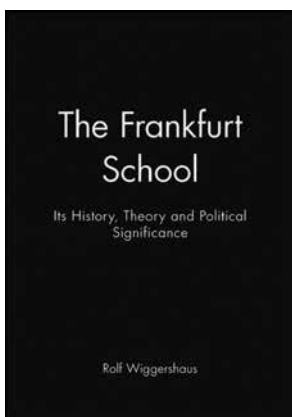
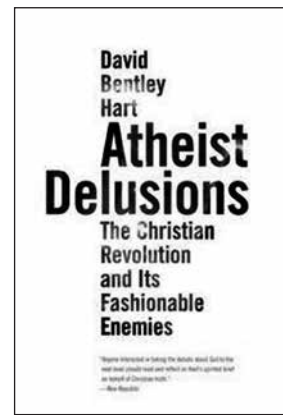
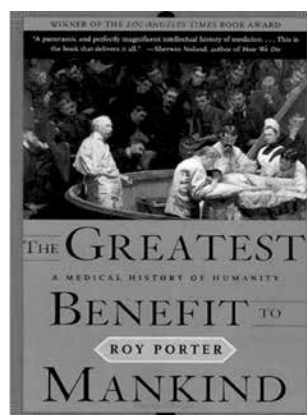
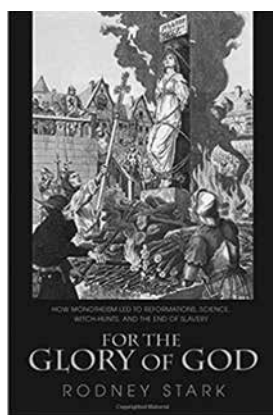
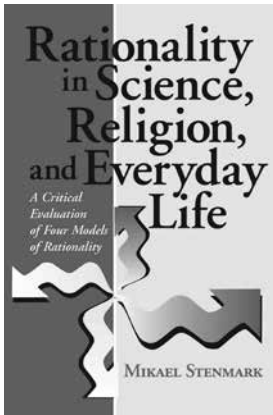
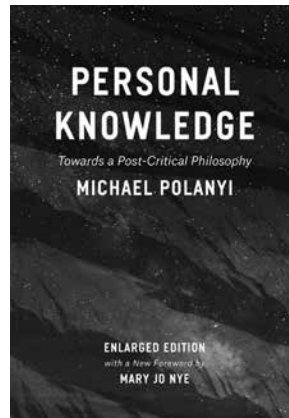
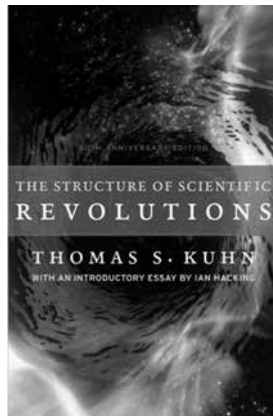
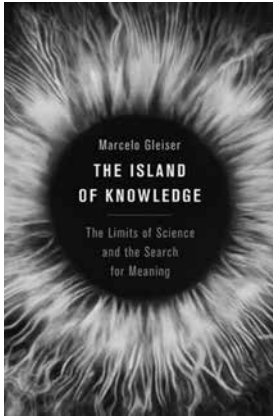
No one expresses the thought that there is more to the human spirit than science can account for with more urgency than Huston Smith.⁸ The author of a widely read textbook on world religions, Smith served on the faculties of a number of prestigious institutions, including MIT, where he was professor of philosophy for fifteen years (1958–1973). Smith died in 2016 at the age of 97.

Born to dedicated missionary parents in China, Smith lived there until he came to America to go to college. He brought his faith with him, he says, but “the rest of my life has been a struggle to keep it intact in the face of modern winds of doctrine that assail it.”⁹ Chief among these assailing

winds is the vaunted place that science occupies in the modern world. Preoccupied with material concerns and dazzled by the miracles of technology which fulfill them, modern Westerners have given science a “blank check.” In the popular mind, science alone provides reliable knowledge and justified belief.¹⁰ And with this perspective people have become blind to the realities of which previous peoples have all been aware, unable to appreciate the longings of the human heart for something more than this world.

The real culprit for this truncated perspective, this loss of the Big Picture, Smith argues, is not science per se, but “our misconstrual of it,” in a word, “scientism,” the unwarranted exaggeration of what science involves and what it can provide.¹¹ Scientism not only embraces science, it holds that the scientific method is the most, if not the only, reliable method to getting at the truth and that the things science deals with, material things, are the most fundamental things that exist.¹²





Instead of living in the great outdoors, open to the Big Picture—the “Single, wonderously clear and inspiring worldview ... distilled in the world’s great, enduring religions.”¹³—we have wondered unwittingly into “The Tunnel,” the impoverished worldview of modernity. The religious world is a world filled with meaning, in which people feel at home. The world of scientism, in short, is a world without meaning, in which we will never feel at home. As Steven Weinberg memorably put it, “the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless.”¹⁴

This, then, is “the great problem the human spirit faces in our time”: “having to live in the procrustean, scientific worldview that dominates our culture.”¹⁵ Despite the tunnel we moderns have stumbled into, there is light at the end. It consists of embracing the insights that religion—indeed, that only religion—provides. Effective and impressive as science is, there are aspects of reality that its methods cannot access. And this, to quote the title of Smith’s book, is *Why Religion Still Matters*.

There may be several ways out of the tunnel that Smith describes. When we look at the actual practice of science, the behavior of scientists, and perhaps most revealing, the history of science, we see that there is much more involved than the familiar picture that science consists of drawing conclusions from the accumulation of empirical data.

The most famous book on the philosophy of science to appear in the last century was *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. When he carefully examined the actual course of scientific development, Thomas Kuhn suddenly realized that the most significant breakthroughs involved dramatic leaps of imagination, leaps that catapulted their discoverers far beyond the accepted conclusions of their time. Indeed, what we typically think of as scientific investigation doesn’t begin to account for the remarkable insights of figures like Copernicus, Newton, and Einstein.

“Normal science,” as Kuhn describes it, involves a progressive accumulation of data within an established framework. In contrast, a scientific revolution involves the formulation of a new “paradigm”; it dramatically recasts our perspective on an entire range of scientific inquiry. It refashions the world we live in.

On their most fundamental levels, then, religion and science have important similarities. Neither would be possible without trust, or faith.

While accumulating data may eventually corroborate or confirm such revolutionary discoveries, it doesn’t account for them. Evidently, it takes more than science, as we typically think of it, to account for the history of science.

If the history of science complicates our picture of science so does the very structure of scientific knowledge. In his influential book, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Karl Popper argues that a scientific theory makes sense only if it is conceivably falsifiable.¹⁶ To put it another way, a theory is scientifically meaningful only if it is possible to specify the doubts it must overcome.

This may be helpful up to a point, counters Michael Polanyi, but this approach to truth has serious limitations. In *Personal Knowledge*, another famous discussion of our topic, Polanyi argues that doubt is not the path to all knowledge, not even knowledge of a scientific nature.

If we exalt what we can know and prove, while covering up “with ambiguous utterance” all that we know and cannot prove, he argues, we have a false conception of truth. Why? Because what we know and *cannot* prove is basic to everything we can prove. “In trying to restrict our minds to the few things that are demonstrable,” the way of doubt, says Polanyi, leads us to overlook “the a-critical choices which determine the whole being of our minds.”

To put it bluntly, if we didn’t know things that aren’t “scientific,” we wouldn’t be able to know the things that are. True, “the prolonged attacks made by rationalists on religion” have forced “us to renew the grounds of the Christian faith.” But this does not remotely justify the view that doubt is “the universal solvent of error which will leave truth untouched behind.... [To] destroy all belief would be to deny all truth.”¹⁷ So, important as doubt may be, trust, or belief, is even more important, and science would be impossible without it. Religious beliefs and the premisses of natural science belong to the same class of statements, and they perform similar functions. On their most fundamental levels, then, religion and science have important similarities. Neither would be possible without trust, or faith.

It seems, then, that science is not as “scientific” as many people think. Dramatic advances in science depend on imagination, not just reason. And science ultimately rests on convictions that reason alone could never establish.

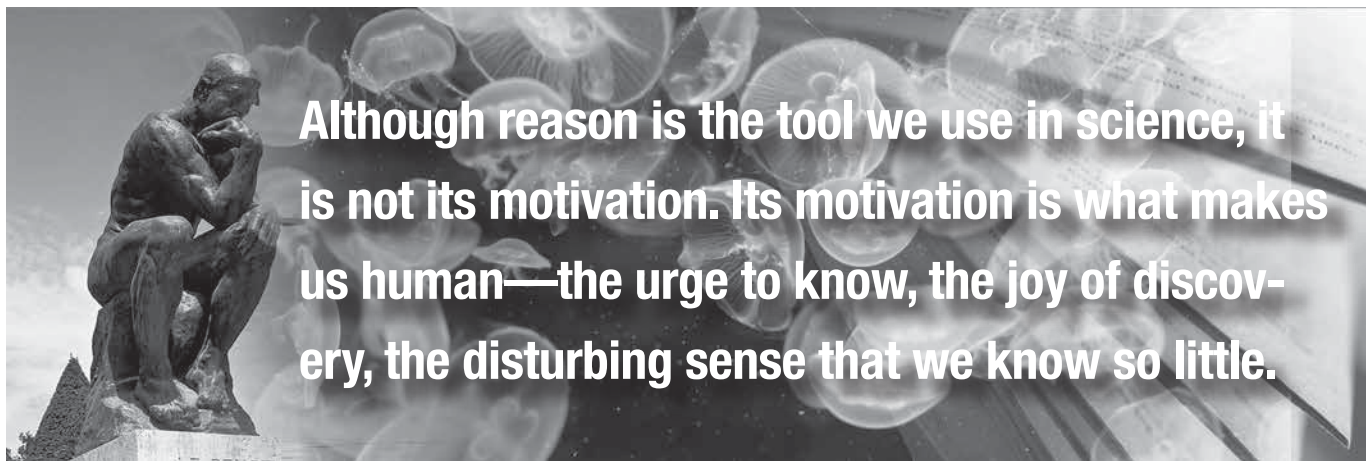
There are other considerations that call into question the tendency to view science as the paragon of reason. Swedish philosopher Mikael Stenmark argues that there are different forms of rationality and the scientific version is not the only one there is.

The reason so many question the rationality of religion is the fact that “one of the deepest and most widely shared convictions among philosophers and theologians” has been “that science is the paradigm example of rationality.” Consequently, when people ask whether or not religious beliefs are rational, they are asking if these beliefs meet scientific standards of rationality,¹⁸ in other words, the standard of “formal evidentialism.” And for most people, the answer is “probably not.” But, suppose there are different modes of

position that we are only entitled to believe something when all relevant doubts have been overcome. Instead, he argues, our basic epistemic posture should be one he calls “presumptionist,” the idea that we are entitled to our beliefs unless we encounter something that requires us to reconsider them.

It appears then, that science and religion are not as different as many people assume, let alone incompatible. If, as Polanyi argues, both ultimately rests on unprovable assumptions, and if as Stenmark argues, both exhibit legitimate, though distinctive, forms of rationality, there seems to be no good reason why they can't get along.

To show that reason needs religion, however, we need something more. It's not enough that there's room in the world for both science and religion. A more important question is



rationality appropriate to different areas of life. In that case, the rational criteria incumbent upon scientific investigation should not be uncritically applied to other areas, particularly the area of religion.

Stenmark argues that different beliefs play different roles in our lives, and we need to take into account “the practice the beliefs belong to,” before we can evaluate their rationality. We also need to remember that whether or not someone is rational is also “person-relative.”¹⁹ It is unrealistic to require someone to subject every belief to rigorous examination. Not even scientists are “scientific” in the sense that they base everything they believe directly on empirical investigation. And this is doubly true when it comes to religion and everyday experience. We simply don't have the time and resources to measure all our beliefs against a standard of conclusive rationality.

Like Polanyi, Stenmark also questions the idea that our basic epistemic posture should be one of skepticism—the

this: Are they related in some way? Is there a connection between them?

For one historian, the answer is Yes, a resounding Yes! In *For the Glory of God*, Rodney Stark takes issue with the familiar view that religion historically stood in the way of science, and science could only get underway when the theological and philosophical authorities of the past were discarded. In his provocative account, Stark asserts that this is not just an exaggeration, it's a complete misrepresentation. Far from inhibiting the development of modern science, religion is responsible for it. The fact is, science owes its existence to religion. “Science,” he says, “could only arise in a culture dominated by belief in a conscious, rational, all-powerful Creator.”²⁰

We generally think of science as “an organized . . . empirically oriented effort to explain natural phenomena—a cumulative process of theory construction and theory testing.” When did this enterprise begin? “In the 17th century,” says

Stark, “in Western Europe and nowhere else.” Why then and there? Because “Christianity depicted God as a rational, responsive, dependable, and omnipotent being and the universe as [God’s] personal creation, [with] a rational, lawful, stable structure, awaiting human comprehension.”²¹

The importance of religion to science is further demonstrated when we look at the “great figures involved in the 16th- and 17th-century blossoming of science—including Descartes, Galileo, Newton, and Kepler.” They confessed

an absolute faith in a Creator God, whose work incorporated rational rules awaiting discovery; the rise of science was . . . the natural outgrowth of the Christian doctrine of creation. The world exists because God created it. To love and honor God, we must fully appreciate . . . his handiwork. And because God is perfect, his handiwork functions in accord with *immutable principle*. By the full use of our God-given powers of reason and observation, we ought to be able to discover these principles.²²

Long before the rise of modern science, however, Christianity contributed something even more important to the world—the conviction that human life has great value. A conspicuous feature of Christianity from its beginning was an emphasis on charity as the paramount Christian virtue and the corresponding affirmation that every human being has unique dignity and unqualified value, whatever his or her social status or physical condition. Following the example of Jesus’ life of self-sacrificing service, early Christians, too, were open to people of all classes and cultures. And there were members of the community who devoted themselves to the welfare of others, including the diseased and the destitute. This contribution to human values was revolutionary. Nothing in the world of late antiquity, nothing in classical culture, compared to the willingness of Christians to jeopardize their own well-being in serving others. Greek and Roman paganism had acknowledged no such duties.²³

Christians not only cared for people individually, they established institutions to provide for care—hospitals for the

sick and welfare centers for the needy. Indeed, according to an authoritative history of medicine, “Christianity planted the hospital.”

By 250 the Church in Rome had developed an elaborate charitable outreach, with wealthy converts providing food and shelter for the poor. After Constantine officially recognized Christianity, Christians established hospitals throughout the empire. By the mid sixth century Jerusalem had one with 200 beds, and another in Constantinople was bigger still. . . . By 650, Constantinople had a hierarchy of physicians and even teaching facilities, a home for the elderly and, beyond the walls, a leper house.²⁴

The revolution in values that Christianity brought about was profound because it eventually, dramatically, and permanently transformed the prevailing perspective on the human in Western civilization: *eventually*, because it took a long time for its ramifications to develop in the form of laws and institutions—the abolition of slavery was not achieved until the nineteenth century, the establishment of equal rights in the US only in the mid-twentieth century; *dramatically*, because it involved such a novel perspective of the human; and *permanently*, because even those who reject everything else in religion generally, and Christianity in particular—at least most of them—accept the values that stem from the revolution. Instead of following Nietzsche, who bemoaned Christianity’s cultivation of charity and compassion, most atheists accept the conventional morality that stems from it.

According to David Bentley Hart, “The Christian account of reality introduced into our world an understanding of the divine, the cosmic, and the human that had no . . . equivalent elsewhere and [it] made possible a moral vision of the human person that has haunted us ever since, century upon century.”²⁵ The doctrine of the Incarnation shows that “a person is not merely a fragment of some larger cosmic or spiritual category . . . but an irreducible mystery.” “This immense dignity—this infinite capacity—inheres in every person, no matter what circumstances might for now seem

Eliminate religion, and the values we see as essential to the flourishing of human life, will, in all likelihood, go with it. Not immediately, perhaps but eventually.

to limit him or her to one destiny or another.”²⁶ “The rise of Christianity produced consequences so immense that it can almost be said to have begun the world anew: to have ‘invented’ the human.”²⁷

OK. Hart’s a Christian theologian, and we might expect him to say something like that. But there are other scholars who trace the values by which we measure civilized behavior today directly to religious convictions. One is Jurgen Habermas, an eminent critical theorist of the Frankfurt School. “[M]odern notions of equality and fairness,” says Habermas,

are secular distillations of time-honored Judeo-Christian precepts.... Our modern conception of ‘government by consent of the governed’ ... would be difficult to conceive apart from the Old Testament covenants. Similarly, our idea of the intrinsic worth of all persons, which underlies human rights, stems directly from the Christian ideal of the equality of all men and women in the eyes of God.” “[T]he ideals of freedom ... the individual morality of conscience, human rights, and democracy, [are] the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love.”²⁸

To summarize, we wouldn’t have the life we have today—life in a society that affirms individual human freedom and dignity—without religion. It provides the very basis for a life worth living.

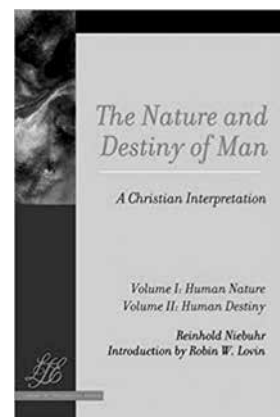
Well and good, someone may say, suppose religion was an important factor in getting us where we are. But now that we are here, can’t we leave religion behind and just keep on going—a little like young adults who acknowledge what they owe their parents, but then go on and make their own way in the world?

There are obviously many in today’s world who embrace the standards of civilized society without buying into all the “religious mythology” that traditionally goes with it. As they see it, we can take the values and leave the religion behind. Even if we grant that Christianity was the matrix of modern ethical values, why can’t enlightened people dispense with the religious veneer and cling to the ethical core? Isn’t this possible?

The answer—not likely! At least not according to one careful student of modern culture—after a painstaking study of how we got to where we are today. According to Charles Taylor, the basic values by which we live, the central values that characterize civilized existence, are inextricably connected

to, and ultimately dependent on, a religious worldview. Eliminate religion, and the values we see as essential to the flourishing of human life, will, in all likelihood, go with it. Not immediately, perhaps ... but eventually.

The notion that we can keep our central values and dispense with their religious sources is essentially what Taylor calls a “subtraction story” in his magisterial tome, *A Secular Age*. As he describes it, the story arises from the Enlightenment idea that reason unfettered by traditional religion can arrive at a core of ethical values entirely on its own, and human beings can be ethical without any reference to something higher.²⁹ We always had these intuitions, the story goes, “only they were over-ridden and sidelined by various illusory ... religious doctrines.”³⁰



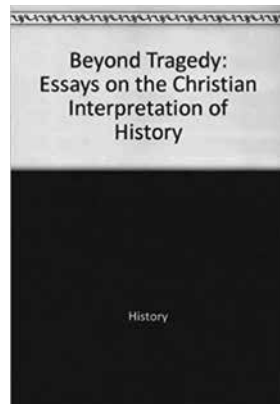
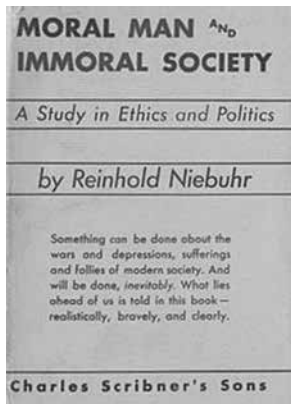
So, along with the subtraction story goes “the narrative of self-authorization,”³¹ the idea that we have always been capable of identifying and embracing these values on our own. In his account, however, Taylor insists that this is not at all what actually happened. People only think it is. In spite of the high regard people have for them, the fact is, these “narratives of self-authorization” are far from self-evident. They survive because they escape examination, but as proofs, “they don’t make the grade.”³²

Get rid of God, abandon religion, Taylor says in effect, and values that we all embrace as essential to human life lose their footing. To put it in terms of our title, reason alone did not give us the values we all endorse as essential to a viable and vibrant society. We got them from religion, and religion is essential to their survival. Get rid of religion, and eventually we lose the values as well. It may take a while, and it may not be obvious, but it is virtually inevitable. Maybe it’s like global warming: people in general may not notice it until it’s too late.

Can individuals behave ethically without being religious? Of course. (One can be an anarchist and still observe

the speed limit.) But that's different from asking what the long-range effect might be if the religious foundation of ethical convictions fades away. What Hart and Taylor say about the historical origins and intimate connection between religion and ethics strongly suggests that the values that arose directly from a religious vision of humanity cannot survive indefinitely if that vision is lost. Basic to the concept of charity, the source of our central social values, lies a Christian understanding of the world, of God, and ourselves.

It is instructive to see what happens when a society loses, or eliminates, religion. A chilling example appears in one of the contributions to the second edition of Simon Wiesenthal's book, *The Sunflower*. Harry Wu was imprisoned in Communist China for nineteen years. After his release he



looked up the woman who was largely responsible for his years of torture and deprivation. She dismissed the past as a time when the whole country suffered and offered nothing in the way of apology for what she had put him through. Her attitude, Wu asserted, was typical of the Communists in China. They had “no regard for an individual’s well-being,” because “the leaders of the country placed no value on human life.”³³ Wu’s reflection is instructive. When a system eliminates religion, the value of human life goes with it.

There is another reason that reason needs religion, and it may be the most important of all. Without religion, reason can be used to justify just about any course of action. In order to avoid its misuse, we need a perspective on human behavior, a principle of criticism or evaluation, that only religion can provide.

Langdon Gilkey, for many years professor of theology at UC Divinity School, describes this in a memorable way. After graduating from Harvard University in 1939 with a major in philosophy, Gilkey went to China to teach English. When World War II broke out, he was arrested by the Japanese and

interned for two and a half years, along with 2,000 other people of Western origin, on the grounds of a former mission station. He recounts their experiences in the book, *Shantung Compound: The Story of Men and Women Under Pressure*, published some twenty years later.

Gilkey grew up in a liberal Protestant home—his father was Dean of Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago—and accepted the basic tenets of his parents’ religion. While in college, however, he became a convinced humanist. People can live decent moral lives, he decided without the trappings of religion.

His early camp experience confirmed the humanism of his college years. Left on their own to organize things, the internees managed to develop a viable society, thanks primarily

To treat our fellow human beings humanely, equitably, we need more than the rational capacity to solve our problems; we need the moral capacity to appreciate and value one another.

to those who had the practical skills to get things done—people who knew how to cook, how to care for the sick, educate children—people, that is, who knew how to analyze a problem and find the resources to fix it. He was impressed at the power of human ingenuity to meet the multiple challenges they faced. There seemed to be nothing that bright people couldn’t do when they put their minds to it. Reason was the solution to all their problems.

As time went by, however, one thing after another tore holes in Gilkey’s confident humanism. There were obstacles that reason couldn’t overcome. It wasn’t that there weren’t reasonable solutions to the problems. It was that people repeatedly refused to accept a solution when it cost them something personally. When it came to human relationships, to human behavior, he realized, something other than reason was at work. Whether it was allocating rooms to individuals and families or distributing Red Cross boxes, people instinctively placed their own interests first and then looked for ways to justify getting more benefits than others did.

Gilkey was forced to conclude that our ability to be reasonable is limited. Reason is indispensable for meeting

life's challenges, by itself it isn't enough. To treat our fellow human beings humanely, equitably, we need more than the rational capacity to solve our problems; we need the moral capacity to appreciate and value one another.

Viewed by itself, reason can give us an unrealistic view of our humanity. We have impressive mental gifts. We can solve problems of enormous complexity. And we can be sensitive to others' needs and find satisfaction in helping to meet them ... up to a point. (Just think of the moving stories of people who risk their lives to pull people from burning houses or overturned cars.) As long as there is more than enough to go around—plenty of space, plenty of food, plenty of time, plenty of opportunity—we are perfectly willing to share. But when these resources are restricted, and sharing means giving up something that we need or think we need, then another factor kicks in, namely, a powerful loyalty to our own interests.

But when this happens, reason doesn't take a holiday. We don't become baldly, conspicuously selfish. If anything, we become more rational than ever. We can be creative, even ingenious, in finding reasons to justify actions whose real motive is self-interest. To counter this pervasive tendency, we need something more than reason. We need a principle of evaluation or criticism, a lens as it were, through which to see our motives in their true light. And for this, religion is indispensable. Only religion provides a sufficiently complex view of the human to account for both the majesty and tragedy of which we are capable—the ingenuity, the generosity, and the self-interest evident in human behavior. In its simplest form, what religion provides that reason can't is the doctrine of sin.

To suggest that reason needs a concept of sin may sound excessively negative. But the idea of sin does not deny the goodness and value of human life. To the contrary, it presupposes it. It is based on the conviction that human beings possess enormous intellectual and moral potential. But it expresses the realization that there is a pervasive contradiction, a fundamental disparity, between what human beings are capable of and what they actually do, between what we are meant to be and what we are—a paradox summarized this way by Reinhold Niebuhr, "Christianity measures the stature

of man more highly and his virtue more severely than any alternative view."³⁴

To do justice to the complexities of human life we need a principle of understanding that comes from beyond our understanding. Only from such a vantage point can we encompass the full range of our complex reality—from the breathtaking heights to the heartbreaking depths of human existence. It illuminates both our essential possibilities, and the truth that we never perfectly realize, and often betray, these ideals.

And this provides a response to the most forceful objection to religion today. In the name of religion, people have done terrible things to each other, throughout history and in our own time, throughout the world and in our own neigh-

borhoods. When people use religion to justify violence and cruelty, it's no wonder that people wonder if the world wouldn't be better off if we got rid of religion entirely.

The paradoxical truth is, we need religion in order

to condemn much of what people have done in the name of religion. The perspective that religion—and only religion—provides exposes the tragic contradiction within us. And it reveals that we fall short of our ideals, not only at our worst, but even at our best. As Niebuhr astutely observes, nothing is more insidious than spiritual pride—the particular failing of overtly religious people. Religion thus provides an account of human ideals that reason could never come up with, and a judgment against any claim to have perfectly achieved these ideals.³⁵

The complexity that Niebuhr articulates is nicely phrased by Ellen White:

Not only intellectual but spiritual power, a perception of right, a desire for goodness, exists in every heart. But against these principles there is struggling an antagonistic power.... There is in [our] nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, [we] cannot resist.³⁶

Conclusion

Our time is up and our helicopter is landing. What have we seen? And where has it brought us? The importance of religion for people dedicated to the life of reason—people

The perspective that religion—and only religion—provides exposes the tragic contradiction within us. And it reveals that we fall short of our ideals, not only at our worst, but even at our best.

who know and appreciate what reason can accomplish, people whose lives have been improved and perhaps saved by the technology that scientific reasoning has made available—consists of two things. Religion gives us both a basis for appreciating all the gifts that reason can bring and a caveat against overconfidence in what reason can do. There is more to human experience than reason can account for, and religion is indispensable for perceiving and understanding it. In a word, reason needs religion.

End Notes

1. Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, The Gifford Lectures, Volume I. (HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 3.
2. Jon Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* (Doubleday, 2004), xxi–xxiii, 68.
3. Tom Stoppard, *Jumpers*, 25. Quoted in Richard Rice, *Reason and the Contours of Faith* (La Sierra University Press, 1991), 220.
4. Granted, along with this modesty comes the confident expectation that science will make continual progress and provide us with information that grows in scope and accuracy.
5. Marcelo Gleiser, *The Island of Knowledge: The Limits of Science and the Search for Meaning* (Basic Books, 2014), xxii, xxv. Gleiser devotes much of the book to some of the mysterious features of the world that quantum mechanics exposes.
6. *Ibid.*, 279
7. *Ibid.*, 281
8. Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters: The Faith of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).
9. *Ibid.*, xii.
10. *Ibid.*, 4.
11. *Ibid.*, 4–5.
12. *Ibid.*, 59–60.
13. *Ibid.*, 43.
14. *Ibid.*, 34–37.
15. *Ibid.*, 202.
16. Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
17. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago, 1958), 286.
18. Mikael Stenmark, *Rationality in Science, Religion and Everyday Life: A Critical Evaluation of Four Models of Rationality* (Notre Dame, 1995), 4.
19. *Ibid.*, 235.
20. Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 197.
21. *Ibid.*, 146–47.
22. *Ibid.*, 157.
23. St. Fabiola was an affluent fourth-century convert to Christianity. She founded a hospital and dedicated her life to charity among Rome’s sick poor. “She assembled all the sick from the

streets and highways and personally tended the unhappy and impoverished victims of hunger and disease.” She often washed wounds “which others—even men—could hardly bear to look at... She founded a hospital and gathered there the sufferers from the streets, and gave them all the attention of a nurse.... How often she carried home, on her own shoulders, the first and poor who were plagued by epilepsy! How she washed the pus from sores which others could not even behold!”

24. Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity* (W. W. Norton, 1997), 87–88.
25. David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*, (Yale University Press, 2009), 203.
26. *Ibid.*, 211.
27. *Ibid.*, 213.
28. Richard Wolin, “Jurgen Habermas and Post-Secular Societies,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, (September 23, 2005): B17.
29. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 245; cf. 253, 255, 267, 270, 294.
30. *Ibid.*, 557.
31. *Ibid.*, 587.
32. *Ibid.*, 590.
33. Simon Wiessenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*. With a symposium edited by Harry James Caragas and Bonny V. Fetterman, rev. ed., (New York: Schocken Books, 1998), 273–74.
34. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 vols. (Scribner’s, 1941, 1943), 2:161.
35. At the same time, it is only by striving for these ideals we may partially achieve them. Though reason alone could never produce the insights that religion provides, once we accept these insights, they become eminently reasonable. Religion [revelation] thus becomes “true wisdom,” says Niebuhr, by “completing the incompleteness, clarifying the obscurities, and correcting the falsifications of human knowledge.” *Ibid.*, 2:67.
36. Full quotation: “Christ is the ‘Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.’ John 1:9. As through Christ every human being has life, so also through Him every soul receives some ray of divine light. Not only intellectual but spiritual power, a perception of right, a desire for goodness, exists in every heart. But against these principles there is struggling an antagonistic power. The result of the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is manifest in every man’s experience. There is in his nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, he cannot resist. To withstand this force, to attain that ideal which in his inmost soul he accepts as alone worthy, he can find help in but one power. That power is Christ.” Ellen G. White, *Education*, 29.



RICHARD RICE, theologian, author, and professor of religion at Loma Linda University, is currently writing two books. For Intervarsity Press Academic, he is compiling a history of open theism, a movement that grew out of his writings about God. His most recent books on pain and suffering have led to a request from LLU to write a book exploring the theological basis for Loma Linda University’s vision of whole-person care. In 2002, Adventist Forum published his book *Believing, Behaving and Belonging*.



Environmental
enthusiasm

Detail: *Cetacea Sempervirens* by Tim Musso



Environmental *enthusiasm*

AN INTRODUCTION

BY LORA E. GERIGUIS

The following essays reflect each person's engagement with the environment at a level that requires the longevity and intensity that is the gift of enthusiasm.

Air pollution, in mid-twentieth-century America, was broadly “accepted as the smell of prosperity.”¹ Nevertheless into this world of “new affluence and intense social conformity... [when i]n postwar America, science was god, and science was male”² came a little book with a whimsical title written by a woman. Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), which warned of the carcinogenic property of the pesticides, such as DDT, was a surprise run-away best seller.³ The *New York Times* heralded the book as a “20th century *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” as an expression of its intense focus on righting *and writing* a wrong.⁴ Rachel Carson (1907–1964), a one-time English major turned marine biologist, combined her literary talents and scientific knowledge to write compelling books about the relationship of humans to the environment. In *Silent Spring*, she predicted over-use of pesticides by industry and individuals would result in a coming spring when the sound of birds would be silenced due to ecological devastation. The warnings for humanity to better nurture our relationship with the planet haven’t lost their relevancy in the half-century since *Silent Spring*’s publication. What is needed is a stimulus to keep our vigilance active in the face of enormous, global-scale challenges and discouraging set-backs.

Stewardship of God’s creation, and its corollary dominion, have long been two major (and debated) pillars of Christian philosophy and practice.

Carson was particularly successful at expressing “deeply intricate scientific material in clear poetic language that could captivate her readers and pique their interest in the natural world.”⁵ The popularity of *Silent Spring* became the catalyst for Carson testifying before a Congressional committee, which eventually led to banning the domestic production of DDT in the United States, though its use internationally continued so that, sadly today, “[g]lobal contamination is a fact of modern life.”⁶ *Silent Spring* put Carson in the crosshairs of the pesticide industry, which mounted a massive campaign to discredit her. Linda Lear reports, “[u]nbeknown to her detractors in government and industry, Carson was fighting a far more powerful enemy than corporate outrage: a rapidly metastasizing breast cancer.

The miracle is that she lived to complete the book at all.”⁷ What drove Carson to persevere in her writing against the odds for a woman of her day, despite the resistance of the rich and powerful, and in the face of the treachery of her own body? A sense of purpose, and, above all, enthusiasm.

The year 2020 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of Earth Day, first established in the United States on April 22, 1970 (six years after Carson’s death).⁸ Reporting that evening in

1970 for the television news on what he called a “unique day in American history,” Walter Cronkite (1916–2009), iconic news broadcaster from World War II to 1981, cited the impetus behind the Earth Day movement as the mounting recognition that economic growth and prosperity was extracting a heavy toll on the environment, which he poetically described as the “deadly byproducts of bounty: the fouled skies, the filthy waters, the littered Earth.”⁹ April 22 has since become an annual day of political organization and practical action world-wide, and Earth Day is now recognized as “the largest secular observance in the world, celebrated by more than a billion people every year.”¹⁰ Mobilization on such a scale is driven not just by obligation, or even by fear, but must include a significant element of enthusiasm.

We’ve titled this collection of essays “Environmental Enthusiasm” because that is what these five authors have in common. Representing a diverse range of disciplines, including Biblical studies, English literature, American history, and psychology, their journeys have taken them down different academic paths, but all have picked up an enthusiasm for the environment along the way that has spurred them forward. Each one’s expression of that enthusiasm varies. Our authors include a hiker with enough grit to mount the summit of Kilimanjaro and another with the herculean patience and persistence necessary to track birds all over the world. The others have found the determination to unearth the history of a people buried by extermination, to discern early evidence of pollution awareness in the poetry of bereft mothers of centuries past, or to open new “green” eyes so as to reread well-known scripture in order to discover its linkage to the land hidden there all along. All of these projects have been fueled by the clean, renewable energy source of enthusiasm.

Stewardship of God’s creation, and its corollary *dominion*, have long been two major (and debated) pillars of Christian philosophy and practice, arising from God’s celebratory invitation to humanity on the sixth day of creation to “Be fruitful, and multiple, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28, KJV). We are suggesting that a third way, a vigor emerging from *enthusiasm* be harnessed to help direct our way of living in the world God has entrusted to us. Enthusiasm for one’s subject is the hallmark of a university professor; it’s what we hope to inculcate in our students. Enthusiasm is what drives us to study our subjects intently for a life-time, conduct complex experiments to learn that

next new thing, write books that demand months, even years of dedication. The following essays reflect each person’s engagement with the environment at a level that requires the longevity and intensity that is the gift of enthusiasm. We hope in reading these essays, in sharing part of our journeys with us, you’ll (re)discover your own spring of enthusiasm for living well in our vibrant but vulnerable world.

End Notes

1. “The History of Earth Day,” www.earthday.org/about/the-history-of-earth-day.
2. Linda Lear, “Introduction” to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), 50th anniversary edition (Boston: Mariner Books, 2002), x–xi.
3. See Mark Stoll, “Carson’s *Silent Spring*: A Book that Changed the World,” Virtual Exhibitions 2012, no 1, *Environment & Society Portal*, Environmentandsociety.org.
4. *New York Times* (27 September 1961): 35. The reference is made to the serialization of Carson’s book in newspapers before it came out in book form. Quoted by Stoll.
5. This quote, though it applies to all of her writing, was directly referencing Carson’s first book, *Under the Sea* (1941). “Rachel Carson,” *U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*, www.fws.gov.
6. Lear, “Introduction,” xviii.
7. *Ibid.*, xvii.
8. Given the current highly polarized divide over environmental politics, there is a (perhaps surprising) element of bi-partisanship in the early history of Earth Day, the original co-sponsors of which were US Senator Gaylord Nelson (Democrat, Wisconsin) and US Congressman Pete McCloskey (Republican, California). See “The History of Earth Day,” www.earthday.org/about/the-history-of-earth-day.
9. Walker Cronkite, “Earth Day: A Question of Survival,” CBS News (22 April 1970), www.earthday.org/about/the-history-of-earth-day. Biographical information from “Walter Cronkite,” www.imdb.com. Awareness raised around environmental degradation, heightened by the media coverage of Earth Day, fueled the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) by the United States government in 1970.
10. The first year’s observation of Earth Day attracted the participation of 20 million Americans; in 1990, the Earth Day movement spread globally, when 200 million people in 141 countries participated. “The History of Earth Day,” www.earthday.org/about/the-history-of-earth-day.



LORA E. GERIGUIS is a professor of English and associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at La Sierra University. Her previous contributions to *Spectrum* have explored “The Bible in Art and Literature” (Spring 2011) and “Female Metaphors in the Bible” (Spring 2012). She and her husband, David, have three children: Peter (21), Paul (19), and Julia (17).

The Tightrope: *Living at Peace* IN A BEAUTIFUL, BUT VULNERABLE WORLD



Giant Lobelia on Kilimanjaro (Photo: Leslie R. Martin)

BY LESLIE R. MARTIN

I am a teacher of environmental ethics who has long balanced on a tightrope between activism and despair, between the promise of an earth made new and the recognition that our historical interpretation of biblical texts is partly to blame for our current ecological crisis.¹ Above all, however, I am a lover of the natural world—particularly its most rugged and raw expanses.

My first close-up encounter with harsh desert beauty was during the *Marathon des Sables*, a 156-mile stage race through the Moroccan Sahara. Because it is a self-sustaining event, competitors carry all of their food for the six-day journey, as well as their bedding, clothes, and required safety equipment in

backpacks while they run. Daytime temperatures top 120 degrees Fahrenheit, but the thermometer can plummet below freezing at night. The group leaves the bivouac together each morning, but variations in speed mean that unless you've made a plan to stick with a group, you'll likely spend

most of the day running alone. It is this solitary journey through the expansive desert that is soul-cleansing.

Deserts have an ineffable quality created by their vastness emptiness—their breathtaking barrenness. Yet despite its vacuity, the diversity of the Sahara is astounding. We

crossed towering dunes that stretched for miles, salt flats peppered with pebbles that challenged every step, craggy ridges,

I carry those moments with me, and they pull me inexorably toward the “activist” side as I balance on my tightrope.



Penitentes (Creative Commons Photo: Sastognuti)



Marathon des Sables (Photo: Leslie R. Martin)

and occasional oases with greens that contrasted with the rusty terrain creating an almost painful jolt. It's impossible not to fall in love with such a place—to want to protect it and share it with everyone you know.

Trekking to the glacial summit of Mount Kilimanjaro was another experience that catapulted me into awe and reinforced my enthusiasm for the natural wonders of our planet. There are six routes one might take to the top, each traversing a series of ecosystems defined by altitude. Thus, each day presents new plants such as sage grasses, birds like the bearded vulture, and rock formations beginning in dripping rainforest and ending in biting, icy wind at Uhuru Peak. There were many points during this journey—such as emerging from fog to encounter a low forest of giant lobelia or lying on my back, head on a stone, eyes tracking the skittering clouds above—that made me so grateful for the beauty of the earth that I could have cried. I carry those moments with me, and they pull me inexorably toward the “activist” side as I balance on my tightrope.

Perhaps my most brutal and punishing experience with the natural world was during an attempt to summit Aconcagua in Argentina. As with Kilimanjaro, the multi-day trek bisects a variety of terrains, each with its own set of plants and animals. But in contrast with Kilimanjaro there are more days at high elevation where the weather is severe. Two of our group became ill at the high base camp, leaving only a pair of us to attempt the peak. I will never forget

the morning that, with heavy packs firmly affixed to our backs, we navigated the *penitentes* (a bed of ice-and-snow spires on the trail just beyond a camp with the same name). We were optimistic, strong, and ready for a challenge—and we got it. The next three days were bitterly cold with a howling wind that made each uphill step seem steeper than it was. Bad weather eventually forced our return—

we had gotten above 20,000 feet but hadn't reached the summit. The stark beauty of the mountain, however, had sliced directly into my consciousness, leaving a mark that hinted at pain and happiness.

How does my passion for the natural world inform my teaching? What is my vision for students—how can I help them find the balance on that tightrope which I, myself, struggle to maintain?

I've experienced angst over my own worldview through time—I will admit to having felt helpless and thinking that perhaps conservation efforts are for naught (after all, Isaiah 65:17 promises that all will be well in the end). Maybe it's best to simply enjoy and appreciate the wonders of creation, even if in so doing we also harm. These thoughts tangle with others—a yearning toward self-sacrifice in the interest of the greater good, toward advocacy in its various permutations. Thus, the issue that I endeavor to help students with is the reconciliation of these two internal demands.

One frequent student-generated challenge in the classroom is some version of this: “I know that lots of little

*When our actions are consistent with our values
we are ideally positioned to benefit spiritually
from our forays into nature.*

actions can add up to something big, but if we are honest about it, the behavior of a single person isn't going to make much difference. If I stop eating meat or commit to taking shorter showers to conserve water, it won't even make a dent." And I cannot argue with the observation; it is correct.

It seems counterintuitive, but the best way I can think of to reconcile the reality of a hyper-consumptive world with the benefits (and costs) of personal, environmentally-conscious actions doesn't focus narrowly on the environment. It focuses on the well-being of the individual—not at some future time, but right now.

We are probably all familiar with the uncomfortable feeling that occurs when we engage in behaviors that we recognize (either at the time, or subsequently) are inconsistent with our values, ideals, or beliefs. Leon Festinger formally described this as *cognitive dissonance*² in 1957 and argued that we strive for psychological consistency in our everyday lives—changing behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and/or values in order to avoid the distress of these internal contradictions. Most people I encounter—students and others—believe that it's important to care for the environment and yet we *all* make choices that negatively affect that environment. We drive too much, and our cars are too big. We take showers that are too long and sprinkle precious water on our lawns. We fly frequently, and we eat too high up on the food chain. And, for those who are concerned about the environment, this creates cognitive dissonance.

Will small, individual actions fix our problems? No. But each responsible decision is a tiny drop in the bucket of stewardship. And the more immediate reward is the reduction of cognitive dissonance. When our behaviors are aligned with our values it simply feels good. There's no internal struggle for reconciliation, no guilt-ridden critiques, no self-justification. There is instead a sense of contentment and harmony. Of course, we may still worry about the environment (and to the extent that this spurs us to do things like voting or engaging in more direct activism, that's probably a good thing)...but our hearts will be at peace. In this state of peace and well-being we are best equipped to engage the natural world. Although there are many gifts (e.g., food, medicine, oxygen) to be garnered from nature, one of the most valuable is spiritual renewal. The beauty of a desert, a

mountain, or a sea can soothe the spirit in a way that little else can. When our actions are consistent with our values we are ideally positioned to benefit spiritually from our forays into nature. This is the lesson I have finally learned and that I endeavor to impart to my students.

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Marathon des Sables (Photo: Leslie R. Martin)

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Birds of the Air **AND** *Beasts of the Field* **Animals and Culture**

BY ANDREW HOWE



Selections from Gustave Doré's illustrations for "Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

I can remember with utter vividness the greatest moment of my birdwatching life. I was on a tiny boat off the coast of Wollongong, Australia, hanging on to the rail for dear life while emptying the contents of my stomach into the Pacific Ocean, on this particular day a very poorly named body of water. I'm not sure what the Australian version of a Small Craft Advisory might be, but surely the captain had ignored one before we left port earlier that morning. I had just reached the conclusion that throwing myself overboard might somewhat improve my situation when it happened. Out of the mist came an apparition, a giant black-and-white bird out of my wildest imagination: a Wandering Albatross. The first of numerous albatross we were to see that day, this bird banked right in front of the boat, no more than fifteen feet away from me, a truly impressive spectacle when taking

into consideration its ten-foot wingspan. Quite simply, I was awestruck. My discomfort was forgotten as I was treated to fresh evidence of the splendor of creation.

For the past thirty years, the enjoyment of nature—in particular, birds—has been more than just a hobby to me, but a passion. It is in the past dozen years or so that I have been able to merge this passion with my vocation as an academic, initially in my research but lately in some of the history courses I teach at La Sierra University. Despite the fact that over the past seventy years Americans have increasingly hailed from the suburbs—as a result most intimately connected to a highly landscaped form of nature—I find that today's college students have an acute sense of environmental justice, no doubt due to anxieties regarding climate change and increased media coverage of natural disasters. A

course that I piloted last year, Nature and Culture, combines these two elements: popular media and environmental history.

It has been said that we are living in the early stages of a post-literate society. What exactly that means is subject to debate, although what is clear is that each successive generation is relying more and more upon visual information when it comes to both education and entertainment. For this reason, the photographer Chris Jordan (1963–) works very well in the classroom as a point of entry into the world of politically-charged environmental commentary. After cutting his teeth as an avant-garde photographer and artist focused upon American mass consumption, Jordan turned to a project that has taken the better part of the past decade: chronicling the devastation of the albatross colony on Midway Island due to the amount of plastic in our oceans.

Jordan's photographic exhibition "Midway: Message from the Gyre" (2009) consists of a series of images of dead and dying Laysan Albatross. The historical fishing grounds of this species occur in the Pacific Garbage Patch, an enormous area in the North

Pacific where plastic material becomes trapped by ocean currents in an ever-circling gyre. The adult birds take in bits of plastic when they feed and then transfer these to their young when they return to Midway to pass along partially digested fish. The results are predictable, with birds old and young alike paying the price for human mass consumption. The images from Jordan's exhibition are striking, and not easy to view.¹ There is an undeniable, compositional beauty to the contrast between the bland colors of the deceased birds and the colorful pieces of plastic. Simultaneously, however, there is



Laysan Albatross (Photo: Bob Steele)



Laysan Albatross (Photo: Bob Steele)

the horror of realization that the soda bottle cap that caused this magnificent creature's demise may have come from a beverage the viewer once held in his or her hand. The evocative duality in these photographs resonates with the Enlightenment concept of the "Sublime," an aesthetic notion that some aspects of nature are too grand or elevated for humanity to fully relate to, often encompassing competing qualities such as beauty and terror.

Jordan was so deeply impacted by the Midway project that he spent the next eight years working on a follow-up



Woman with snowy egret “plume hat”

documentary called *Albatross*. Even though I have been looking forward to this film since Jordan’s 2012 Kickstarter funding campaign, I have not been able to bring myself to watch it since its June debut. I have seen the four-minute trailer a dozen or so times,² on each occasion coming away emotionally drained. It’s sort of like committing to watch *Schindler’s List*; one has to be in the right mood, and I have not been able to muster the emotional reserves necessary to sit through it, despite its important message. I do plan to screen this film the next time I teach *Nature & Culture*, however, as the plight of the albatross not only indicates the dangers of mass consumption and pollution, but also illustrates a tenet of globalism. Everything in this world is connected, and the abrogation of moral responsibility—even in things as simple as decisions made while shopping, or recycling practices—can have an impact elsewhere.

Due to their migratory nature, birds in general prove to be fitting “canaries in the coal mine” when analyzing global environmental trends. Unfortunately, there is no shortage of examples I have been able to bring into the classroom, involving such issues as deforestation, energy production, and urbanization. The decline of some bird species, such

as the Cerulean Warbler, is due to their migratory nature. Populations of this tiny sapphire of a songbird, immortalized in Jonathan Franzen’s *Freedom* (2010), have long been in decline due to deforestation in its wintering grounds in Central and South America. During the past twenty years, however, the species has additionally faced deforestation in its breeding strongholds in Northern Appalachia, ever since coal companies discovered that it was easier to just remove the tops of mountains, trees and all, rather than tunnel for coal. Other species, such as the Spotted Owl, are also in trouble due to deforestation (in this case, in the Pacific Northwest), but instead due to the fact that they do not migrate. Still other species, such as the Snowy Egret, almost went extinct due to fashion trends, in this case with late-nineteenth-century hats decorated with feather plumes.

Birds are not the only class of animal that I have brought into my classroom in order to explore social or political issues. The re-introduction of the Gray Wolf into the Great Basin region in the 1990s provides a fascinating platform for examining land use, allowing an examination of historic anxieties involving state rights vs. federal mandate (extending back through the American Civil War to the Federalist Papers and the formation of the Republic), but also highly specific episodes such as the Sagebrush Rebellion of the 1970s. When one adds personal property rights into the equation, particularly the concern that ranchers have about livestock loss, the case of the Gray Wolf becomes even more complex. Finally, the additional complication of indigenous land makes things even more convoluted. Wolves often cover twenty-five miles in a day, in so doing finding themselves on different parcels of lands where they are either actively hunted or unequivocally protected. The Gray Wolf thus serves as a powerful introduction in the history classroom to a debate regarding governance and property rights that has waxed and waned for nearly 250 years.

One specific environmental metaphor resonates particularly well with students, and that is biological invasions. We live in a time in which each passing year introduces new biological bogeymen—most often in insect or reptile form—that in some fashion pose a threat to our wellbeing, usually on the local or regional level. The framing of such invasions in the popular media often contains overtones of anti-immigrant sentiment. This distinction is particularly true, and especially relevant to the modern classroom, when the invasive threat has Latin American origins, such as the spread of the

Africanized “Killer” Bee into the American Southwest during the 1970s. Much of the media coverage of the bee at that time echoed anti-immigrant attitudes commonplace during the era: brought across the border in the back of trucks, will devastate the agricultural industry, will out-compete the native worker (ironically, the Italian Honeybee), etc.

This fear was notoriously satirized in a skit that aired on Saturday Night Live in January 1976, with Elliott Gould, John Belushi, and other actors dressed as Mexican bandito bees—replete with sombreros and bandoliers of ammunition crossed diagonally upon their chests—invading an urban apartment and menacing its two white denizens. Last year, this clip and the readings on the Killer Bee that were assigned resulted in a far-ranging class discussion about the proposed Border Wall and other aspects of contemporary immigration. The Killer Bee is far from an isolated episode. Indeed, the symbolic attachment of topical anti-immigrant anxiety to an invasive insect extends back to the very origins of the United States, with the infestation of a European fly shortly after Hessian mercenaries arrived in New York in August 1776. This fly, a pest that preyed on wheat and barley crops, was described in American newspapers in terms that were thinly veiled metaphors for the unpopular German troops brought in by the British to help secure order. The colonial propaganda campaign was so successful that forty years later, when the fly was first fully described by a scientist, it was given

Dominion must be viewed as our tarnished legacy, one that has seen large portions of the natural world destroyed and numerous species driven to the brink of extinction.

the name Hessian Fly, a moniker that is still in use today.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s 1798 poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” involves a vessel that encounters hardship when one of its sailors kills an albatross, a senseless act of violence against nature with unforeseen consequences. Over 200

years later, Chris Jordan voyaged to Midway Island to document the destruction of the Laysan Albatross at the hands of mass consumption, a subject that was so emotional for the photographer that it would dominate the next decade of his career. The Book of Genesis presents two very different views of how humans should relate to nature, the so-called “dominion” and “stewardship” models. Dominion must be viewed as our tarnished legacy, one that has seen large portions of the natural world destroyed and numerous species

driven to the brink of extinction, the knowledge of our complicity in this loss the proverbial albatross around our neck. However, mere stewardship is not enough: we must celebrate nature and all it has to offer. As Chris Jordan notes,

we must allow ourselves to feel, to be awed and inspired by the beauty of the natural world, moved by the horror of environmental destruction and, armed with a strong sense of ethics, dedicated to the preservation of the cathedral of nature for the generations that come after.

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BOB STEELE is one of the leading bird photographers in the United States.



Summitt childhood home (Photo: April R. Summitt)

Naming Place, Mapping Place

CHEROKEE STORIES *of the* **TENNESSEE RIVER**

BY APRIL R. SUMMITT

I grew up in the mountains of Appalachia and experienced a rare childhood that could easily sound like a story from another century. We lived, as farmers do, by the cycles of the seasons, and our playground was the mist-shrouded forests and mountain-sides of the Cumberland Plateau. Our house was an old log cabin, heated by wood-burning stoves.

Trickling down the sides of the bluffs were mountain streams with fluctuating, seasonal flows. I delighted in their waterfalls and rapids, or their gentle trickles and secret pools. But what seemed most exciting were the excursions when my father took me and my siblings to watch the rust-colored barges pass the locks and dams along the Tennessee River. This



Lover's Leap (Photo: April R. Summitt)

large river has long been a major transportation system for the region. It was once dangerous and unpredictable with cyclical floods that devastated farmland and town alike. When the Tennessee Valley Authority Dam system was completed in the 1930s, the river became tame and reliable, although drought can still bring its levels dangerously low. The TVA system generates a large percentage of the region's electricity and is still one of the most prestigious employers in the river valley.

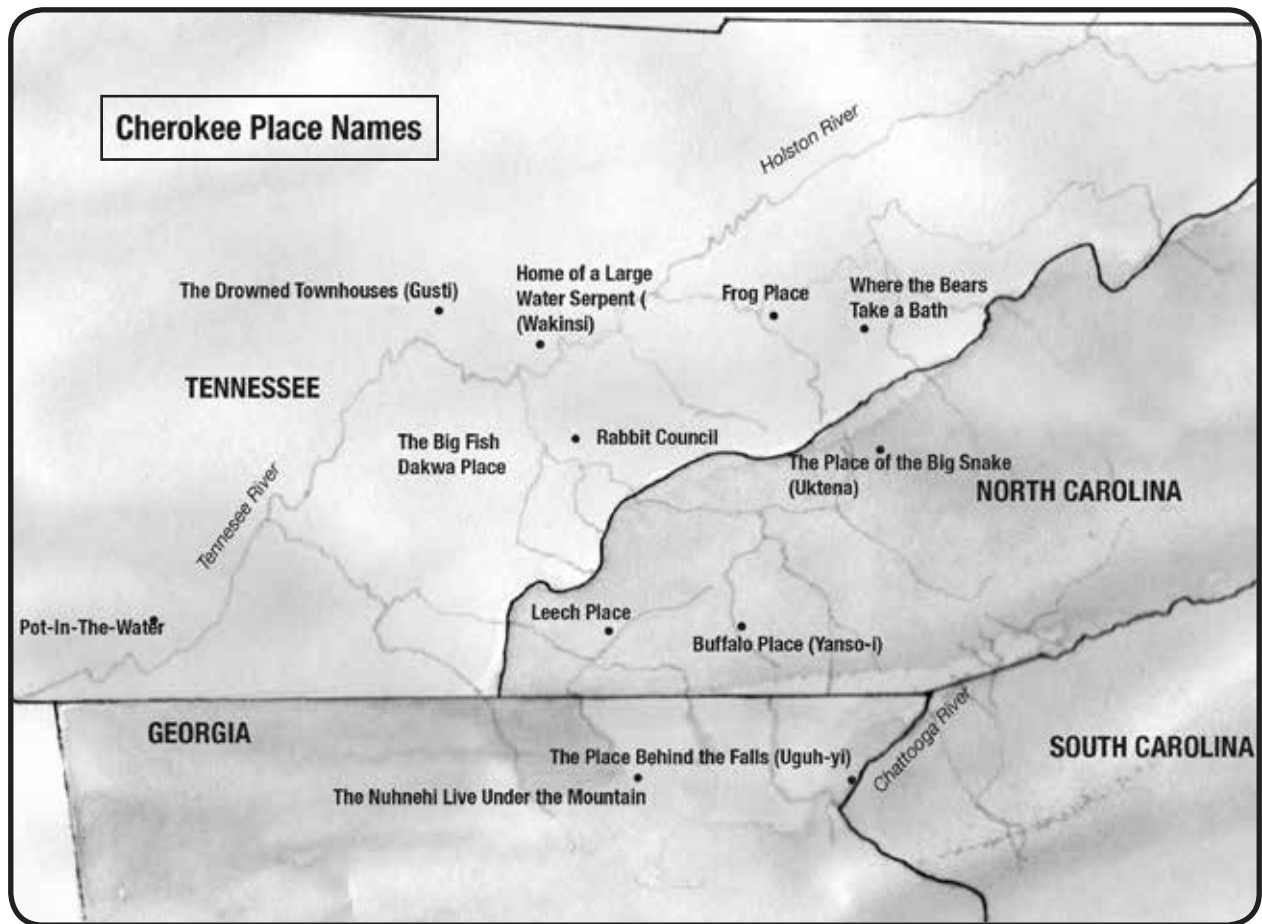
The story of the TVA, however, is only one part of the Tennessee River's history. In order to fully understand its importance, one needs to trace backward past Civil War battles and Scottish colonial settlers, to an even earlier story. Not far from the mountain where I grew up, the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation has its home. Studying the river's story means studying the indigenous people who lived along its banks. The road up the mountain to my mother's house is marked as part of the 1838 Trail of Tears, where an estimated 4,000 Cherokees died on their forced march to Oklahoma Indian Territory. I grew up seeing those signs and hearing the stories of forced migration and loss.

As I pursued further study of the Cherokee people before and after the 1838 Removal, I visited the tribal elders

who told me amazing stories. Naturally, there were stories of battles with other native communities, tales of first contact with Europeans, trade, migration, and conquest. But the stories that surprised me were the ones they told about the river, the mountains, the fields and streams. Connected to each Cherokee story was a specific place that had a name. As I listened, their stories painted a mental map of Cherokee space. And through that space ran the Tennessee River as an important figure, an actor in the story as much as any human.

Although the exact meaning of the name "Tanasi" (Tennessee) is unknown, the Cherokee typically called all rivers "The Long Man" or "Long Person." Obviously, anthropomorphizing a river is not new. We sing songs about the Mississippi River as the "Old Man River." What was fascinating to me about the Cherokee stories was that rivers contained divine powers, held the spirits of ancestors, and were the dwelling places of mystical beings. The Long Man had his feet in the valley and his hair in the mountains.¹

Not only did the Cherokee see the river as a powerful being, they also explained various features of the river as the voice of the "long person" (water falls or rapids) or the results of some supernatural occurrence. For example, one particular



place in the river, about eighteen miles below the site of the old Fort Loudon, is a place the Cherokee call Gusti. They believed that an old Cherokee townhouse once washed down the river with all the inhabitants gathered inside for a dance. Any Cherokee paddling past the location believed that the dome-shaped rock visible under the water at that site was the old townhouse now turned to stone. They sometimes heard drumming and dancing, and threw food into the water as they passed the spot.

Another interesting place on the Tennessee River, known as “the Suck,” is located about eight miles below Chattanooga. The Cherokee called these dangerous whirlpools “Pot-in-the-Water” because the swirling water looked like a boiling pot. The story behind this place-name involves a tale of several fishermen caught in the whirlpool. A giant fish swallowed one of the men, but he managed to survive and later told of seeing a house at the bottom of the river where many people lived and called to him to join them.

The Long Man had his feet in the valley and his hair in the mountains.

In this way, Cherokee assigned meaning to geographic features by creating stories that described and explained the natural environment. They also used the stories to explain other phenomena, such as baldness. At a point in the Tennessee River where Toco creek flows into it, there is a place the Cherokee called Dakwai, or “Dakwa Place.” This location was the home of a giant fish called Dakwa who once swallowed a warrior trying to cross this place. The thrashing of this giant fish caused rough waters in this location, which could easily capsize a canoe. The warrior swallowed by Dakwa in the story managed to cut himself out of the fish’s belly with a mollusk shell. Before he managed to escape, however, the juices in the fish’s belly burned off the warrior’s hair, and he was bald ever after.

The “Long Man” was both a conduit between worlds and a source of healing and spiritual power. In the first capacity, the river is the home of various ancestors or other immortal beings. In the previous stories about the “Pot-in-the-Water”



Stream on Walden's Ridge (Photo: April R. Summitt)



Pot-in-the-Water (Photo: April R. Summitt)

and the stone townhouses at “Gusti,” people were living under the water, dancing and calling out for any hapless fishermen to join them. The story speaks of “Nunnehi” or immortals who lived in the waters and were responsible for carrying the townhouse away. The Cherokee believed these people under the water were their ancestors; ones who had died and gone to live with the “Nunnehi.” Waterfalls were often viewed as doorways to the underworld or land of immortals and mysterious creatures.

Another story tells of a large snake or serpent that lived in the river. To see the serpent was an evil omen and the

story tells of a man whose child died shortly after he saw the serpent. One Cherokee storyteller told of people who lived in the water and rode through rivers into the underworld on the backs of rattlesnakes that were as big as horses. That both good and evil could live in the water emphasizes its nature as connector between upper worlds of good and light, and the lower world of darkness and evil. It also reveals the importance of water as a source of power that supported magical beings of both sorts.

In fact, any real power wielded by Cherokee medicine men ultimately derived from the water. Ethnographers

describe the process of “Going to Water” as part of most Cherokee ceremonies and rituals. In the yearly Green Corn ceremony, the Cherokee gave thanks for sustenance and celebrated the harvest. Part of the ceremony is a “solemn procession, to purify themselves in running water.” A modern-day Cherokee storyteller Freeman Owle states that in the old days, Cherokee people “went to water” every morning to purify themselves of “any thoughts or feelings” that might separate the person from his or her human and animal family. They believed that running water, or the “Long Person,” would bring them health, if asked properly. Although everyone bathed in the water as a daily ritual, special healing and prayers for long life or healthy childbirth were conducted by medicine men who used the water as a conduit of spiritual power.

What all of these stories do is create a map the Cherokee used to understand the world and their place in it. When the Cherokee were removed from the banks of the Tennessee River, it was more than a political and emotional loss, it was also a cosmological disaster. The places where once ancestors and animals interacted were gone. The gateways between mystical worlds were closed, and the river that seemed to matter for everything was left behind. What did it now mean to be a Cherokee?

Similar ethnohistories have been written about the Apache tribe in the southwest. In his book, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, Keith Basso describes how tribal elders taught their children.² Similar to some stories I heard from Cherokee elders, Apache elders could communicate values to their children. By simply pointing to a hill or bend in the river, a father could say, “remember Snake Mountain” and the child would know the story of that place and a specific lesson connected to it. When such places are lost to strip mining or buried beneath a dam’s reservoir, vital parts of a people’s worldview and identity is also lost.

Yet there are positive stories to tell. The restoration of a wetland in the Delta of the Colorado River brings back to life parts of the cultural map of the Cucupa people. Replanting a mountain forest near the Tennessee River protects its riparian ecosystem from further decline, preserving part of the Cherokee story. I have spent most of the past three decades teaching many different types of history: mostly western, largely American, but interspersed with courses on world civilizations, globalization, and the history of engineering. In all of my courses, I talk about

the environment and the role it plays in the human story. Through this new lens, students learn to view rivers or mountains as active players in history. And as they do, their discussions and assignments begin to reveal their own connections to place, whether urban or rural. As my students learn to recognize, all of our stories have been influenced by the natural world we inhabit. The story of a river is the story of us. And knowing the story of our relationship with the environment may be the best hope for both its future and ours.

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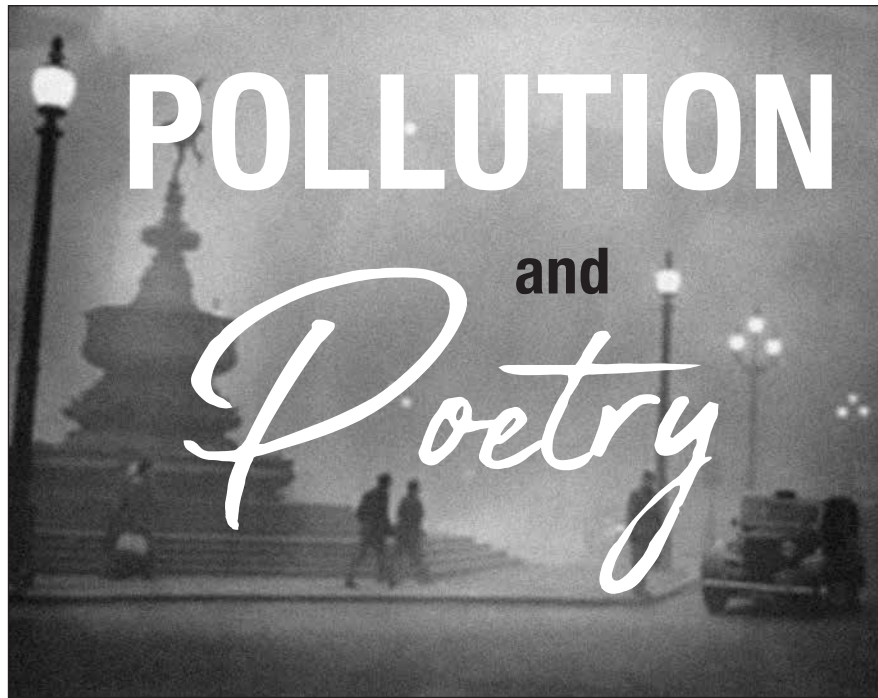
End Notes

1. It is interesting to note that the earliest records of Cherokee stories of place or origins were recorded by male anthropologists. In most of those, the river is anthropomorphized as male. In the interviews I recorded with tribal elders, the river is almost always referenced as non-gendered—the “Long Person.”

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Piccadilly Circus, London, 1952.

BY LORA E. GERIGUIS

Environmental anxiety is not a twenty-first-century innovation, nor is it a product solely of twentieth-century corporate globalism, or even an invention of nineteenth-century industrialization. Instead, we can trace evidence of human awareness of our interconnections with and dependence upon nature back much earlier, for example, to the Dark Ages in England. The discovery of coal and its fuel properties in the 1300s was quickly stigmatized by the English as being accompanied by an unpleasant sulfur smell suggestive of hell fire and clouds of smoke that laced every surface with corrosive dust. King Edward (1442–1483) banned the burning of coal

The discovery of coal and its fuel properties in the 1300s was quickly stigmatized by the English as being accompanied by an unpleasant sulfur smell suggestive of hell fire and clouds of smoke that laced every surface with corrosive dust.

and established penalties to prevent the ill effects of usage, but his measures did not deter a population driven to satisfy its needs for cooking and warmth, particularly during the unusually cold spells that periodically marked the pre-modern era, known as the “Little Ice Age.”¹ Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603) feared England’s tree supply was being dangerously exhausted by the over-forestry demanded of the economically critical and militarily sensitive building and shipping trades, as well as wood’s continued use by the population as a fuel source, and so sought to study the problem throughout her reign.² Long-held assumptions about the inexhaustibility of nature were being challenged by the

evidence of such environmental stress-points well before the words of William Shakespeare's poetry were first spoken on the stage of the Globe theatre.

By the seventeenth century, London was already choking on its air pollution. The pervasiveness of the smoke from coal usage inspired the earliest known print publication to specifically identify pollution as a problem and to argue for a solution to it. In *Fumifugium: Or the Inconvenience of the Air and Smoak of London Dissipated*,³ John Evelyn addressed King Charles II (1630–1685) by dramatizing in biblical terms what the capital city of London had become, a “hell on earth,” caused by the ever-present “Hellish and dismal Cloud of SEA-COAL” generated by the unrestricted burning of coal within the city limits, by industry in particular and households to a lesser extent.⁴ Evelyn warned, “this pestilent smoke... corrodes the very iron, and spoils all the movables [household goods] leaving a soot on all things that it lights: and so fatally seizing on the lungs of the inhabitants, that the cough and the consumption spares no man.”⁵ A later editor of Evelyn's work makes a point of comparing the high death-toll among London's children resulting from pollution to the practices of deliberate infanticide typified by ancient Greek and Roman cultures: “We shudder and are shocked at the barbarity of it, but at the same time are accustomed to read with great composure of the deaths of thousands of Infants, suffocated every Year, by Smoke and Stenches which good policy might in a great measure remove.”⁶

Evelyn's proposed solution to London's pollution problem was to outlaw the industrial use of coal inside the city and to plant a hedge of trees and flowers around the city to act as a filter for the air and a beatifying boundary line—a suggestion quite prescient in its science and precociously suggestive of modern city planning practices. As evidence of the merit of limiting coal burning in the city, Evelyn recalls a year when “Newcastle was besieged and blocked up” due to war thereby preventing the mining of coal and limiting its use in London as a season when the gardens produced “such plentiful and infinite quantities of Fruits, as they never produced the like either before or since.”⁷ Unfortunately, Evelyn's plans for ameliorating pollution in London were ignored by King Charles, who was described later as so “negligent and dissipated a Patron” for his rejection of Evelyn's advice.⁸ *Fumifugium* was reprinted by concerned citizens five times over the next three hundred years, indicating that his articulation of the problems of pollution held sway well into the twentieth century.⁹

By the eighteenth century, at a time of already high infant mortality, Londoners understood that their children died at a significantly greater rate than did their country cousins.¹⁰ Hetty Wright (1697–1750), sister of John and Charles Wesley who went on to found Methodism, lived in London with her husband, who operated a lead-works shop adjacent to their house. Tragically, all of the Wright children died in infancy, a fact that biographers say Hetty blamed on their family living so close to the lead-works shop, precisely the kind of industry fueled by coal.¹¹ Wright commemorated the loss of one daughter on “the second day of its birth” in a 1733 poem, by metaphorically evoking coal smoke as the specter of death:

That whene'er that fatal cloud
Must thy radiant temples shroud;
When deadly damps, impending now,
Shall hover round thy destined brow,
Diffusive may their influence be,
And with the blossom blast the tree!¹²

The references to “fatal cloud,” “shroud,” and “deadly damps” are unmistakably coal-related images. The “shroud[ing]” of her daughter's temples by the “fatal cloud” is reminiscent of Evelyn's disgust that London “should wrap her stately head in Clouds of Smoke and Sulfur.”¹³ The “damps” are a direct evocation of the various gases (e.g. methane) known to regularly leak out of fissures of coal mines, often leading to explosions that killed many miners.¹⁴ The “diffusive” quality of these gases meant they could accumulate and spread to other areas of the mine, a property the poet-mother calls upon in her grief to express her desire to die with her child (“with the blossom blast the tree”). Wright's imagery is also strongly suggestive of the terminology employed by Timothy Nourse in 1700 to describe the dangers of coal pollution to the very young: “new-born Bodies, like tender Plants, or Blossoms, are soon blasted by the Sulphureous [sic] Exhalation.”¹⁵ Regrettably, wide-spread recognition that coal was killing the kids did nothing to reverse trends towards greater economic dependence on a fuel source that England had in such large supply: “by 1700, Britain was probably mining five times more coal than the rest of the world combined.”¹⁶

Poetry of this period documents a consciousness of pollution, either through negative description of pollution's harm (as seen in Wright's poem), or idealized depictions of the clean-aired country-side as a pollution-free zone.

Sometimes both themes are addressed by the same poet, as can be exemplified by Mary Barber's "To a Lady in the Country" (1728), with its reference to herself being stuck in smoky Dublin (where she "very seldom see[s] the sun" due to that city's high level of coal usage), while her aristocratic lady-friend (and patron) enjoys the pure air of the country.

Whilst lovely Landscapes you survey,
And peaceful pass your Hours away,
Refresh'd with various blooming Sweets;
I'm sick of Smells and dirty Streets,
Stifled with Smoke, and stunn'd with Noise

.....

"O! would kind Heav'n reverse my Fate,
Give me to quit a Life I hate,
To flow'ry Fields I soon would fly;
Let others stay—to cheat and lye.
There is some blissful Solitude,
Where eating Care should ne'er intrude,
The Muse should do the Country Right,
And paint the glorious Scenes you slight."

When she wasn't being entertained by generous patrons in their country houses, Barber's lower-class status kept her living in the city ("a life I hate"), which certainly aggravated her asthma, often to a debilitating level.¹⁷ Beyond her physical and medical challenges, note the direct association made by Barber between the material filth of Dublin (the "Smells and dirty Streets") and the moral corruption of city life ("Let others stay—to cheat and lye"), which became a mainstay of the way city and country life were contrasted during the period.

Although poets and other people have long recognized humanity's responsibility to live in the world without harming it, to be both good stewards and appreciative curators of nature, we've repeatedly failed to live up to that divine calling. Sarah Dixon (1671–1765) in her poem, "Spring" (1740), recalled "happy Eden" before the fall as filled with "delightful Greens," where "Perfumes, did through the Air diffuse."¹⁸ Dixon likens Adam and Eve's fall into sin as a blow struck by humanity against nature: the "Elements were all at Peace with Man,/Till he, himself, the dangerous War began."¹⁹ There is a striking similarity between Dixon's thesis in "Spring" and the argument made more than two hundred years later by Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring* (1962), where she predicted a future, fabled, even Edenic "town in the heart of America" that would experience a "spring without voices" due to the

polluting of our environment by unrestricted commercial use of pesticides: "No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves."²⁰

Carson's predictions might well have been informed by London's Great Fog of 1952, when unusually cold weather conditions prompted a high rate of coal usage, the smoke of which was held close to the ground due to an anticyclone hanging over the region. At least 4,000 people (perhaps as many as 12,000) died during the four days of the event from the same breathing ailments that Evelyn described in 1661.²¹



Nelson's Column, December 1952 (Photo: N T Stobbs)

The Clean Air Act of 1956 and other measures taken to improve air quality were a direct response to the mid-century tragedy;²² perhaps London's politicians were finally moved to action because the large-scale calamity was well photographed and widely publicized. In January 2018, London papers reported another cold weather fog/smog event was expected; they notified the public that, while reminiscent of 1952, the "modern version will only be moderately polluted."²³ What would Evelyn say of this limited and severely delayed implementation of his clean air vision?

In the 1970s, Francis Schaeffer reminded Christians that our divinely ordained relationship with nature "should not only be for aesthetic reasons—though that would be enough reason in itself, because beautiful things are important—but we should treat [creation] with integrity because this is the way God has made it."²⁴ Aesthetics can be a means of planting the seeds of an environmental enthusiasm

that will bear the fruit of more sustainable practices. As a professor who teaches British literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, I'm challenged to make poetry of a distant time and a seemingly ancient language accessible to contemporary, technology-native, visually-literate college students. Ironically, the environmental anxiety of that earlier period has proven to be bridge of commonality that students can cross to meet the poets of the past. The ability for students to read both environmental anxiety and enthusiasm for nature in the works of the past brings the otherwise 'alien' period into clearer focus, so that it can be appreciated—even embraced—as a means of better understanding their own present-day relationship with the still imperiled world.

Further Reading

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. 50th anniversary edition. Introduction by Linda Lear. Boston: Mariner Books, 2002.

Freese, Barbara. *Coal: A Human History*. New York: Penguin, 2003.

Schaeffer, Francis A. *Pollution and the Death of Man: A Christian View of Ecology*. 11th printing. Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 1980.

End Notes

1. "Europe had by this time entered into its so-called Little Ice Age, a period that would last through the 1700s. On average, this was the coldest period since the last ice sheets had left the Northern Hemisphere; the region's climate was characterized by longer, harsher winters and the occasion freezing over of the River Thames." Barbara Freese, *Coal: A Human History* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 31. Freese is the source for the coal history related in the previous sentence as well (1).

2. "During Elizabeth's reign, dozens of commissions were sent out by the central government to investigate the wood shortage round the nation, and each one confirmed the serious decline of the forests." Freese, *Coal*, 30.

3. "Fumifugium" is a word Evelyn invented, combining two Latin words, one for smoke or vapors and the other for exile or banishment.

4. John Evelyn, *Fugifugium: Or the Inconvenience of the Aer and Smoak of London Dissipated* (1661), Reprinted by B. White (London: At Horace's Head, in Fleet Street, 1772), 18-19, Books.google.com. All references to Evelyn's work are quoted from this edition. Spellings have been silently modernized.

5. Evelyn, *Fugifugium*, 19-20.

6. B. White, "Preface by the Editor," *Fumifugium*, vii-viii.

7. Evelyn, *Fugifugium*. 21.

8. White, "Preface," *Fumifugium*, viii.

9. Evelyn's 1661 work was reprinted in 1772, 1825, 1930, 1933, and 1961 at the behest, not of literary or historical presses, but by environmental activist organizations, suggesting something powerful about Evelyn's ability to articulate the problems of pollution and the failure of government to resolve them.

10. B. White, writing in 1772, quotes the "yearly Bill of Morality" which reports that "near half the children that are born and bred in London die under two years of age." He contrasts this statistic with the knowledge that a "child born in a Country Village has an even change of living year forty year...the chance for Life in infants, who are confined in the present foul Air of London, is so small, that it is highly prudent and commendable to remove them for it as early as possible." B. White, "Preface by the Editor." *Fumifugium*, vii.

11. Headnote to "Mehetabel Wright (1697-1750)," David Fairer and Christine Gerrard, eds., *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, 3e (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 332.

12. Mehetabel ('Hetty') Wright ('nee Wesley'), "To an Infant Expiring the Second Day of its Birth" (1733), *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: The Annotated Bibliography*, 3e. Edited by David Fairer and Christine Gerrard (Alden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 333.

13. Evelyn, "To the Reader," *Fugifugium*, 8.

14. Freese, *Coal*, 49.

15. Timothy Nourse, *Campania Foelix* (1700). Quoted by Freese, *Coal*, 38.

16. Freese, *Coal*, 56.

17. Barber "suffered from chronic ill health [described as a "cough, and asthma"] and frequent spells of disability." Fairer and Gerrard, eds., Headnote to "Mary Barber (c.1685-1755)," *An Annotated Anthology*, 479.

18. Sarah Dixon, "Spring," *Poems on Several Occasions (Canterbury: J. Abree, 1740)*, 84. Books.google.com.

19. Ibid.

20. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, 50th anniversary edition, (Boston: Mariner Books, 2002), 2-3.

21. "The Great Smog of 1952," www.metoffice.gov.uk.

22. Ivana Kottasova. "Here's What London is doing about its pollution problem," *CNN Money* (24 January 2017). Money.cnn.com.

23. Ian Kano. "London Smog Hits Back," Insidecatholic.com (11 January 2018).

24. Francis A. Schaeffer. *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology*, 11th printing (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 1980), 54.



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Reading the Bible

WITH GREEN EYES

BY KENDRA HALOVIK VALENTINE



Windswept Morning, Eddleston, Scotland (Graphite Drawing by Wanda Thompson)

Every Spring Quarter I teach an upper division class on biblical interpretation that considers the gospel of Mark from a variety of perspectives. We try to intentionally notice the new insights we see in the gospel when we bring a particular perspective—like cultural or literary or postcolonial—to its stories and teachings. For example, the first verse of Mark’s gospel reads in English: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God” (Mark 1:1). A cultural perspective on this verse might explore the meaning of the word “gospel” in Mark’s day and emphasize that the word had the military connotations of a battle being won and a runner from the front lines shouting in nearby villages:

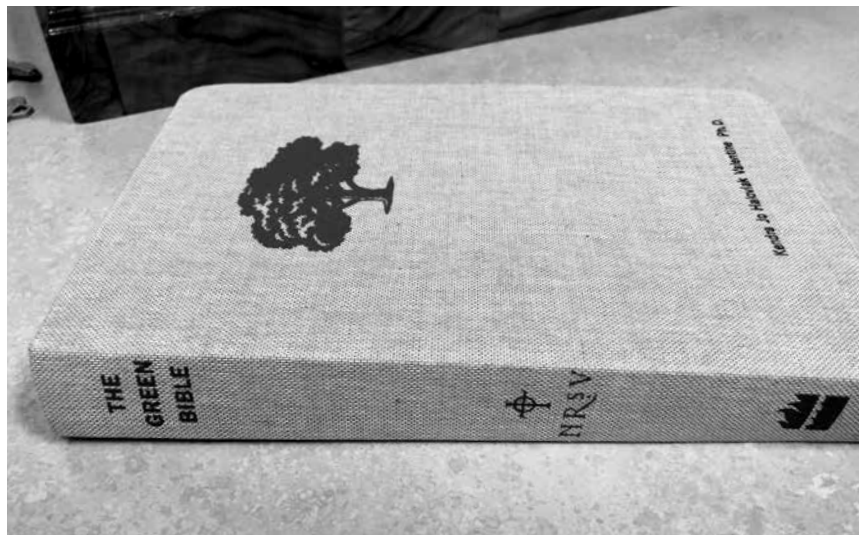
“Gospel! Gospel!” The villagers would hear: “Good news! The battle is going our way!” Given this cultural context, is Mark declaring at the start of his account of Jesus’ life: “Good news! The battle is going our way!”? A literary perspective on the first verse of Mark’s gospel might notice the literary echo between Mark’s “The beginning...” and the Torah’s first words: “In the beginning...” (Genesis 1:1). This perspective emphasizes the new creation occurring through the life of Jesus Christ. A postcolonial perspective would be aware that Mark wrote this gospel in the context of Roman rule in what had been Jewish territory. Such a reading might ask if Mark is intentionally contrasting Caesar’s “good news”

of military victory with the good news that comes with Jesus Christ. These are just three of the many perspectives students are challenged to consider as they seek to enrich their understanding of the gospel of Mark in particular, as well as the other works of Scripture.

Several years ago I became acquainted with another perspective that can be brought to the reading of our sacred texts. It happened when I read an article written by a colleague, Dr. Lora Geriguis, doing an ecocritical reading of a work by British novelist Daniel Defoe. An ecocritical reading seeks to foreground the environmental elements present in texts.¹ Upon reading her article, I immediately wondered: what might happen if my students read Scripture from an ecocritical perspective? I invited Dr. Geriguis to give a guest lecture on reading with an environmental lens. As she introduced students to ecocriticism and began reading Mark's gospel from that perspective, she helped us see new aspects of the stories. Since then, I have worked on several ecocritical readings of passages in Mark's gospel that I find particularly difficult. These are passages that raise questions inadequately addressed by other reading perspectives. These studies have brought a richness to the gospel for which I am very grateful.

Noticing Nature

Reading Mark's gospel with an eye to the environment causes one to pay special notice to places and locations in the narrative. For example, one quickly identifies the wilderness motif, including the four-fold repetition of the phrase "in the wilderness" in the first thirteen verses of the gospel (1:3, 4, 12, 13). The "wilderness" seems to be contrasted with the "country of Judea" and "Jerusalem" as people leave those areas to join John the Baptizer "in the wilderness." Bodies of water are given particular importance throughout this gospel, including the Jordan River, where people "in the wilderness" experience baptism (1:5–11) and physical nourishment (6:35–44; 8:4–8). The geographic



Kendra's Green Bible (Photo: Kendra Haloviak Valentine)

region known as "Galilee," located near the Sea of Galilee (actually a large lake), becomes a central focus when Jesus is first introduced as coming from "Nazareth of Galilee" (1:9). It is the region that becomes the headquarters of Jesus' ministry (2:1) as he shares the "good news" of "God's reign" (1:15) with the people in villages located around the Sea of Galilee. This Sea will feature as a kind of network hub around which Jesus moves and connects to other towns and people. But it will also present challenges to be overcome when storms arise (4:35–41; 6:45–52) and attempts to cross over to other towns must be postponed. In this gospel's final scene disciples are invited to meet Jesus again in Galilee (16:7), so that readers return full circle to this key location even as the story ends.

Other aspects of nature in Mark include food (2:18–20) and wine (2:22), grain fields and activities associated with an agrarian economy (2:23; 4:3–9, 13–20; 26–29; 30–32; 10:29–30; 12:1–12). The careful ecocritical reader will notice water and wind (6:47–52), fire and water (9:22), a fig tree (11:13–14, 20–25; 13:28–31), earthquakes and famines (13:8), the sun, moon and stars (13:24–25), the mention of clouds at key moments in the narrative (9:7; 13:26; 14:62), darkness on the land (15:33), the setting and rising of the sun (1:32; 16:2), a very large stone (16:3–4), and that important events take place on mountains (3:13; 9:2, 9; 11:23; 13:14)—especially the Mount of Olives (11:1; 13:3f; 14:26f).

In Mark's gospel unclean spirits (the demonic world) frequently enter into the narrative (1:21–28, 34; 3:11; 5:1–20;

Noticing nature can also aid us in making more thoughtful and theologically coherent interpretations of these fascinating stories.

7:24–30; 9:14–29). Scholars have suggested that for those living in a first-century cultural context, spirits merge the supernatural and the natural order of things. People in Mark’s day understood that a very thin line separated the demonic world from their own. Unclean spirits caused illness and deformity, public outbursts, and other unexplained and dishonorable behavior.

To notice aspects of nature in Mark’s gospel not only helps contemporary readers gain a better sense of the cultural assumptions of the agrarian world that provided the setting of Jesus’ life and ministry, but noticing nature can also aid us in making more thoughtful and theologically coherent interpretations of these fascinating stories.

Noticing Non-Human Creatures

Mark’s gospel also contains many references or allusions to non-human creatures. These references occur frequently enough that they warrant separate special

consideration. Reading Mark’s gospel with an environmental lens highlights the appearance of these creatures in the narratives. For example, very early in Mark’s description of Jesus he is with wild beasts (1:13). It is no surprise that fish would be referenced often, given the occupation of some of Jesus’

first followers (1:17; 6:38, 41, 43; 8:7). But references to non-human creatures also include pigs (5:1–20), sheep (6:34; 14:27), dogs (7:27–28), a camel (10:25), a colt (11:2, 4, 5, 7), doves (11:15), a lamb (14:12), and a rooster (14:30, 68, 72).

The presence of a story about pig farming in the gospel (5:1–20) raises particular questions for readers who are concerned about caring for God’s creatures because it seems to make Jesus responsible for the destruction of an entire sounder of 2,000 swine.² The story centers on Legion, a demon possessed man who is the first to greet Jesus during his first excursion into Gentile territory—the land of the Gerasenes. Often interpretations focus on the “uncleanness” of

Jesus casts the demonic power out of the man and out of the land; a land not ethnically his own, but clearly of concern to Jesus of Nazareth.



Blà Bheinn and Loch Slapin, Isle of Skye, Scotland (Graphite Drawing by Wanda Thompson)

the man (living among the dead) and the land (Gentile territory), being used to farm unclean animals. Legion's spiritual healing is underscored by Jesus cleansing the land of unclean animals. But is this interpretation adequate? Does it too easily dismiss the ethical questions about Jesus' destruction of nonhuman life? A careful study of this passage using an ecocritical perspective suggests several observations that address these concerns.

First, the "land" described in Mark 5:1–20 would be considered "unclean" not merely because it was Gentile land (a Jewish conclusion), but all peasants, Jewish and Gentile, would conclude that something was seriously wrong with this scene due to its ecological unsustainability. Reading this story with an eye to the descriptions of the environment led me to explore further about first-century farming practices. I learned that husbanding two thousand pigs would require huge amounts of water and a large grazing area, pointers to an exploitative economy. Villagers and farmers would not normally choose such use of environmental resources unless perhaps forced to do so. What has happened in this land of the Gerasenes? This led to a second insight from an ecocritical perspective: at the time of Mark's writing, this region was occupied by Roman soldiers who had murdered many of the villagers and exploited the land to raise pork for their own consumption, meat for the elite rather than local herds (sheep, cows) whose wool and milk would better serve the majority of the population. There are even textual clues to suggest that much of the local population may have had to move away in order to survive the environmental oppression of imperial Rome. This imperial power that oppresses the local population is presented in Mark's gospel as demonic.

Jesus casts the demonic power out of the man and out of the land; a land not ethnically his own, but clearly of concern to Jesus of Nazareth, in the region of the Galilee. From an ecocritical perspective, Mark 5:1–20 can be read as reimagining the land of Gerasa without pigs and without invading armies controlling the local economy and ecology.

Conclusion

On the occasion of my wedding, close relatives gave me *The Green Bible* with my name engraved on the cover. I guess they hoped our new household would be environmentally friendly. In this edition of the New Revised Standard Version, passages of Scripture that reference creation are placed in green type (much like the words of Jesus are

in red type in some Bibles). As we would expect, much of Genesis 1–2 is in green. But the surprising thing is how many sections of other books of Scripture are also highlighted as concerning creation and our environment. Reading Scripture with an environmental lens causes us to ask new questions and to make new connections, enriching the wonder of God's Word.

Further Readings

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The Green Bible: New Revised Standard Version. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008.

Kiel, Micah D. *Apocalyptic Ecology: The Book of Revelation, the Earth, and the Future*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017.

Tonstad, Sigve K. *The Letter to the Romans: Paul among the Ecologists*. England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2016.

End Notes

1. Robert Kern, "Ecocriticism: What Is It Good For?" in *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993–2003*, Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic, eds. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 260, says that ecocriticism "aims to recover the environmental character or orientation of works whose conscious or foregrounded interests lie elsewhere." Notice this observation from Hebrew Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 197: "if land is indeed a prism through which biblical faith can be understood, not only will specific texts take on different nuances and tones, but we shall find that the Bible in its entirety is about another agenda that calls into question our conventional presuppositions and our settled conclusions."

2. I explore this in a book chapter, "Liberating Legion: An Ecocritical, Postcolonial reading of Mark 5:1–20," in Melissa Brotton, ed., *Ecotheology and Nonhuman Ethics in Society* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2017), 199–215.



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WANDA THOMPSON's artwork can be found in her book, *Reflections on Scripture, Dandelions, and Sparrows*, Energion Publications: Gonzalez, Florida (2018). She and her husband Alden are long-time residents of the Walla Walla community.



Detail: *Cetacea Sempervirens* by Tim Musso

I N - D E P T H

A Year in the Life of the Church

The 2018 Unity Reports, Documents, Statements, and Responses

Introduction: How to Respond to the Ordination of Women?

COMPILED BY ALISA WILLIAMS AND BONNIE DWYER

Ever since the election of Ted N. C. Wilson in 2010, there has been an ongoing drama at the General Conference over how to respond to the ordination of women. A progression of committees, votes, and responses over eight years has failed to settle the issue of equality in ordination. The debate actually dates back to 1990, when changes in the Church Manual were approved that gave commissioned ministers—mainly women—the authority to perform weddings and other pastoral duties. That was the same year that a General Conference Session vote denied women actual ordination. The inequality of this two-track system has been discussed repeatedly since then, but not resolved, because the inequality remains in place. (See Kendra Haloviak Valentine’s “Recent History of Adventist Women in Ministry” on p. 5)

Wilson began his presidency by establishing the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) in 2012. It held meetings in 2013–2014 that were supposed to help shape the conversation at the 2015 General Conference Session. Instead, a proposal was put forward to give divisions the ability to make their own decisions on women’s ordination. It was defeated. However, even before that vote was taken, two unions, pointing to Working Policy, which places ordination as a responsibility of the unions, went to their constituencies for a decision on the matter. In 2012, both the Pacific Union Conference and the Columbia Union Conference constituencies voted overwhelmingly to ordain without regard to gender, and proceeded to do so.

The discrepancy between the union constituency votes and the General Conference session votes has led President Wilson to present some measure to the General Conference Executive Committee each year for the last three years to discipline the unions that voted to ordain women. In the process, the debate has moved past women’s ordination to church authority, unity, and compliance. In 2016, in the name of unity, he proposed disbanding the non-compliant unions and putting them under General Conference control. The General Conference Executive Committee sent that proposal back and created a Unity Oversight Committee to come up with a different solution. In 2017, the Unity Oversight Committee proposed a system of sanctions to be meted out on the officers of the offending unions, requiring them to sign a loyalty oath, and taking away voice and vote if their employing entity was found to be out of compliance with General Conference actions and policy. At Annual Council (AC) 2017, the proposed “loyalty”

document, “Procedures for Reconciliation and Adherence in Church Governance,” was voted down.

Shortly following AC 2017, it was announced that Thomas Lemon had been removed from chairing the UOC. Lemon had stated during his AC report that during his meetings with division and union leadership over the past year, “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.” Many speculated that this report led to his departure from the committee chairmanship.

In 2018, the Unity Oversight Committee surveyed division and union leaders about the next steps to be taken. Committee members also went to division offices to speak with their representatives.

Compliance Committee System Created

Then in July, the committee released its proposal, “Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions,” that introduced the concept of Compliance Review Committees as well as discipline actions to be taken against union officers of non-compliant entities. Reaction to the proposal was swift and loud. It continued for the next two months, with the General Conference responding primarily to the General Conference Executive Committee through the Committee’s newsletter. At the Annual Council meeting of the Executive Committee, held in Battle Creek, Michigan, the “Regard for” document was approved. The response to the Battle Creek action came in November when the North American Division voted to ask the General Conference to rescind the Battle Creek vote and to quickly bring its tithe to parity with other divisions. The General Conference responded to the NAD with a video that has evoked more videos and responses. As of early December, the Compliance Committees had not yet met. What follows are key documents and stories from the many that were posted on the *Spectrum* website. In September, Alisa Williams created a timeline with links to all the many stories leading up to Annual Council. It can be found here: www.spectrummagazine.org/news/2018/responses-church-entities-gcs-compliance-attempts-and-timeline-key-events.

A Year in the Life of the Church

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 52** Introduction: How to Respond to the Ordination of Women
- 55** General Conference Re-Asks the Questions of 2017
- 57** Unity Oversight Committee Survey Results
- 60** Validity of Unity Survey Questioned
- 64** Spring Meeting Postlude
- 66** A Troubling Disconnect
- 69** Compliance Document Moves Forward after Administrative Committee Approval
- 70** Key Document: “Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions”
- 74** Adventism’s Shocking Fulfillment of Prophecy
- 81** Key Illustrations: General Conference Governance Committees and Process Overview
- 82** Official Responses to Proposal for Compliance Committees
- 84** The Unity I Would Like to See: An Open Letter to the General Conference
- 89** Approval of the “Regard for” Document: Observations on the Compliance Discussion
- 91** Statements after Annual Council Compliance Vote
- 96** Confounding Conundrums: A Response to Mark Finley’s “Mystical Myths” Article
- 103** North American Division Votes Request for Tithe Parity
- 107** NAD Calls for GC Compliance Document to be Rescinded
- 109** Hooey and Credulity
- 113** South Pacific Division Asks GC to Reconsider Women’s Ordination at GC Session in 2020
- 114** Church Members and Official Entities Respond to the General Conference Unity Video



A SURVEY TO START THE YEAR

The General Conference sent out a survey to division and union presidents asking for their views on what membership in their territories felt on several issues, essentially asking the same questions that were sent back to committee at AC 2017. The six-question survey was followed by an official announcement from the Unity Oversight Committee (UOC) concerning the appointment of a new chair, Mike Ryan, and the UOC’s plans for an “open and transparent” process.

General Conference Re-Asks the Questions of 2017

BY BONNIE DWYER | AUGUST 24, 2018

General Conference officials are seeking the opinions of church leaders about the views of their membership by doing a simple poll of division and union conference presidents. They are asking the presidents essentially the same questions that were sent back to committee for further review at Annual Council 2017, but this time they are asking that the presidents base their answers on their view of the opinions of their membership rather than on their own personal opinion.

The consultation being sought from the divisions and unions came to them in the form of a questionnaire from the Unity Oversight Committee (UOC) that asked the following questions:

- 1) Should the General Conference Unity Oversight Committee appoint a team to listen sensitively, counsel, and pray with the presidents of unions not in compliance with voted actions of General Conference Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee?
- 2) Should there be further organizational consequences for unions that do not comply with voted actions of General Conference Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee?
- 3) Should church leaders be asked to sign a document saying that they will follow voted actions of General Conference Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee?
- 4) Should presidents of unions not in compliance with voted actions of General Conference Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee be allowed to speak (i.e. have voice) at meetings of the GC Executive Committee?
- 5) Should presidents of unions not in compliance with voted action of General Conference Sessions

and of the GC Executive Committee be allowed to vote in meetings of the GC Executive Committee?

- 6) Should presidents of unions not in compliance with voted action of General Conference Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee be allowed to serve on standing committees or ad hoc subcommittees of the GC Executive Committee?

The first question in the survey is a rephrasing of the action that was voted by the Annual Council in 2016. Questions 2–6 are a reshaping of the 2017 document that was sent back to the Unity Oversight Committee for further work. At that time, much was made by Executive Committee members of being asked to vote on a fourteen-page document without time to consider what was in the document. Now church leaders are being asked to project the opinions of the entire church membership, which has never been given any explanation about why the questions would be asked in the first place. Re-asking the questions could be seen as doubling down on the proposed actions. Or, is this the action of an administration that is not used to losing a vote on a major issue asking the questions again, hoping to get the answer it wanted to hear originally?

Recently, there had been some indications that advisers to General Conference President Ted Wilson were suggesting that the whole process be slowed down, that he retool his tactics and strategy and not bring an action to the upcoming April Spring Meeting, because the 2017 Annual Council vote was being read as a message that the proposed action was punitive and vengeful rather than helpful. Will this survey revive the punitive proposal? Will it give the Unity Oversight Committee any new information about how to fulfill its assignment of reshaping the proposed action? How will unions and divisions figure out the views of their membership on these questions? The survey seems to create even more questions about the proposed actions.

BONNIE DWYER is editor of *Spectrum*.

February
2018

RESPONSES AND DIALOGUE

The Unity Oversight Committee (UOC) announced that of the 150 surveys sent to division and union presidents, 144 had been returned already (with a deadline of March 15), and that “dialogue meetings with world division leaders are currently taking place.”

March
2018

SUPPORT FOR CONSEQUENCES ANNOUNCED

At the end of March, the UOC announced the results of its six-question survey. Based on the results, the UOC concluded that “there is strong support for some kind of consequences for non-compliance,” as well as “strong support” for not allowing presidents of non-compliant unions to serve on committees, and “pronounced support” for not allowing these presidents to vote in GCC meetings.

Unity Oversight Committee Survey Results

BY UNITY OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

ADVENTIST NEWS NETWORK | MARCH 23, 2018

Results from a worldwide survey were presented to the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's General Conference (GC) Unity Oversight Committee on March 20, 2018, during a scheduled meeting held at the world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland.

The six-question survey was designed and administered by the church's Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR). The survey addressed issues relating to compliance with voted actions of the General Conference Session, the church's highest decision-making body, and its Executive Committee, which meets annually between the quinquennial sessions of the General Conference.

Following the process adopted by the Unity Oversight Committee in December 2017, the survey provides quantitative data, allowing the committee "to more accurately judge where the world Church leaders and members stand on these issues," according to Mike Ryan, chair of the committee. "This information will serve as a guide to the Unity Oversight Committee in defining consequences for unions who have not complied with votes of the GC Session and of the GC Executive Committee," he added.

The report, presented to the committee by the Director of ASTR, David Trim, featured survey data gathered from the presidents of the Church's thirteen world divisions, as

well as the Middle East North Africa Union, an attached field of the GC. In addition, the survey was sent to the 137 presidents of unions around the world.

"The union presidents answer directly to a grassroots constituency," said Ryan. Additionally, union presidents are members of the GC Executive Committee with an overview of global church events and actions. Unions comprise the constituency of the GC.

Survey Results

In his report, Trim stated that union and division presidents were requested to answer the six survey questions according to "what they believe is the view of the majority of members in their territory, as opposed to their personal opinion."

Trim noted that 100 percent of the surveys, sent out on January 18, 2018, had been received by March 4. He then presented each question, along with the data received, including 1) number and percentages of "votes" received; 2) number and percentages of union president "votes"; 3) percentage of union membership living in the territories represented by each vote.

Following are the questions and responses presented to the committee:

QUESTION 1

"Should the General Conference Unity Oversight Committee appoint a team to listen sensitively, counsel and pray with the presidents of unions not in compliance with voted actions of GC Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee?"

Response:

YES: 139 total votes (92 percent); 126 union president votes (92 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 90.56 percent.

NO: 10 total votes (7 percent); 9 union president votes (7 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 6.28 percent.

NOT ANSWERED: 2 total (1 percent); 2 union presidents; percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 3.16 percent.

QUESTION 2

“Should there be further organizational consequences for unions that do not comply with voted actions of GC Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee?”

Response:

YES: 108 total votes (72 percent); 97 union president votes (71 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 83.93 percent.

NO: 34 total votes (22 percent); 31 union president votes (23 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 12.17 percent.

NOT ANSWERED: 9 total votes (6 percent); 9 union presidents (6 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 3.9 percent.

QUESTION 3

“Should church leaders be asked to sign a document saying that they will follow voted actions of GC Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee?”

Response:

YES: 72 total votes (47.7 percent); 65 union president votes (47.4 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 60.6 percent.

NO: 77 total votes (51 percent); 70 union president votes (51.1 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 36 percent.

NOT ANSWERED: 2 total (1.3 percent); 2 union presidents (1.5 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 3.4 percent.

QUESTION 4

“Should presidents of unions not in compliance with voted actions of GC Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee be allowed to speak (i.e. have voice) at meetings of the GC Executive Committee?”

Response:

YES: 76 total votes (50.3 percent); 67 union president votes (48.9 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 34.3 percent.

NO: 67 total votes (44.4 percent); 63 union president votes (46 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 60.9 percent.

NOT ANSWERED: 8 total (5.3 percent); 7 union presidents (5.1 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 4.9 percent.

QUESTION 5

“Should presidents of unions not in compliance with voted actions of GC Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee be allowed to vote in meetings of the GC Executive Committee?”

Response:

YES: 56 total votes (37.1 percent); 50 union president votes (36.5 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 26.8 percent.

NO: 86 total votes (57 percent); 79 union president votes (57.7 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 67.9 percent.

NOT ANSWERED: 9 total (6 percent); 8 union presidents (5.8 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 5.3 percent.

QUESTION 6

“Should presidents of unions not in compliance with voted actions of GC Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee be allowed to serve on standing committees or ad hoc subcommittees of the GC Executive Committee?”

Response:

YES: 40 total votes (26.5 percent); 36 union president votes (26.3 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 15.5 percent.

NO: 100 total votes (66.2 percent); 91 union president (66.4 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 79.1 percent.

NOT ANSWERED: 11 total (7.3 percent); 10 union presidents (7.3 percent); percentage of world membership residing in those unions: 5.4 percent.

Conclusions Drawn

The following conclusions were drawn from the collected data:

There is overwhelming support for a GC team to meet with presidents of unions not in compliance, “to listen sensitively, counsel and pray.”

There is strong support for some kind of consequences for non-compliance.

There is also strong support for not allowing presidents of non-compliant unions to serve on standing or ad hoc committees of the GC Executive Committee.

There is pronounced support for not allowing presidents of unions not in compliance with voted actions of GC Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee to vote in meetings of the GC Executive Committee.

A majority of Church leaders oppose removing “voice” as well as vote from non-compliant union presidents.

Most Church leaders also oppose requiring union presidents to sign a document promising to abide by GC Session and Executive Committee actions.

Qualitative Data Gathering Continues

A preliminary report on qualitative data gathering was given by Hensley Moorrooven, secretary of the Unity Oversight Committee. Moorrooven reported that qualitative data is continuing to be gathered through personal visits and dialogues with division and union leaders worldwide. Qualitative data is also being gathered from GC institutions and the GC Leadership Council, composed of GC officers and departmental leaders.

So far, eleven such dialogues have taken place, according to Moorrooven, with many more scheduled for the near future.

“Of the dialogues that have taken place,” added Ryan, “there appears to be a positive correlation between the quantitative and qualitative data.”

Ryan pointed out, however, that in the end, “data is a guide. It can be empirical, but not necessarily infallible, information. It’s a guide, not an absolute. But we will be informed by the data in crafting what is brought to the Executive Committee during Annual Council 2018.”

This article originally appeared on the Adventist News Network.

April
2018

SPRING MEETING SURPRISE

Spectrum asked Adventist researchers to analyze the methodology and findings of the Unity Oversight Committee's (UOC) survey, and one provided a detailed analysis that was published on the *Spectrum* website.

At the April Spring Meeting of the Executive Committee, there was no discussion of the unity controversy. But then, just as the meeting closed, there was news of a document that had not been discussed, titled "Uplifting Jesus," giving criteria for evaluating independent ministries.

Validity of Unity Survey Questioned

BY WILLIAM W. ELLIS | APRIL 20, 2018

As the conflict has continued around the ordination of women pastors and issues of compliance with voted actions of General Conference Sessions and of the General Conference Executive Committee, the Unity Oversight Committee (UOC) requested that the Office of Archives, Statistics and Research (ASTR) conduct a global survey. The results of the survey, titled a "Questionnaire on Compliance," have been published in the Adventist News Network post dated March 23, 2018 and on *Spectrum*. The General Conference said that the findings represent the profile of global Seventh-day Adventist opinion on the issue of unity and compliance in the SDA Church. Because it is in the interest of us all to understand the profile of opinion among us on this and other issues, I offer these comments on the methodology and findings of this undertaking in the hope that they will help to clarify the relationship between the stated purpose of this study and its findings.

Study Purpose

Because this study is so important in the development of Church policy on a looming, divisive issue, it is essential to consider the authenticity of its findings. The key to this is the way the findings were generated by the data said to support them. And the very foundation of data generation is the methodology by which they were produced.

However, these issues cannot be engaged without first considering the study's purpose. What was it after? What did it seek to discover or elucidate? The prelude to the survey's questions states this:

The General Conference Unity Oversight Committee would like to explore the opinion of the world field, represented by division and union presidents, on the issue of compliance with voted actions of General

Conference Sessions and of the General Conference Executive Committee.

We request that you, as a division/union president, record what you believe is *the view of the majority of members in your territory* (as opposed to your personal view) on the following questions. [Underlining added by author.]¹

Another indication of the survey's purpose can be surmised from a statement about how the data will be used by the Committee.

... the survey provides quantitative data, allowing the committee 'to more accurately judge where the world Church leaders and members stand on these issues,' according to Mike Ryan, chair of the committee. 'This information will serve as a guide to the Unity Oversight Committee in defining consequences for unions who have not complied with votes of the GC Session and of the GC Executive Committee,' he added.²

This statement presupposes that there is a shared understanding among the leadership and general membership on the meaning of "compliance" and that division and union presidents can accurately know and represent the view of the majority of members in their territory.

Two Parts of the Study

The methodology of the study—the way its data were generated—has two main parts: a survey of 150 top Seventh-day Adventist leaders, and a "qualitative" part involving conversations with a number of these leaders. There are five aspects of the study addressed here. Two are aspects of the survey, its sample and instrument. Two are aspects of the qualitative component, the extent to which it was systematic and its documentation. Finally, the findings of the two study components are addressed as they are related to the study's stated purpose.

The Survey Questionnaire/Instrument

A basic issue in any sample survey is the extent to which it represents the population from which it is drawn. The best sample in any case is a strict probability sample in which every element of that population has a known and equal probability of being selected into the sample. This is

rarely achieved because the response rates of respondents in a strict probability sample are seldom 100 percent. The question then becomes the extent to which the almost inevitable compromise with this standard corrodes the representativeness of the sample.

The sample in this study is not at all a probability sample, but one apparently based on the convenience of the investigators as it was easy for them to poll 150 of the most senior Church leaders who were supposed to be able to accurately know and report the opinions of congregants in their massive units. It is a problematic leap to get from leadership beliefs about the opinions of members of their groups to the opinions of the members themselves. It is misleading to assert that any leader can accurately know and report the range of opinion of hundreds of thousands of others in the group, particularly when no attempts to systematically gather information have been done within these large groups. Claiming to know the opinions of those in one's union or division does not make it so, and it is a gross misrepresentation of the data to claim that it does. It is like saying that all the Cardinals and Bishops of the Catholic Church can accurately know and report the range of Catholic opinion on things like contraception or abortion.

The questionnaire, attached as Exhibit 1, is also problematic.³ The construction of instruments, often called questionnaires or interview schedules, is an extremely important step in the sample survey process. The most credible organizations engaged in this kind of work are generally the more well-known and seasoned university survey research shops. They often work for months and sometimes years to create reliable and well-validated items—questions—for their surveys. This means simply that the well-validated items measure what we think they measure.

The questions in this survey are derived from various actions proposed in the document titled "Procedures for Reconciliation and Adherence in Church Governance Phase II" discussed at last year's Annual Council and referred back to the Committee.⁴ Likely, the committee wanted the wording of the questions to be consistent with the language in the compliance document. Yet the wording is important to the scientific nature of the survey process, findings, and conclusions. The six items in the Unity Oversight Committee survey are too long and too vague to meet this standard though some seem to be more valid than others. (See Exhibit 1.)

In question 1, the meanings of some of the major terms are not clear and subject to manifold interpretations: "listen sensitively," "counsel," "not in compliance."

In question 2, the concept of “organizational consequences” is unclear. Questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 are clearer, but they could certainly be sharpened and made more valid with a substantial period of application and honing. But if this could not be done because of the urgency of launching the survey, researchers would have been well-advised to consult existing, well-validated survey items and to base their new items on these.⁵ Even assuming that the items are reliable, meaning that they would consistently generate the same results when measuring the same opinions, the validity of

the six items of the survey is questionable. We cannot know with real confidence that they measure what we think they measure. And without the assurance that the convenience sample of 150 Adventist leaders represents the range of opinion of 20 million of us and that the survey items measure what we think they measure, we cannot be at all sure of the apparent survey results.

In addition, the use of a five-item scale for responses for each question, such as strongly favor, favor, no opinion, oppose, strongly oppose, instead of the bi-modal “yes” or “no”

Questionnaire on Compliance

The General Conference *Unity Oversight Committee* would like to explore the opinions of the world field, represented by division and union presidents, on the issue of compliance with voted actions of General Conference Sessions and of the General Conference Executive Committee.

We request that you, as a division/union president, record what you believe is the view of *the majority of members in your territory* (as opposed to your personal view) on the following questions. Please enter an X in the appropriate space and email this to trimd@gc.adventist.org

For each question, please answer Yes or No

<p>1. Should the General Conference Unity Oversight Committee appoint a team to listen sensitively, counsel and pray with the presidents of unions not in compliance with voted actions of General Conference Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee?</p>	<p>1. ___ Yes 2. ___ No</p>
<p>2. Should there be further organizational consequences for unions that do not comply with voted actions of General Conference Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee?</p>	<p>1. ___ Yes 2. ___ No</p>
<p>3. Should church leaders be asked to sign a document saying that they will follow voted actions of General Conference Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee?</p>	<p>1. ___ Yes 2. ___ No</p>
<p>4. Should presidents of unions not in compliance with voted actions of General Conference Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee be allowed to speak (i.e. have voice) at meetings of the GC Executive Committee?</p>	<p>1. ___ Yes 2. ___ No</p>
<p>5. Should presidents of unions not in compliance with voted actions of General Conference Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee be allowed to vote in meetings of the GC Executive Committee?</p>	<p>1. ___ Yes 2. ___ No</p>
<p>6. Should presidents of unions not in compliance with voted actions of General Conference Sessions and of the GC Executive Committee be allowed to serve on standing committees or ad hoc subcommittees of the GC Executive Committee?</p>	<p>1. ___ Yes 2. ___ No</p>

Comments and Suggestions:

FINAL SURVEY – Approved by UOC on June 9, 2018

Exhibit 1

responses would have produced a more varied range of positions on the studied compliance issues. Similarly, the addition of demographic data, such as age, ethnic background, length of service, and education, would have allowed for more nuanced findings on the opinion items.

Qualitative Data Collection

There are a number of well-accepted qualitative data collection methods in social analysis. One of them is nominally-scaled items in sample surveys, and some would argue that the six items in this survey are of this type. Other accepted qualitative methods include focus groups, in-depth interviews, simulations, and anthropological field studies and its cousin, participant observation studies. What the standards all of these methods have in common is that they must be systematic, and their procedures and results must be documented. Since there is no readily available documentation of the “personal visits and dialogues” with church leaders said to comprise the qualitative component of the unity project, it is impossible to know whether these conversations were appropriately systematic and documented. Therefore, it is difficult to be confident in the data generated and to draw conclusions about the consistency of the information from the “listening sessions” and the findings from the questionnaire. This is especially true given the lack of anonymity in both the “quantitative” and “qualitative” responses.

The Findings

The findings of systematic social research are typically reported in such a way that there is a clear and logical link between the research operations and the conclusions drawn. As in all such studies the very foundation of data generation is the methodology by which they were generated. In this study, the sample is not representative of the global body of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as no person in the general membership was in the sample, only a small number of its higher leaders. And the validity of the survey instrument is questionable. In the qualitative component of the study, we have no assurance that the data collection was systematic or well-documented. For these reasons, we can have little confidence in the study findings as a whole.

The Presentation of the Findings

The appropriateness of the presentation of the study findings are open to challenge by those who bear the standards for the conduct of systematic social research.⁶ In the first place, in the reportage of the findings, the proportion of the global Seventh-day Adventist population represented by Church

leaders responding “Yes” or “No” to survey questions is indicated, strongly suggesting that the responses represent the indicated proportion of the entire population under study. This is potentially misleading. Second, the identity of study respondents may be made known to some of the researchers apparently in such a way that individuals’ responses may be known. Any sample survey with such sensitive questions, ones that could lead to punishment of those who answer in ways that do not support leadership, should be absolutely anonymous in the sense that the responses of individuals could be known to researchers or anyone else. Otherwise, the survey can only be construed as an open plebiscite of followers by their leaders. How could that be presented as an adequate measure of opinion on sensitive issues?

It is this researcher’s hope that these observations will enhance our purpose in promoting the work of our Church in advancing the gospel.

Notes & References:

1. The instructions for the “Questionnaire on Compliance,” the questionnaire for this survey, are included below as Exhibit 1.
2. Adventist News Network. Survey results presented to Unity Oversight Committee: Qualitative Research Continues. <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2018-03-23/survey-results-presented-to-unity-oversight-committee-qualitative-research-continues/> [accessed April 5, 2018].
3. See Exhibit 1.
4. Adventist News Network. Procedures for Reconciliation and Adherence in Church Governance Phase II. <https://news.adventist.org/fileadmin/news.adventist.org/files/content/procedures-for-reconciliation-and-adherence-in-church-governance-phase-ii.pdf> [accessed April 11, 2018].
5. Among the many sources of well-validated survey items are the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan and the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago.
6. Note the findings have been reported in the Adventist News Network post of March 23, 2018 and in the *Spectrum* post also of that date. Adventist News Network. Survey results presented to Unity Oversight Committee: Qualitative Research Continues. news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2018-03-23/survey-results-presented-to-unity-oversight-committee-qualitative-research-continues/ [Accessed April 11, 2018]. *Spectrum Magazine*. Unity Oversight Committee Survey Results. <https://spectrum-magazine.org/print/8646> [Accessed April 11, 2018].

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Spring Meeting Postlude: “Uplifting Jesus” Document

BY BONNIE DWYER | APRIL 11, 2018

The General Conference Executive Committee completed its work early and was adjourned at noon on Wednesday, April 11. As the members were making their way to the airport a document that curiously never made it onto the agenda was posted on the Adventist News Network. Under the headline “An Invitation to Uplift Jesus: A Statement from the General Conference Executive Leadership and Division Presidents,” the document resembled in many ways the loyalty oath portion of the document sent back to committee from Annual Council 2017. This time the request for loyalty was being made to independent organizations, with the One Project being singled out as an example.

We appeal to all organizations and initiatives that are united with us in mission to reaffirm or to respond positively in their official communication channels to the following crucial questions.

Seven questions follow, touching on substitutionary atonement, the role of doctrine, understanding of the heavenly sanctuary, uniqueness of Adventism, literal six day creation, biblical authority and prophetic interpretation, support for church teaching on marriage and the family and LGBTQ relationships, and church membership in the light on Scripture. The full document follows below:

To honor and exalt Jesus is the foundational commitment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and undergirds its prophetic message expressed in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs. Salvation by Faith alone leading to a life of discipleship to Jesus is the goal of our mission. As we proclaim the three angels’ messages let us make sure that Christ stands at the center of all our activities and initiatives.

A number of entities both inside and outside the church organization have been founded for the purpose of exalting the name of Jesus. Such an honorable task also brings the challenge of proclaiming a Christ in harmony with His Word. It is our conviction that the Jesus whom Seventh-day Adventists are to follow and emulate is the One revealed in the Bible—the One who presented Himself as the Truth and upheld the authority of the Scriptures. It is of utmost importance that we never forget that Jesus identified Himself with “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). He is actually the Word (John 1:1).

Church leaders are often asked for advice on how to relate with some initiatives and organizations, some of which are well established and widely accepted, such as ASI-recognized entities, which have long cooperated with the church and its leadership. A more recent development is the One Project (now apparently transitioning to become the Global Resource Collective), about which some questions have been raised. Therefore, the General Conference executive leadership with Division presidents has decided to offer some guidance regarding the evaluation of any initiative seeking church endorsement.

We commend those who, prior to joining any initiative or movement, study for themselves to assess whether such movements are in accordance with the revealed will of God (Acts 17:11). As Jesus Himself advised us: “You will know them by their fruits” (Matt 7:16). He also gave the warning, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matt 7:21).

In harmony with the conviction expressed above that the name of Jesus must be uplifted in ways consistent with His propositional revelation in Scripture, we invite our church leaders and any concerned individuals to assess the biblical foundations of any ministry or evangelistic initiative in the light of Isaiah 8:20: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

The Church will be eager to work with all who share its prophetic message expressed in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs. In light of issues that have been raised regarding some recent initiatives, the following questions although not exhaustive provide some guidance for an assessment of such groups. We appeal to all organizations and initiatives that are united with us in mission to reaffirm or to respond positively in their official communication channels to the following crucial questions:

1. What does it mean to accept Jesus Christ? When we say we accept Christ is this a mystical Christ of experience only, or, does it mean an acceptance of the doctrinal truths He taught, or, both? Does such ministry or initiative uphold the substitutionary atonement of Jesus?

2. How do they understand the role of doctrine in Christian faith? Is there an organic connection between the person of Christ and the teachings or doctrines of Christ? Is there the understanding that knowing Christ necessarily includes knowing and living His teachings and the Biblical truths He taught?

3. What is their understanding and support of the message and mission the Adventist church in the light of its prophetic mission? How do they express their understanding of 1844 and Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary?

4. Do they have a clear understanding of the uniqueness of the Seventh-day Adventist movement? Are they clear in how Adventist faith differs from other evangelical denominations that exalt Jesus?

5. What is their understanding of creation? Do those involved in new ministries and initiatives believe that God created this world in six literal days and rested on the seventh day in the recent past as understood and voted in our 28 Fundamental Beliefs?

6. What is their understanding of biblical authority and prophetic interpretation? Do they accept the historicist explanation of Bible prophecy and do they share the Adventist understanding of the little horn of Daniel 7, the beast powers of Revelation 13 and the antichrist of Scripture, and that faithfulness to Christ will ultimately climax in a conflict over the law of God with the Sabbath at the center of that final controversy?

7. Due to current perceptions of gender and sexuality, which contradict the biblical teaching on marriage and the family as accepted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, these pertinent questions must also be asked: How do they understand gender identity and the question of LGBTQ+ relationships to church membership in the light of Scripture? Do they have a clear, unambiguous and biblical understanding of this subject?

Organizations, groups, or individuals that cannot affirm the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and provide clear and unambiguous answers to the questions above should not expect endorsement from the organizations of the Church. The General Conference executive leadership with Division presidents invites every member and entity of the church to uphold the name of Jesus by presenting him to the world and living according to His will. In doing so, Jesus must be proclaimed in connection with the truth as revealed in Scripture and understood by Seventh-day Adventists. Consequently, we reaffirm our utmost commitment, which is to preach "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).

—General Conference Executive Leadership and Division Presidents

May
2018

COMPLIANCE PROCESS DESIGNED

The General Conference announced that after “several months of dialogue and gathering data, the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Unity Oversight Committee (UOC) has begun outlining elements of a compliance process that will be considered by world church leaders later this year.” It was also announced that by the end of May, the UOC had met with twelve of the fourteen world church entities (there are thirteen divisions and one attached union). UOC Secretary Hensley Mooroooven called these meetings “very cordial and candid dialogues.”

July
2018

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE COMPLETES DOCUMENT

The General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM) announced that it had voted and approved a document recommended by the UOC on July 17. The document, “Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions,” along with the companion document, “Terms of Reference for Compliance Committees,” will now move on to the General Conference and Division Officers Committee (GCDO) for discussion, and finally, on to the GCC at October’s Annual Council. The “Regard for...” document calls for an hierarchical system to garner compliance where, if a matter remains unresolved, it will continue to move up the chain of command to the next-highest level of Church administration until it becomes resolved. If, “in the event the due process referenced above does not bring about compliance,” a graduated system will be applied to the non-compliant leader: 1) warning, 2) public reprimand, 3) being placed on removal for cause and subject to policy application.

Compliance Document Moves Forward after Administrative Committee Approval

BY UNITY OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
ADVENTIST NEWS NETWORK | JULY 18, 2018

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's General Conference Administrative Committee voted on Tuesday, July 17, a document recommended by the Unity Oversight Committee (UOC). The recommendations came after nine months of listening and consultation with church entities around the world and outlines a process of addressing entities not in compliance with the actions of a General Conference (GC) Session, the GC Executive Committee, or working policy. The outlined process includes setting up a number of compliance review committees that will address specific issues of non-compliance and will make recommendations to the General Conference Administrative Committee.

The Unity Oversight Committee was informed by quantitative and qualitative data gathered from church leaders worldwide as well as dialogues with the thirteen world divisions, General Conference Leadership Council, and GC institutions. Comments from Executive Committee members during previous Annual Councils were also considered.

The Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research was tasked with developing a questionnaire and administering a survey of all union and division presidents worldwide. All those surveyed submitted a response, even though in some cases they chose not to answer all questions. The results of the survey were published in a previous article, and showed that a majority of the world Church's union presidents favored some kind of process for dealing with non-compliance.

Following standard process and protocol, the document voted today by GC ADCOM will also be discussed by the General Conference and Division Officers Committee. It will then be sent to the GC Executive Committee at its Annual Council this October for consideration.

This article originally appeared on the Adventist News Network.

1 ADCOM/ADCOM to MLR-GCDO18AC+18AC(DIV)

2
3 113-18G REGARD FOR AND PRACTICE OF GENERAL CONFERENCE
4 SESSION AND GENERAL CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE
5 COMMITTEE ACTIONS
6

7 A sacred trust exists between church members and their elected Church leaders. Unity and trust
8 are strengthened as church members and organizational leaders commit to being led by the Spirit to
9 regard and honor the constituted decisions made by fellow church members and leaders.
10

11 “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”—Eph 4:3. “We are
12 coming to a time when, more than ever before, we shall need to press together, to labor unitedly. . . In
13 unity there is strength.”—2SM 374.
14

15 Where regard for and practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive
16 Committee actions have not been followed, these principles shall apply:
17

18 1. All perceived non-compliance shall officially be identified and reported by the
19 Administrative Committee of a conference and/or union and/or division successively to the next higher
20 organization, beginning with the administrative level of the Church closest to the matter. If any level of
21 organization does not report an issue of non-compliance, it becomes the responsibility of the next higher
22 organization.
23

24 2. Planning for and implementing compliance shall initially be the responsibility entrusted
25 to the administrative level of the Church closest to the matter.
26

27 3. Administrators dealing with any matter of perceived non-compliance shall exercise
28 Christian due process which will (a) include much prayer and dialogue, (b) provide a clearly written
29 statement defining the perceived non-compliance, (c) provide an opportunity for the executive officers
30 of the perceived non-compliant entity to provide both a verbal and written explanation, (d) create an
31 atmosphere by which compliance and unity may be achieved, and (e) provide a reasonable timeframe to
32 realize change and consistent progress.
33

34 If, in the opinion of the executive officers of the conference and/or union and/or division and/or
35 General Conference, change has been requested but has not been realized or there is no evidence of
36 consistent progress, the General Conference Administrative Committee may request the appropriate
37 General Conference Compliance Review Committee* to implement its terms of reference. If, in the
38 opinion of a General Conference Compliance Review Committee, reasonable time has been given for
39 discussion and review, the General Conference Compliance Review Committee may directly make
40 recommendations to the appropriate Administrative Committee.
41

42 An entity seeking appeal may do so directly to the assigned General Conference Compliance
43 Review Committee.* The appeal process made by the non-compliant entity shall be considered part of
44 the work of the General Conference Compliance Review Committee* as defined by its terms of
45 reference.
46

113-18G REGARD FOR AND PRACTICE OF GENERAL CONFERENCE
SESSION AND GENERAL CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE ACTIONS - 2

1 4. With sound judgment and prayerful discernment, administrators may use existing
2 General Conference working policies and guidelines as tools for resolving matters of non-compliance.
3

4 5. If the matter continues to be unresolved, the next higher level of Church organization is
5 tasked with the responsibility to resolve the matter or facilitate the initiation of a process leading to
6 consequences.
7

8 In the event the due process referenced above does not bring about compliance and does not
9 result in the reversal of the action taken by the non-compliant entity and/or the constituency-elected
10 leader of that body (the union president, who represents both the voice of the union constituency and the
11 voice of the world Church and who is an *ex officio* member of the General Conference Executive
12 Committee), the entity and its duly elected leader may be subject to the following:
13

14 1. Warned—By vote of simple majority of the General Conference Executive Committee,
15 unions/unions of churches that have complied with a General Conference Executive Committee and/or
16 General Conference Session actions but have taken actions that are not in compliance with the practices
17 of the Church as defined by the General Conference Constitution and Bylaws and the General
18 Conference *Working Policy* may be “warned.” Being “warned” applies generally to a non-compliant
19 entity and does not intend to identify individuals for further action or mention.
20

21 2. Public Reprimand—By vote of simple majority of the General Conference Executive
22 Committee, the president of such unions/unions of churches that have not complied with General
23 Conference Executive Committee actions and/or General Conference Session actions, including
24 *Working Policy* that has been voted by the General Conference Executive Committee and/or General
25 Conference Session, may be given a public reprimand. Each time the union president exercises his right
26 of voice to address the General Conference Executive Committee, the members will be informed that the
27 speaker has been given a public reprimand.
28

29 3. Placed on Removal for Cause and Subject to Policy Application—When non-compliance
30 continues after public reprimand, the relevant General Conference Compliance Review Committee,* by
31 virtue of prior General Conference Executive Committee actions and General Conference Session
32 actions, shall have authority to consider and recommend to the General Conference Administrative
33 Committee, division officers, and General Conference Executive Committee, applying the existing
34 General Conference working policies and guidelines, such as removal of the individual member “for
35 cause.”—Bylaws Article XIII Sec. 1. c. and GC B 95.
36

37 In the event that entities that have been “warned” or “reprimanded” take actions that bring their
38 entities into compliance with the practices of the Church as defined by the General Conference
39 Constitution and Bylaws, the General Conference *Working Policy*, and voted actions of the General
40 Conference Executive Committee and/or General Conference Session, the relevant General Conference
41 Compliance Review Committee* shall recommend to the General Conference Administrative Committee

113-18G REGARD FOR AND PRACTICE OF GENERAL CONFERENCE
SESSION AND GENERAL CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE ACTIONS - 3

1 that they be reinstated to regular standing by the General Conference Executive Committee. In the event
2 that entities that have been “warned” or “reprimanded” continue in non-compliance with voted actions
3 of the General Conference Executive Committee and/or General Conference Session, the relevant
4 General Conference Compliance Review Committee* may recommend to the General Conference
5 Administrative Committee to pursue other actions that may be available in the General Conference
6 working policies and guidelines or the Constitution and Bylaws of the General Conference. If, after the
7 organization closest to the matter has been unable to resolve a compliance issue and the General
8 Conference Compliance Review Committee* has recommended consequences, only the General
9 Conference Executive Committee and/or the General Conference in session has authority to implement
10 the recommendation.

11
12 Presidents of conferences/missions whose unions have been “reprimanded” shall continue to
13 exercise voice, as provided by the General Conference Bylaws, and the body will be notified that the
14 invitee requesting voice is a constituent representative of a conference/mission of a “reprimanded”
15 union.

16
17 In instances where a president has been removed from the membership of the committee “for
18 cause,” other members of the General Conference Executive Committee from that union shall continue
19 to exercise full privileges without mention of reprimand.

20
21 Entities who desire reconsideration of a General Conference Executive Committee and/or
22 General Conference Session action, may seek recourse through processes already provided for in the
23 General Conference *Working Policy*. The process of seeking recourse and the “Regard for and Practice
24 of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions” shall run
25 concurrently.

26
27 As circumstances warrant, this process may be used as a model by other levels of Church
28 organization.

29
30
31 * As per General Conference Administrative Committee action of July 17, 2018.

August
2018

ROBUST RESPONSES TO COMPLIANCE COMMITTEES IDEA

In August, *Spectrum* Editor Bonnie Dwyer broke the story that a network of five compliance review committees had been established by the General Conference, each with a different topic to oversee: 1) General Conference Core Policies; 2) Doctrines, Policies, Statements, and Guidelines for Church Organizations and Institutions Teaching Creation/Origins; 3) Doctrines, Policies, Statements, and Guidelines Regarding Homosexuality; 4) Distinctive Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; and 5) Doctrines, Policies, Statements and Guidelines Regarding Issues of Ordination. The committees are populated by over forty GC employees. Although a couple of lay people are included on the committees, no pastors or officials from other levels of church governance (such as unions or conferences) are included.

A Troubling Disconnect

BY WILLIAM G. JOHNSON | AUGUST 1, 2018

I have been a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for some seventy years. For more than fifty of those years I served as a minister, an employee of the church. The responsibilities with which I was entrusted embraced various avenues of service that entailed travel throughout the world church.

It has been a wonderful ride. I feel privileged and grateful to have been afforded such a position. To a large extent the Adventist Church has made me what I am, and I have been, and remain, a very happy person. But now, no longer on the front line but a loyal layperson, not wishing to involve myself in decisions of the church—I had a long inning at bat—I find myself increasingly troubled over certain developments in this fellowship that I love. My dilemma is this: I cannot reconcile some church actions with what the Holy Spirit seems to me to clearly be telling us as a body.

“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Revelation 2:7). That dictum guided the church of the first century when it faced the issue of the inclusion of Gentiles who had accepted Jesus. The particular point of dispute was circumcision, the sign of the covenant people given to Abram by Yahweh. Paul and Barnabas, pioneers in the Gentile mission, instructed converts that circumcision was no longer a requirement for salvation. Their position was, to say the least, extraordinary: nowhere in the Old Testament or the teachings of Jesus can one find warrant for it. So the first ecumenical council of the church was convened. We read Luke’s account of it in Acts, chapter 15.

Several leaders among the first Christians expressed their views, with some drawing upon Old Testament scriptures. But what eventually won the day in support of Paul and Barnabas was not argument from the Word but the recounting of what the Spirit was saying by His activity among non-Jewish believers. Thus, when at its conclusion the council drafted a letter for the Gentile churches, it stated that “it seemed good to the Holy

Spirit and to us” rather than listing scriptural passages (verse 28).

Throughout my many years of service in our church, I cannot recall any instance when official actions appeared to me to be at odds with what I deemed the Spirit to be saying.

Until now.

In two matters I find a glaring disconnect between official position and what I personally witness of the Spirit’s activity. For me, this is deeply troubling; I don’t know how to handle it.

The first matter concerns The One Project, a revival movement initiated and led by a small group of church pastors and chaplains. Its stated aim, arrived at after days of prayer and study, was to place Jesus at the center and head of all our activities, including preaching and teaching. Who can argue with that?

Sadly, it turned out, a lot of people, including some GC leaders. The pastors found themselves subjected to criticism and vilification; in despicable fashion even their kids were attacked through social media. Incredible!

The One Project ran for about seven years. It organized gatherings in the United States, Europe, and Australia where Jesus was exalted in preaching and music as All. I was not witness to its early years, but over the course of the final four years I became drawn into its activities, speaking six times at gatherings in the U.S. and in Australia. What I saw and heard during those years, not only in public but as I had opportunity to observe the lives of these pastors, made a deep impression. Noelene was with me in everything; she, along with me, could only praise the Lord for what He was doing through The One Project. We, together with countless others, were renewed spiritually. It seemed to us that the Lord was answering the prayers of many Adventists for a revival, a renewing through the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was speaking to our church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, instructing us to make Jesus first and last and best in everything, just as Ellen White urged us to do many years ago.

Noelene and I thought that church leadership would have rejoiced with us at The One Project and encouraged it. They didn't; just the opposite. The pastors had to battle under a pall of suspicion. I learned about the cloud over The One Project and tried hard to find out what the problems were all about. In an article I begged critics to let me know what was wrong. To this day no one has been able to tell me. All I got was smoke and rumor, instructions to view such-and-such DVD, and so on. It became apparent that the criticisms were originating with people who hadn't actually been to a gathering of The One Project.

Sad to say, that observation extended to GC leaders who called the pastors in for an examination of their views. None of those doing the interrogating had attended a gathering. I saw a list—and it was long—of the items on which they were cross-examined. Under the terms of this list Ellen White would have failed in a book like *Steps to Christ* because she made no mention of “the little horn”!

I cannot support, far less defend, the stance adopted by the GC toward The One Project. I think it is indefensible. And ironic: these same leaders had encouraged the worldwide church to pray for revival!

If any reader of this article wants to find out what was actually preached at the TOP gatherings, they can find a large selection of messages in the book *For the One: Voices from The One Project* (Signs Publishing, 2014).

You find there penetrating presentations dealing with Adventist history, theology, and practice. For me, church leaders' rejection of TOP signals a massive, troubling disconnect with experience.

The second matter concerns the ordination of women to the Adventist ministry. We have had this question before us since the GC Session of 1881 voted that qualified women may be set aside for the ministry by ordination. The item was referred to the GC committee, where it died. But already the Spirit was speaking to the church: many women were serving in ministry and one in particular, Ellen White, occupied a prophetic role in which at

times she felt divinely led to issue sharp rebukes to even the GC president.

In our times hundreds, probably thousands, of women are serving in Adventist ministry, in at least seven of the 13 divisions of the world church. Most are commissioned rather than ordained—although on a biblical basis there is not one scintilla of difference. In China, however, large numbers of women serve as ordained ministers. Some lead congregations of many thousands.

During the past forty years we have debated endlessly the issue of women in ministry. After all this expenditure of money and time, I have to ask: Have we been listening to what the Spirit has been saying to our church?

I find it incredible that at the recent San Antonio GC Session, when the women's ministry question was the main item on the agenda, no report was sought from the women pastors in China—those who evangelize, shepherd and lead the church. How could that be? It's as though at the Jerusalem Council Paul and Barnabas

were forbidden to relate how the Spirit blessed their work.

Am I troubled? You'd better believe it. This is not right. This is not authentic Adventism. This is a spiritual disconnect of grave consequence. If, as I am convinced, the Lord is calling and empowering women, who are we to say that He may not? This is dangerous stuff. Someone needs to say it, so I will, albeit with reluctance and heartbreaking sadness. I am appalled that GC leaders seem embarked on a course to shut down women in ministry by hook or by crook—and more by crook than by hook.

But this personal sharing cannot and must not end on a note of gloom. The divine reality is that Jesus, not man, gets the last and decisive word.

Not our words, the Word. Jesus is the Head of the church and no one else. We are safe in His hands as we listen to Him.

Throughout my many years of service in our church, I cannot recall any instance when official actions appeared to me to be at odds with what I deemed the Spirit to be saying. Until now.

WILLIAM G. JOHNSON is the retired Editor of *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World* magazines, and the author of numerous books including *Where Are We Headed? Adventism after San Antonio*.

Adventism's Shocking Fulfillment of Prophecy

BY GEORGE R. KNIGHT | AUGUST 28, 2018

For over 150 years the Seventh-day Adventist Church has faithfully preached the message of Revelation 13 that near the end of time “all the world marveled and followed the beast,” who had recovered from the deadly wound (13:3, NKJV). And at the heart of the Adventist concern was Verse 7’s prophecy that the beast would “make war with the saints” and “overcome them.”

What was not predicted by the Adventist evangelists was that the General Conference leadership would be joining the beast in its eschatological crusade, with the denomination’s president leading the charge.

The latest move in that direction came on August 14, 2018, when the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM) voted a document creating a network of five compliance review committees to make sure that Adventists around the world behave themselves according to the General Conference’s interpretation of the twentieth-eight fundamental beliefs (which is apparently now viewed as a creed) and the denomination’s working policy.

The committees have been tasked with enforcing the punitive measures for noncompliance set forth in ADCOM’s July 17 document titled “Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions,” which is to come before Annual Council 2018. One interesting point is that the five committees have been appointed before the basic document has been approved. A second is that committee memberships

are weighted in a way to guarantee that they will come up with a “correct” solution. The machinery and documents for making war on any saints who are out of harmony with the General Conference (president) will be in place if the proposal is voted into policy in October.

On the day after the oversight committee system report was released I received an email from a close student of Roman Catholic ecclesiology. The author noted that “this truly reminds me of RCC [Roman Catholic Church] curia in Vatican. It is unbelievable. Only people who have zero sense of history can move in this direction.”

Being somewhat imprecise in my understanding of just how the Curia functions, I got out my *Catholic Dictionary*. Under “Curia, Roman” I read: “The whole ensemble of administrative and judicial offices through which the

Pope directs the operations of the Catholic Church....Pope John XXIII spoke of the Curia as his right hand, through which the Vicar of Christ mainly exercises his primacy over the universal Church.” In Adventism it is ADCOM that is taking on the role of the Curia. As such, it is, as it is presently utilized by the denomination’s leader, one more way to follow the beast.

I was so fascinated with that definition that I decided to look up the *Catholic Dictionary*’s definition of “inquisition.” I discovered that it was “the special court or tribunal appointed by the Catholic Church to discover and suppress heresy and to punish heretics.” Once again the current leader of

What was not predicted by the Adventist evangelists was that the General Conference leadership would be joining the beast in its eschatological crusade, with the denomination’s president leading the charge.

Adventism is right on track. But, I must say, it is a wonder to me that a person who loves *The Great Controversy* so much could take the path he is creating.

One of the more interesting facts of history is that it took the bishops of Rome 600 years to develop an effective papacy with control over the worldwide church, while Silver Spring is on track to do so in a little more than 150.

Of course, none of the recent ADCOM documents allude to the comparisons raised above. To the contrary, they are couched in sanctified God talk, such as “to honor and exalt Jesus,” “a sacred trust” exists between those “being led by the Spirit,” and “after much prayer.” Sounds spiritual. But make no mistake, the Roman Catholic leaders used the same sort of verbiage. After all, it sells ideas to sincere Christians who are unaware of church history.

It should also be noted that the July 17 punitive proposal of ADCOM is mild in its recommendations and procedures in relation to the failed proposals of the past two annual councils. Much of the forceful language has been toned down to make it easier to vote for. Thus the proposal to go before Annual Council 2018 is made to appear quite orthodox, orderly, and mild. But it should be seen as an entering wedge to codify centralized authority without the necessary checks and balances. I will be covering such eventualities in a

future article tentatively titled “The Adventist FBI and the Sticky Wicket Thicket.”

Last year I was falsely accused of calling the General Conference president Hitler, which resulted in the Michigan Conference president banning my books from the Adventist Book Centers under his control. While that accusation was

SPECIAL REPORT

ISSUES REGARDING THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH AND ITS LEADERSHIP

BY THE GENERAL CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER EDITORIAL TEAM



principle that to correctly identify the application of these prophecies, each symbol should have a single, specific fulfillment in history. Those who try to suggest that the Seventh-day Adventist Church or its leadership are fulfilling the prophecy of Revelation 13 are virtually identifying the church as Babylon.

A careful analysis of the “beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns” (Rev. 13:1) reveals that it is the continuation of the fourth beast of Daniel 7. Both beasts have ten horns (Dan. 7:7; Rev. 13:1) and are linked to speaking blasphemies (Dan. 7:20, 25; Rev. 13:5-6) and the persecution of God’s people, which lasts for three and a half times or years, symbolizing 1,260 literal years (see Dan. 7:25; Rev. 13:5, 7).

Seventh-day Adventists have long understood that Daniel 7:25 adds that this power would “intend to change times and laws.” This refers to an attempt to change the very law of God written with His own finger on tables of stone. The Roman Church not only replaced the Bible Sabbath with a man-made day of worship, Sunday, but it also dropped the second commandment referring to idolatry and divided the ninth commandment into two separate commands. The issue regarding the change of the law of God revolves around the issue of authority. In understanding Daniel 7 and its corollary Revelation 13 we must ask, does any power claim to have the authority to change the immutable law of God?

The one and only power that makes this claim and matches the prophetic description is the Roman papacy, which exercised both religious and political power throughout its history and especially during the Middle Ages from AD 538-1798.

To counteract this widespread apostasy, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been raised up by God as the remnant of Bible prophecy, entrusted with the three angels’ messages to present Jesus in all His fullness and warn the world

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was raised up by God in fulfillment of Bible prophecy to prepare people for the second coming of Christ (Rev. 12:17). But some have suggested that the church’s leadership is now fulfilling different aspects of Bible prophecy, specifically those that we have understood as applying to the Roman Catholic Church. They charge that the current efforts being made to fulfill the voted actions of the world church at the 2015 San Antonio General Conference Session and bring compliance are papal and contrary to liberty of conscience. One of their major claims is that the decision-making process has been manipulated by not presenting the reports from the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) to the 2015 General Conference Session. This response is offered to help Adventist leaders and members understand the truth about these matters.

WHO PERSECUTES THE SAINTS?
Applying Revelation 13:7 (“to make war with the saints and to overcome them”) to Seventh-day Adventist Church leadership is misguided since it ignores the historicist

13

In the *Executive Committee Newsletter*, the General Conference leadership responded to George Knight’s provocative article that had exploded on the *Spectrum* website. It had drawn over 47,000 page views from 34,383 people who visited the site specifically for the article. To counter Knight, the GC said applying Rev. 13:7 to the SDA Church was misguided, because it ignores the historicist principle that each symbol should have a single, specific fulfillment in history.

false, it is true that our leader's tactics are increasingly taking on dictatorial aspects, such as:

- Deceptively manipulating the voting among GCDO (General Conference and Division Officers) members to get the 2017 document before the Annual Council on a technically "legal" basis.
- The removal of subordinates who disagree, creating an atmosphere of fear and distrust.
- Use of financial incentives to those sectors of the church that fall into line and implying financial threats to those who don't. (It needs to be remembered that the GC distributes a lot of money worldwide.)
- Having General Conference in-house emails checked to discover "leaks" and other improprieties.
- Shouting, sometimes extensively, at those who refuse to follow the party line.

And so on.

Now I must admit that my mind, in all of these things, has probably been biased by the fact that for more than two decades I taught a course in the history of religious liberty and also by a lifelong habit of studying the totalitarian mind through extensive reading of biographies of Stalin, Mao, and Hitler, and related literature. While some may see that background as perverting my ideas in the current situation, I prefer to view them as enlightening them. At any rate, we are looking at a church that is increasingly losing its system of checks and balances in favor of unquestionable and unchallengeable rule from the top. One can only wonder what the good lady who wrote that "*it has been a necessity to organize Union Conferences, that the General Conference shall not exercise dictation over all the separate conferences*" (MS 26, 1903, emphasis supplied) would think about the current ADCOM initiatives.

Here it needs to be pointed out that the real problem of "one-man-rule" is that if that one person is off the track, he or she will lead the entire world church astray in the direction of his or her personal issues. Serious problems do need to be handled by the proper bodies, but Adventism's organizational structure has been wise in limiting damage through regional enforcement. And if one region gets off-center the others are in place to eventually pull it back. But if the whole church goes wrong because of over-centralization there will be no checks and balances to correct the situation.

At this juncture we come to another interesting aspect of how Adventism is attempting to follow the beast in making war on the saints. It is of special interest that a long line of Roman Pontiffs have been unified on the idea that noncompliance is always a problem with those individuals and levels of the church below their exalted office. That is exactly the position of the current General Conference leadership. One result historically has been inquisition and heresy trials for those at "lower" levels in the worldwide organization. It takes little insight when reading the July 17 document ("Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions") to see the same mentality at work. While the investigation of those in noncompliance is to begin with the level of organization nearest the problem, if it is not solved at that level the punitive responsibility always moves to the "next higher level of Church organization" until it finally arrives at the highest level, the General Conference, which will be granted, if the document is approved, a progressive three-step program of warning, reprimanding, and removing the offending individuals, all by simple majority vote. The wording of ADCOM's proposal is fascinating. One example is the last sentence under the reprimand section which notes that "each time the union president exercises his right of voice to address the General Conference Executive Committee, the members will be informed that the speaker has been given a public reprimand." The document concludes with the idea that the system of oversight committees "may be used as a model by other levels of Church organization."

That last suggestion is a pregnant one, especially when it is realized that down through the history of the Roman Catholic Church it has all too often been those at the top of the hierarchy who have needed to be reprimanded and removed. Protestants, including Adventists, have had no problem seeing that point.

Now, however, the time has come to apply that truth to Adventism, which needs to thoroughly investigate the General Conference president through those committees that may now be established at the lower realms of the church. After all, noncompliance of policy has been a practice of the current denominational leader when it suits his purpose. And the issues for investigation and possible reprimand and censure are many. For example, the blatant and deceptive manipulation of the GCDO vote to get the desired noncompliance document on the agenda for Annual Council 2017.

When challenged in public on that point, the president replied before a televised audience that “that is how democracy works.” If all of the tactics used by the GC president to obtain that vote were put on the table, the statement would have to be revised to read “that is how democracy worked in Germany in the 1930s.” While such tactics lent a façade of legality to the Leader’s dictates, the result was that the nation soon had no democracy at all. Another important issue that needs a thorough investigation is the expenditure of hundreds of thousands of dollars of sacred tithe funds on the TOSC (Theology of Ordination Study Committee) study and then not reporting the results to the General Conference session before the crucial vote in 2015 that has divided the church for the past three years. It is no small thing when one person has the power and the audacity to massively misuse the church’s funds.

Last year I was falsely accused of calling the General Conference president Hitler, which resulted in the Michigan Conference president banning my books from the Adventist Book Centers under his control.

Those issues and many others cry for investigation. The result could easily be that every time the current General Conference president rises to speak in an annual council that “the members will be informed that the speaker has been given a public reprimand.” Of course, some investigative committees might opt for removal once all the facts of highhandedness are on the table.

The point is that those at the top are not immune to noncompliance or the need for church discipline. It is not uni-directional. And, it might be added in passing, neither is theological heresy. The document entitled “An Invitation to Uplift Jesus,” released

on April 11, 2018, without going through the Executive Committee, highlighted problems that somebody at the top believed to be heresies on what might be thought of as the theological left of the church. What that controversial document (which had almost nothing to say about

uplifting Jesus) failed to address are problematic heresies on Adventism’s theological right, such as anti-trinitarianism and Last Generation Theology (which contradicts not only many Ellen White positions, but also central Bible teachings). All too often those concerned with orthodoxy have focused in one direction. Of course, at times such a one-sided focus is due to the fact that the initiators of such endeavors have leanings toward heresies in the opposite camp. At any rate, here is another issue that needs to be thought through before any organization opens up its siege guns on real or perceived heresy.

I am afraid that I am in trouble again this year for following the General Conference president’s counsel to read *The Great Controversy*. Last year I was led astray when I took seriously a statement claiming that “the very beginning of the great apostasy was in seeking to supplement the authority of God

by that of the church” (289–290). This year my problems began when I read the chapter on the “Protest of the Princes” (197–210). Reading that chapter is permissible, but I am afraid that taking it seriously may be problematic, especially if one reads it in the context of the obvious rush of Adventism’s top leadership toward what I last year labeled “the Roman Catholic Temptation.”

I have had the unfortunate experience of reading that inspired chapter in the light of the greatest power grab in Adventist history, and one of the boldest in the history of the Christian church. In that context my mind began to equate the protesting princes that saved the Reformation from defeat in terms of the “princes” of the Adventist church — its union presidents, division presidents, and others on the GC Executive Committee. The name “Protestant” came into being because those Lutheran princes had the “guts” to follow and stand up for their convictions, no matter what the consequences to themselves or their livelihoods. I will quote a few passages from *The Great Controversy* that helped me see things more clearly.

‘Let us reject this decree,’ said the princes. ‘In matters of conscience the majority has no power’ (201, italics supplied).

‘We protest. . . before God, our only Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Saviour, and who will one day be our Judge, as well as before all men and all creatures, that we. . . neither consent nor adhere in any manner whatsoever to the proposed decree, in anything that is contrary to God, to His holy word, to our right conscience, to the salvation of our souls’ (202–203).

A deep impression was made upon the Diet [by the protesting princes]. The majority were filled with amazement and alarm at the boldness of the protesters (203). [While it was admittedly disruptive of usual procedures to stand and present their protest before the council, that tactic was the only way of accomplishing their goal of saving the Reformation.]

The principles contained in this celebrated Protest...constitute the very essence of Protestantism. *Now this Protest opposes two abuses of man in matters of faith: the first is the intrusion of the civil magistrate, and the second the arbitrary authority of the church* (203–204, emphasis supplied).

Here it needs to be pointed out that the real problem of “one-man-rule” is that if that one person is off the track, he or she will lead the entire world church astray in the direction of his or her personal issues.

In the current Adventist context, I was particularly impressed by the testimony of John of Saxony: “God forbid. . . that you should exclude me. I am resolved to do what is right, without troubling myself about my crown. I desire to confess the Lord. My electoral hat and my ermine are not so precious to me as the cross of Jesus Christ” (207).

I have highlighted John of Saxony because in the Adventist context many leaders are afraid of standing for the right for fear of losing their jobs. And that fear is a serious reality in 2018, given the highhanded approach of the denomination’s president. But to betray our church and its future along with our conscience makes our positions and our very selves meaningless.

I have highlighted John of Saxony because in the Adventist context many leaders are afraid of standing for the right for fear of losing their jobs. And that fear is a serious reality in 2018, given the highhanded approach of the denomination’s president. But to betray our church and its future along with our conscience makes our positions and our very selves meaningless.

The nature of Adventism in the future is what is at stake in October. We will either stand against the drive toward papalism at Annual Council 2018 while we have the opportunity or fall with the church we love. In the language of Ellen White in the Kellogg crisis, “This is the iceberg, Meet it.” And it must be met firmly if Adventism

is to avoid continuing its drift into a one-sided Roman Catholic ecclesiology.

The idea of standing brings to mind the quotation that the current General Conference president read to the assembled delegates of the Executive Committee in the first presentation at Annual Council 2016's pre-meetings. "*The greatest want of the world,*" he read, "*is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall*" (Ed 57, emphasis supplied). I followed him, presenting a message the second hour. As I sat there waiting my turn I distinctly remember thinking to myself during his reading of that quotation that I was fully in harmony with its sentiments but that the president and I were standing by different poles.

That quotation brings me to some final questions. First, what is the church? Second, what is its biblical mission? Third, what is genuine church unity? Fourth, is there any more effective way to create disunity in the church than the path chosen by the General Conference president? Fifth, when will Adventism begin to hold its top leadership accountable for the misuse of power and money? Sixth, when will the princes of the church say enough is enough and that it is time for ADCOM and the Executive Committee to get back to the mission of the church instead of going off on a tangent largely directed by the stubborn will of one man? Lastly, what is my role (especially if I am a leader) in the drama playing out in Adventism today?

The preceding discussion indicates that 2018 is not the most tranquil time in Adventist history. But the church has been through difficult times before. And, as in the past, we need to pray that God will guide the church we love through the present crisis. It is His church and we are His servants. And it is in that spirit that we must move forward, praying

for both our leaders and the denomination itself as we move toward the crucial October meetings.

I will close out this discussion with three "memory verses":

In a land of boasted freedom of thought and of conscience, like ours, *church force cannot produce unity; but has caused divisions, and has given rise to religious sects and parties almost innumerable* (James White, *ST*, June 4, 1874, emphasis supplied).

In no conference should propositions be rushed through without time being taken by the brethren to weigh carefully all sides of the question. . . . *Very many matters have been taken up and carried by vote, that have involved far more than was anticipated and far more than those who voted would have been willing to assent to had they taken time to consider the question from all sides* (EGW, *9T*, 278, emphasis supplied).

God has not put any kingly power in our ranks to control this or that branch of the work. The work has been greatly restricted by the efforts to control it in every line. . . . If the work had not been so restricted by an impediment here, and an impediment there, and on the other side an impediment, it would have gone forth in its majesty (EGW, *GCB*, 1901, 26).

If all of the tactics used by the GC president to obtain that vote were put on the table, the statement would have to be revised to read "that is how democracy worked in Germany in the 1930s."

GEORGE R. KNIGHT has served the church as a university professor, pastor, school administrator, and an elementary and secondary teacher. His last assignment was Andrews University where he taught for thirty years. His most recent books include *Adventist Authority Wars, Ordination, and the Roman Catholic Temptation* (August 2017) and *End-Time Events and The Last Generation: The Explosive 1950s* (April 2018).

September
2018

OFFICIAL RESPONSES MULTIPLY

Following *Spectrum's* report, the GC then issued its own statement on its compliance committees, stating that “the General Conference (GC) ADCOM established five compliance committees to serve unity, helping retain voted church beliefs and operating procedures and process.”

On September 18, the GC announced it had updated the compliance document that would be voted on by the GCC at Annual Council in October. A second statement released that same day said “it was recognized that a procedural oversight was inadvertently communicated” that stated the compliance committees would be established by and report directly to the GCC. In actuality, however, these newly established compliance committees were established by and would report directly to the GC ADCOM. Additionally, after a unanimous vote by the GC ADCOM, two of the five committees were activated.

As Bonnie Dwyer reported in her analysis of the situation,

There is no established need for the committees without the approval of the...document on ‘Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions’ that still awaits action by the GCC at Annual Council in October. The GCC could approve an entirely different process for discipline, one that does not involve the committees that have already been appointed. ADCOM has jumped ahead of the game by assuming that it has this particular role. It is taking to itself specific responsibilities that have not been assigned to it.

As George Knight noted in his report for *Spectrum*, “Annual Council 2018 has been rendered irrelevant if the September 18 action of ADCOM is not successfully challenged.”

General Conference Governance Committees

UOC – UNITY OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

- Lemon, Thomas, chair, general vice president of the General Conference*
- Ryan, Michael, vice-chair, assistant to the president of the General Conference
- Mooroooven, Hensley, secretary and an associate secretary of the GC
- Doukmetzian, Karnik, legal advisor and chief counsel for the General Conference
- Biaggi, Guillermo, vice president of the General Conference
- Bryant, G Alexander, secretary of the North American Division and associate secretary of the General Conference **
- De los Santos, Abner, vice president of the General Conference
- Finley, Mark, assistant to the General Conference president
- Iseminger, Myron, undersecretary of the General Conference***
- Perez Schulz, Magdiel, assistant to the president of the General Conference
- Wahlen, J Raymond, undertreasurer of the General Conference
- Ng, GT, ex officio member, secretary of the General Conference
- Prestol-Puesan, Juan, ex officio member, treasurer of the General Conference
- Wilson, Ted, ex officio member, president of the General Conference

* *No longer chair, but remains on the committee*

** *Resigned from the Committee*

*** *Transferred to the Middle East and no longer a member of the committee*

ADCOM – ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE

46 members, 12 invitees for a total of 58 members; meets weekly

- GC President
- General Vice Presidents (6)
- North American Division President (or his designee)
- GC Secretary
- GC Undersecretary
- Associate Secretaries (7) (including the NAD Secretary)
- GC Treasurer
- GC Undertreasurer
- GC Associate Treasurers (5) (including the NAD Treasurer)
- Field Secretaries (8) (most represent various entities of the world church, such as ADRA, AWR, Hope Channel, BRI, GRI, White Estate, etc.)
- GC Departmental Directors (14)

GCDO – GENERAL CONFERENCE AND DIVISION OFFICERS

83 members

The three officers of the General Conference (and their assistants) plus the three officers of the thirteen world divisions.

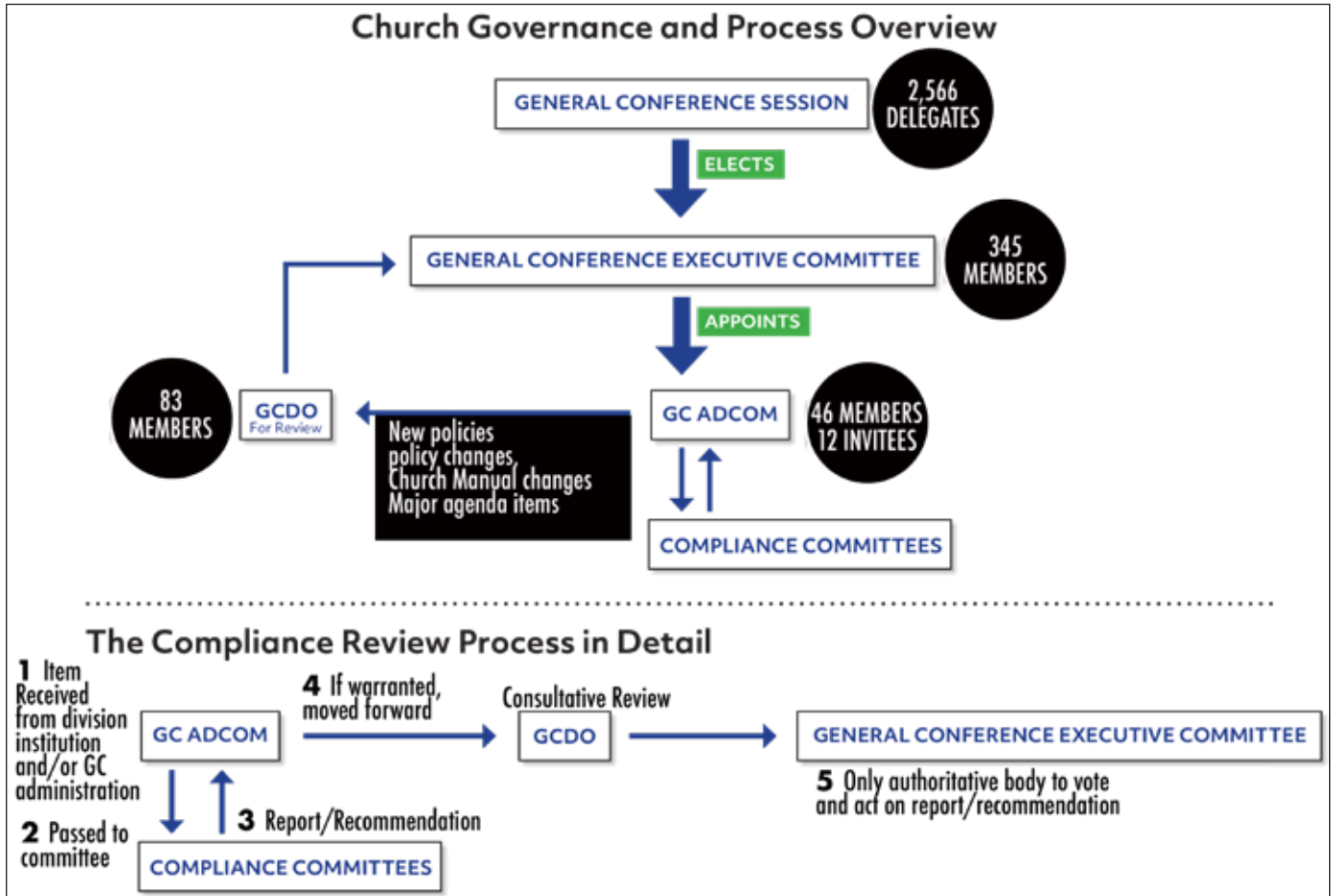
Invitees to GC ADCOM include:

- Assistant to the NAD President
- Assistant to the GC Treasurer
- Assistants to the GC President (2)
- Director, General Conference Auditing Service
- Editor, *Adventist Review/Adventist World*
- GC Assistant Treasurer
- President, Adventist Risk Management
- Assistant Secretary
- Director, GC Human Resource Services
- GC Meeting Planner
- GC General Counsel as Legal Advisor

GCC – GENERAL CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

345 members, 129 invitees for a total of 474

The General Conference Executive Committee is the second highest governing body of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, after General Conference session.



Adventist News Network/Spectrum

Official Responses to Proposal for Compliance Committees

In the two months after the “Regard for” document was released and before the Annual Council meeting in Battle Creek, there were dozens of responses from all levels of the church.

Division Responses:

South Pacific Division: President Glenn Townsend stated, “Most Church leaders believe there needs to be consequences for not being compliant, but giving the power to [General Conference] ADCOM to work through the matters is against the elected representative system that we have traditionally worked in.”

Union Responses:

North and South German Union Conferences: “In the recent initiative of the world church leadership, we see a threatening development towards a hierarchical church structure, which we will resolutely oppose.”

Pacific Union Conference: “we voice our urgent objections to the proposed creation of ‘compliance committees’ as formulated by the General Conference Administrative Committee.”

Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish Union Conferences: joint statement expressed “a number of concerns about the proposed strategy for attaining unity in our Church. Far from

bringing unity, we believe that there is a strong possibility that the strategy outlined in the proposals will undermine our Church's mission, by causing division and polarization in the world Church rather than the bonds of peace spoken of in Ephesians 4:3."

Czech-Slovak Union Conference: "As part of the world church, we want to express our conviction that the best way to build and maintain unity is to engage in dialogue, mutual listening and respect for freedom of conscience in matters that are not fundamentally doctrinal in nature."

The North Pacific Union Conference issued a call to prayer, with "specific principles and values of our church in mind."

Columbia Union Conference: "The General Conference Administrative Committee's proposed new system of committees to assure compliance and uniformity within the global church will not result in the unity it seeks. We find this approach to be deeply troubling for it will bypass established policies, protocols and processes and reach beyond longstanding governance practices that have contributed to the amazing growth of our diverse, yet united world church family."

Mid-America Union Conference Presidents' Council: "We believe the proposal coming to Annual Council is a departure from the principles set forth in our *Working Policy* and, therefore, have deep concerns with this new direction and are not supportive of the content of the proposed document to be voted."

Conference Responses:

The Berlin-Central German Conference: "reject the documents," "dissolve the Unity Oversight Committee," and clarify "whether the current Church leadership continues to have a vote of confidence."

Iowa-Missouri Conference: President Dean Coridan, issued an open letter to constituents based on discussion with the conference executive committee "The committee and I are greatly troubled by and strongly oppose the move toward a hierarchical form of church governance and a centralization of power within the Seventh-day Adventist Church."

The German-Swiss Conference Executive Committee: voted agreement with the earlier joint statement by the North and South German Unions that warns against the development of the worldwide Adventist Church "towards a hierarchical church structure."

Responses from Churches and Other Entities:

The Adventist Church in Göttingen, Germany circulated a petition to support their unions in their opposition of the GC's documents.

The Adventist Church in Basel, Switzerland followed the Göttingen Church's lead and circulated the same statement and petition to members of the Swiss Union Conference.

The Adventist Church in Linköping, Sweden: the "proposed mechanisms are detrimental for the future of our church and our mission.... Enough harm has been done to the unity of our denomination by the very existence of these proposals. More harm will be done if the Annual Council votes these proposals into effect."

The AdventNetwork, a group of lay church members and pastors in the Southern Africa Union Conference opposed the compliance committee system: it "creates a sense of an investigative atmosphere amongst brothers and sisters that are supposed to have a fellowship experience when gathered."

The Nærum SDA Church, Denmark: voiced "its grave concerns about the recent efforts to enforce compliance.... We are horrified to see the previous threats of 'grave consequences' can now result in union leadership being publicly placed in pillory while under investigation. In addition, this disenfranchises the members who have elected the union leadership and voids the mandate the members have given them."

The Women Clergy of the North American Division issued a statement: "As a group of approximately two hundred professional women clergy, we share the conviction that nothing ought to be about us, without us. Additionally, we share a consensus of concern over proposals regarding governance that do not represent the heart of protestant faith, biblical fidelity or authentic Adventism; a document that advocates an overreach, if not abuse, of power that obviously misunderstands our unique governance system."

The Loma Linda University Church held several discussions over October 5 and 6.

The Springwood Seventh-day Adventist Church in Brisbane, Australia: "We believe this new GC proposal will be detrimental to the robust health of our church-at-large, as together we pursue the Lordship and authority of Jesus in living out the Gospel Commission within our unique local context."

The Unity I Would Like to See:

An Open Letter to the General Conference

BY MARY CHRISTIAN | SEPTEMBER 11, 2018

Dear GC Executive Committee:

I have recently been reading a document you published this past July, “Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions.”¹ In this paper, steps are outlined for identifying and disciplining church entities deemed out of compliance with the church’s doctrines and policies. The first page opens with a quotation from Ephesians 4:3: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

This emphasis on church unity has been a recurring theme in the writings of the General Conference and its leaders during the past few years, first in conversations on gender and ordination, and, more recently, in other areas of discussion such as creation and sexuality. These calls for unity have frequently held up the early Christian church as an example, offering numerous quotations from the epistles and from Acts. Elder Ted Wilson, for example, in a presentation at the GC Global Leadership Summit in Lisbon this past February, quoted the Acts account of the believers who “continued daily with one accord in the temple,” and echoed Paul’s injunction to the Philippians to “fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Acts 2:46; Philippians 2:2).²

I agree that the early church described in the New Testament offers valuable lessons for the Adventist church today. But the lessons I see there are somewhat different from the picture of “unity” offered in recent GC statements, and if I may, I would like to share with you a little of what I’ve seen, a layperson’s perspective. It has been intriguing these past few months to study the book of Acts with my Sabbath School class in Warner Robins, GA, against the backdrop of the GC’s proposed actions for promoting unity and compliance.

(I notice, by the way, that “unity” is an oft-repeated refrain in the adult Sabbath School quarterly this quarter.³) The story of the early church does indeed contain many uplifting scenes of believers being “one in heart and mind” (Acts 4:32). Yet it seems to me that this is not the whole story.

My sense of the early church, based on my recent re-reading of Acts and the epistles, is that its history is rather a messy one, in which the first apostles wrangled with one another and with new believers in trying to create a cohesive group identity—an identity centered on Jesus, yet allowing space for wide differences of class, ethnicity, geography, and worldview. They were struggling to make sense of ideas which, to outsiders and often even to themselves, seemed contradictory—a Jewish Messiah and a Savior of all people, an exclusive Jewish nation and a fellowship of believers from all nations, Mosaic laws and salvation by faith. They had conflicts—cultural, personal, logistical, and theological—much as the Adventist church today has. There were clashes of opinions, personalities, and egos. And what interests me most in the story (I speak here as a college English professor as well as a former church board member familiar with local-level church disputes) is not the heroic picture of the apostles doing miracles and holding firm to their faith in the face of imprisonment and torture, or of the loving, harmonious believers living “in one accord” (important and inspiring as these stories may be), but the drama of negotiation, debate, and occasional head-butting through which the Christian church came into being. This focus on real, imperfect people struggling through real dilemmas and frustrations—this is where the epistles and the book of Acts seem to me most real, most relevant to our church today.

The conflicts of the church in the first century are not exactly the same as those faced by the twenty-first century Adventist church, yet I think we can gain important insights by looking at the ways in which believers dealt with these conflicts. Here are a few examples that stand out to me:

1. The church leaders preached the good news of Jesus wherever they went; yet they understood that Jesus would mean different things for different listeners. For their Jewish listeners, Peter, Stephen, and others repeated Jewish history over and over, stressing the fulfilled Old Testament prophecies, Jesus' recent death in Jerusalem, and their listeners' own guilty participation in his crucifixion. For the Athenians, Paul presented Jesus as the "Unknown God," the creator and father god memorialized in the Athenians' own shrine and poetry (Acts 17:22–28). For the uneducated people of Lystra, Paul made no reference to prophecy or to poetry, but described Jesus simply as the God who sends rain and crops, who "provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:17). They seized every opportunity to "uplift Jesus," and did not distort or water down the truth. But they saw that the truth about Jesus was complex and many-sized, and they tried to present the parts of Jesus' story that would be most meaningful, relevant, and readily understandable to each group of listeners.⁴

2. Apostles, in making administrative decisions, listened to the concerns of ordinary believers and took their well-being into account. When the Grecian converts complained that their widows were getting less than their share of food, and that the Hebraic Jewish widows in the church were being unfairly favored (Acts 6:1), the twelve apostles did not order the Greeks to be silent and stop distracting from the Great Commission. Instead, they recognized that the need for food was a real need, and so was the need for fairness. In appointing deacons and delegating

responsibilities to them, they sought to address both these needs, while also maintaining their own primary focus on spiritual ministry and evangelism.

3. While recognizing the Old-Testament laws and prophetic writings as God-given sources of guidance and inspiration, they interpreted these writings with a sense of their rhetorical and historical context, and with a recognition that changed circumstances can call for changes in practice.

This idea comes to the surface, I think, in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). The eunuch

had gone to Jerusalem to worship (v. 27). This was contrary to the laws of Moses: "No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 23:1). Though Luke does not say it in so many words, it is possible to

read into the text that the eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship and been turned away—if so, the temple officials who sent him away might well have pointed to Deuteronomy and claimed that sola scriptura was on their side. Might this be why the eunuch was fascinated by the passage of Isaiah that speaks of a man suffering "humiliation," "deprived of justice," a man with no descendants (Acts 8:33)? In any case, Philip did not insist on applying the Mosaic criteria, but welcomed the eunuch into the fellowship of Jesus. For Philip, it was more important to include and affirm this sincere truth-seeker than to insist on the letter of the law.⁵

4. The early church leaders recognized that some decisions must be left to individual conscience—and respect for the consciences of others.

After the Jerusalem Council, the apostles instructed the gentiles to "abstain from food sacrificed to idols" (Acts 15:29). But in Romans and in 1 Corinthians, Paul spoke in less absolute terms: He, not believing in the gods represented by the idols, did not see the eating of sacrificed food as an act of

The early church leaders recognized that some decisions must be left to individual conscience—and respect for the consciences of others.

idol worship, and could eat with a clear conscience. But he recognized that others could not do so, and avoided actions that might undermine their faith, and urged other similarly “strong” believers to do likewise.

5. On some questions, the church leaders seem not to have reached one final, settled answer, especially in balancing personal freedom and cultural sensitivity. In the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), Peter and James insisted that circumcision should not be required for non-Jewish Christians, though the books of Moses had repeatedly insisted on this requirement. It was seen as an undue hardship for new believers (this might be taken as another illustration of the previous point that circumstances and historical contexts matter when one applies scriptural teachings). This decision was stated in the letter the leaders sent to the Gentile believers (vv. 23–29). Paul reinforced this rejection of compulsory circumcision still more vehemently in some of his letters, especially the one to the Galatians. Yet both Paul and Peter seem to have upheld this dismissal of Jewish ritual more rigidly in theory than in practice. Paul, shortly after the Jerusalem Council, circumcised Timothy before taking him as a helper in order to avoid offending Jewish observers (Acts 16:3). Peter also changed his behavior to show deference to Jewish customs when prominent Jews were present, though Paul publicly reprimanded Peter’s decision as hypocrisy (Galatians 2:11–21). Both these apostles agreed that the laws of Moses were important and given by God, and also agreed that the ceremonial laws were not the thing that brought salvation, and also agreed that it was important to be sensitive to the beliefs of the people they were trying to reach, whether Jews or Gentiles. Both experienced situations in which these three values—obedience to the law, salvation by grace, and cultural sensitivity—seemed in tension, and on occasion they disagreed on how these tensions should be resolved. Both were leaders of a church celebrated for being “in one accord”; both were committed followers of Christ who had repeatedly received the Holy Spirit, and who had sacrificed and suffered much for their faith—yet they disagreed, and, it seems, even argued and exchanged harsh words. These facts have more than once given me pause for thought when I’ve been tempted to doubt the sincerity or

godliness of a fellow Christian simply because of a difference in judgment or in cultural perspective, or because I’ve taken offense at something he or she has said.

6. When the apostles disagreed, they kept on working—and allowed one another to keep on working. Barnabas and Paul had a “sharp disagreement” about whether to give John Mark a second chance in the mission field after he had once disappointed them (Acts 15:39). This dispute led them to separate. Luke, in recording the story, does not make a statement on which one was right—perhaps it was one of those cases in which “each was partly in the right, and all were in the wrong.” In any case, what strikes me in this story is this: Paul and Barnabas disagreed and separated, but both kept working to serve God and build up the church. Also, neither one attempted to turn church members against the other, to use apostolic authority to shame or punish or ostracize the other, or to question the other’s sincerity or devotion to Christ, or to impede the other’s work in any way. (At least, there is no record of either of them behaving in this way. The record in Acts gives little detail. But I would at least like to think that they handled their disagreement in a mature and constructive way.) Discord and disputes may not be God’s plan for the church, but for as long as the church is staffed by fallen humans, they will happen. But such disputes need not destroy God’s work—if both parties love and serve God, God can use both, even if they seem to be going in opposite directions.

The picture of the early church that emerges from the New Testament, in my reading, at least, seems patchy, scappy, dissonant, even chaotic. To readers looking for a clear map or guidebook on how to “do church” correctly, the story is downright frustrating. Believers struggled to articulate their beliefs, to reconcile ancient laws with new revelations, to distinguish divine commands from personal bias, to be true to their own consciences while accommodating other people’s. Even the apostles made mistakes, changed their minds, and were not always consistent in applying teachings or defining policies. In short, early Christians had a lot in common with the Christians of today.

But I see one other thing in the early church: its people and institutions were flawed, messy, and contentious,

yet God blessed them and used them. God increased their numbers by the thousands, and endowed them with supernatural abilities of healing, language, and prophecy. He transformed Peter the traitor, Saul the persecutor, and John Mark the deserter into workers who would face any hardship, threat, or suffering rather than forsake their Master. He poured out power in a degree seldom seen, before or since, in the world's history.

This, I think, is what we mean when we speak of wanting our church to be more like the early church. I believe this is what Jesus meant when He prayed for all believers: "May they be brought into complete unity to let the world know that you sent me" (John 17:23). If He was praying that the disciples would "accomplish their work together without any difference of opinion," as Elder Wilson put it in his Lisbon presentation, we may conclude that the Father answered that prayer with a "No," regarding the early believers as well as those of the present day.⁶ But if He prayed that they would be united in their willingness to be used and their readiness to receive His help and power—well, then, it has happened once and can happen again if God allows it.

This is the unity I earnestly want to see, that I pray for. And I do not believe it will be brought about by revising the twenty-eight fundamentals, or by forming new committees, or by dismissing or shaming church members who honestly question the church's official teachings on sexuality or six-day creation, or by silencing union leaders who follow their consciences in supporting women in ministry. No one's belief in Jesus or in the Adventist Church's mission will be reinforced by such actions—from what I have seen, these measures are far more likely to lead to resentment, distrust, and discouragement. The General Conference cannot make true unity happen; nor can any union or division president, or pastor or evangelist or church member. Only God can bring that unity.

What can we do in the meantime? We can wait, study, pray, listen, learn, share, care for the needs we see around us. We can allow space for one another to work, as Paul and Barnabas did. We can make mistakes, recognize them, learn from them, and move on. We can do our balanced best to follow our consciences and respect other people's. But the unity can come—and will—only by God's act, in His time.

As the time approaches for the Annual Council business meeting, I join with my Adventist brothers and sisters in praying for guidance, both for you, our church's leaders, and for ourselves, the members of the church and of Christ's body. I pray for the unity sent by God. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,
Mary Christian

Notes & References:

1. news.adventist.org/fileadmin/news.adventist.org/files/news/documents/113G-Regard-for-and-Practice-of-General-Conference-Session-and-General-Conference-Executive-Committee-Actions.pdf.

2. I'm relying on the version of the speech published in *Adventist World*: Ted N. C. Wilson, "Church Unity and Biblical Authority," *Adventist World* April 2018, p. 17. (www.adventistworld.org/april-2018/).

3. For example, "It's so easy to sow dissension in the ranks, isn't it? How can we do all in our God-given power to keep peace among us and to focus, instead, on mission?" (Lesson 4, Sunday, July 22). Or "Church unity is always so important. How can we learn to work together, unified, even when we have different views of things?" (Lesson 11, Friday, September 14). (absq.adventist.org/current-quarter).

4. I can't help wondering: Does the Adventist church follow their example when it insists that the only ministries that genuinely "uplift Jesus," are those that share and emphasize the General Conference's official interpretations of the six-day creation, Daniel's little horn, sexuality and gender, and all other issues? See "An Invitation To Uplift Jesus," *Adventist News Network*, 11 April 2018. (news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2018-04-11/an-invitation-to-uplift-jesus/)

5. Some scholars have argued that this story offers insights for Christian responses toward gay and trans believers. See, for example, Fritz Guy, "Same-Sex Love: Theological Considerations," in *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-Day Adventist Perspectives* (Adventist Forum: 2008), part 4, 43–62.

6. Wilson, "Church Unity and Biblical Authority," 16.

MARY CHRISTIAN teaches composition, drama, and world literature at Middle Georgia State University. She also serves as an Adult Sabbath School teacher at her local church in Warner Robins, GA.

October
2018

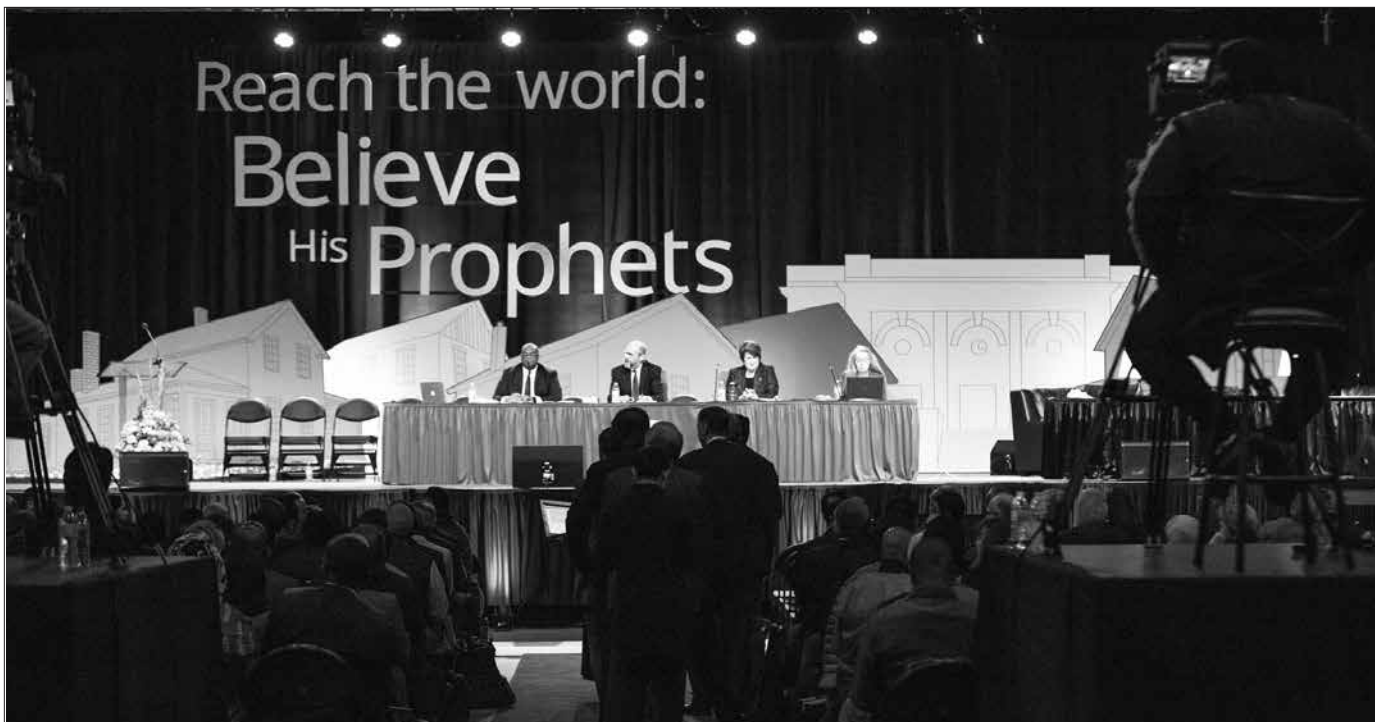
ANNUAL COUNCIL APPROVES COMPLIANCE COMMITTEES

More than sixty members of the General Conference and Division Officers (GCDO) Committee met on Thursday, Oct. 4, and split down the middle on a vote concerning the latest compliance document that was drafted by the General Conference Administration. The vote to approve the document and place it on the Annual Council Agenda was thirty-two yes, thirty no, with two abstaining. President Ted Wilson had implored committee members to support the proposal, but after more than an hour of discussion, the vote to proceed with this latest version still did not get any more traction than last year's version. In informal discussion as people were breaking for lunch some suggested that the close vote meant that the whole matter should just be dropped.

On October 8, the General Conference released on the Adventist News Network an article entitled, "Questions regarding the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its leadership," responding to the ongoing conversation about the overreach of the proposed action for Annual Council. The list of seven questions and corresponding answers included "has the General Conference leadership become a persecuting power as identified in Revelation 13?" and "Is the General Conference leadership exercising 'kingly power' akin to papal authority?"

In the Southeastern California Conference, Sandra Roberts was re-elected president on October 7, despite the displeasure of the General Conference about her serving in a position reserved for ordained ministers. (She has been ordained in her conference.)

Annual Council reports began on October 12. On October 14, 2018, the discussion and vote on the compliance document occurred, and the proposed document passed with 185 yes votes, 124 no votes, and two abstentions. After Annual Council, there were many responses to the action taken.



Members line up to speak in the Kellogg Arena in Battle Creek, Michigan, USA (Brent Hardinge/Adventist News Network).

Approval of the “Regard for” Document: Observations on the Compliance Discussion

BY EDWIN TORKELSEN | OCTOBER 16, 2018

I. Introduction by Ted Wilson and others (1 hour 45 minutes, Wilson himself used 45 minutes).

This very long introduction was exclusively dedicated to explaining and defending the General Conference proposal:

a) Wilson reassured the audience that the compliance committees in reality have no authority or power. They merely have an advisory function reporting to GC AD-COM. They have no “teeth” of their own.

b) None of this is a “power grab” by the GC administration, it is all within the “system.”

c) The compliance committees are actually put in place to defend the system, not circumvent it. They are not the KGB or CIA.

d) The proposed discipline is not severe, it is of the “mildest order.”

II. Four more people (Mike Ryan, David Trim, Karnik Doukmetzian, and Hensley Moorrooven) explained the methods used by the Unity Oversight Committee:

they listened to input, adjusted the document, made it public, all with full transparency.

Trim explained in detail why the Questionnaire was a valid method of gathering reliable information about the opinions of the majority of the membership. There was a close consensus that some consequences were needed. Doukmetzian, GC legal counsel, explained the legal validity of the punishments outlined in the document. Moorrooven presented this argument: The Holy Spirit is the source of unity, the policies are a consequence of that unity. Non-compliance with policies is therefore going against unity (and by implication the Holy Spirit). Ryan summed it all up, and presented his own personal opinion of the document.

III. TW addressed the fact that the vote in the GC Division Officers (GCDO) meeting became known and was leaked to an “independent publication.”

This leak must have been committed by a member of the GCDO, and was characterized as unethical.

IV. Mooroven read the document out loud and it took 15 minutes.

Every single person included in this introductory defense procedure presented only legal or technical information, to justify the reasonableness and legal and technical correctness of the document. Not one of them even touched upon the principles that are the foundation and are embedded in this document. The argument was simply, as long as it was all technically correct, everything was perfectly OK. And it was all “within” the present “system,” nothing was outside the “system,” probably meaning that none of this changed anything regarding the “system” itself.

V. The Debate (2 hours and 55 minutes)

Everyone assured each other that their main concern was to protect the unity of the church. They differed on how to secure that unity.

a) People approving the document: Every single one argued from a “law and order” point of view. The GC in session has voted, then everyone must comply, and those who don’t must suffer the consequences. Not one questioned the document on the basis of principle. Their only focus was rules and submission to votes and church authority. Their vision was that unity can only be real and secured through enforced uniformity; enforced compliance with voted policies was the road to that unity. Not one person questioned the validity of using coercion as a means of obtaining uniformity.

b) People disapproving the document: Almost all of them based their arguments on principles of governance, justice, and conscience. They defended the bottom-up system put in place by the 1901 GC Session. They pointed out that if this document passed, it would change the Seventh-day Adventist church to a top-down organization, which would result in a totally new cultural environment, characterized by surveillance, suspicion, lack of trust, and fear of possible personal consequences.

Voting Results:

For: 185 (60 percent)

Against: 124 (40 percent)

Abstained: 2

These results are almost identical to the voting results of the 2015 GC session. Most of those speaking for the document were from Africa and Latin America. This illustrates that social culture seems to be among the most decisive factors of the voters.

It was a bit puzzling to observe that through the debate hardly anyone from Africa spoke. Only at the very end was there a line of people, practically all of them from SID, that finally spoke, all of them for the document. Was this a coincidence? Or was it planned in order to be the ones that concluded the debate, all of them being for? The last speakers may be the ones that finally sway those who are uncertain.

Is this the end of the matter? Will this vote contribute to unity? Hardly. Conscience and principles of equality and justice cannot be voted away. Nor will the issue of women’s ordination.

This vote will probably not accomplish anything positive. It has simply, again, revealed that the split in our church is real, deep, and persistent. Today’s vote has cemented the stalemate created by the 2015 GC Session vote. It illustrates the futility of taking a deeply divisive issue to a simple majority vote. Such a vote will only be counter-productive to the declared aims of these actions and documents. The whole process, and the now-voted document, reveals again the lack of spiritual and political wisdom in our top leadership. Their course of action may secure a majority vote. It will never create unity, only more divisiveness.

In 2015, the appeal was made to accept the results of the vote, focus on mission, and move on. That did not happen then; it will not happen now. The results of the 2015 vote ought to have awakened the top leaders to at least re-examine their course of action. The feedback received in 2017 was not a call for cosmetic refinement of the loyalty document; it was a call to reconsider its foundational principles. They kept the principles, and did a few cosmetic changes. That only brought us back to square one of 2015. The stalemate is not only still there, it is more firmly in place.

EDWIN TORKELSEN is a retired historian who worked for the National Archives in Norway. He also taught Medieval History in the University of Oslo and was an Associate Professor of History in the University of Trondheim with a special interest in the development of the ecclesiastical, jurisdictional, theological, doctrinal, and political ideologies of the Medieval church. He is a member of the Tyrifjord Adventist Church in Norway.



Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division of Seventh-day Adventists. (Courtesy of Adventist.org.)

AdventNetwork of Southern Africa Issues Statement after Annual Council Compliance Vote

Editor's Note: The AdventNetwork, a forum of both lay church members and pastors in the Southern Africa Union Conference, has issued a statement on October 19, 2018, regarding the Annual Council compliance vote. The statement follows in its entirety:

On the General Conference Annual Council decision on October 14, 2018, to establish Compliance Committees

On Sunday (October 14, 2018) the General Conference Executive Committee deliberated on the proposal “113-18G: Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions.” It is a process designed to enforce compliance with organizational policies as well as actions voted at General Conference Sessions and Executive Committee Meetings.

Those that fail to comply face disciplinary measures as outlined in the document. The Executive Committee voted to accept this proposal and the AdventNetwork of Southern Africa would like to express our disagreement with this decision. Considering the exhaustive and prayerful study and discussion of this specific development considering the biblical understanding of Unity, it is difficult to see God's hand in this decision, yet.

In our letter on October 4, 2018, we raised seven areas of concern with this proposal, the setting up of the GC ADCOM Compliance Committees, and the terms of reference. We would like to reaffirm our concerns and belief that this decision will not achieve the intended goal, namely the Unity of Faith. Also, it will have an unintended adverse effect on the mission God has given to His church.

Though there have been concerns raised for many years about the non-compliance with policies in various parts of the world (even in our own Southern Africa Indian Ocean Division), the GC ADCOM never saw a need to create Compliance Committees. These were matters that threatened the very heart of the Gospel Mission. We don't want to share

specific examples, as it is not the spirit through which we intend to convey our concerns—public naming and shaming. (Yet it seems to be the preferred method of the GC Compliance Review Committee.) It is only after GC Session 2015 that the process of Compliance Committees was initiated and came to this drastic measure, this past Sunday.

We would like to reiterate that it is the mission that drives policy development and not the other way around—“form follows function.” Union Conferences were set up during the major church organizational restructuring of 1901 to facilitate the mission in their geographical territories while having cognizance of the locally prevailing conditions. These conditions vary from one part of the world to the other. For example, the General Conference Working Policy C70 (Polygamy) was designed to deal with a matter some parts of the world church (mainly Africa) were grappling with. This policy is meant to support the mission of the church and is more helpful in Africa than in North America or Europe.

The unity we all desire is not and cannot be achieved through “naming and shaming” and other punitive measures foreseen in this voted document. As a matter of fact, this document will in effect create an “us and them” approach. It will divide the church even more. It is in light of these concerns and the decision taken that we would like to make the following statements:

1. Southern Africa Indian Ocean Division is not monolithic in its views. Although the representative system of governance that the SDA Church follows implies that delegates to business meetings do not necessarily have to consult their constituencies prior to taking a vote, we would like to indicate that our Division and Unions (like all others) are not monolithic and there is a wide range of diverse positions on this matter. Which in our understanding of what transpired at the council of Jerusalem is perfectly in order and does not constitute disobedience to God’s Church yet invites a spirit of Unity and not conformity as it allows for individual conscience. Does this mean we reject the leadership of our delegates? No, certainly not, it merely means we will not always agree with our elected leaders. Does this mean we will reject the policies of the Church? No, policies change, even our fundamental beliefs can be adapted and clarified, which means we keep ourselves open to the work of the Holy Spirit. When policies do not follow function, the Seventh-day Adventist Church at the Business Session of the General Conference and the Annual Council of the General Conference change, propose, and adapt policies to fall in line with function. As much as we don’t agree with the GC Compliance Review Committees, we will continue to evaluate it and engage it considering the Gospel Mission (Function), as we are currently doing.

2. Compliance with all policies and not a targeted few. We hope that the required policy compliance shall be applied fairly across all (policies and regions of the world

church). It would be unfortunate if only specific policies and regions become primary targets of the Compliance Committees. In forming the AdventNetwork of Southern Africa we wanted to create a safe platform, an informed platform, a visionary platform for the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Southern Africa. Something that has its origin in our painful past as we suffered under injustices—even though they were voted policies and legal.

3. Formation of Compliance Committees. The matter of the Compliance Committees, as well as their member composition, was not debated nor voted on at the GC Annual Council. This process needs to be opened to ensure it is transparent so as not to be misconstrued as a “private police.” The majority of lay members, at least in our part of the world, have been caught unawares by this major development within their Church, and therefore transparency moving forward will be of paramount importance.

4. Church entities/institutions/members spying on each other. There is a real danger that Adventist entities (including individual members) will initiate their own investigations, against both existing policy and stated provisions of the voted compliance document, to identify policy violations in their local or Union Conferences as well as Divisions/GC and report these. There will be mistrust between brethren and church entities. As indicated, there are numerous cases of policy violations which take place all across the world church and it should be very easy to create, report, and publicize a catalogue of these. This is exactly what we have always raised as a real and present consequent of this process of compliance committees. What was intended to be a whip, will now become a guillotine. Discussions of mission have now become archaeological expeditions for skeletons in closets. This is not prediction, this is happening as we speak.

It is our firm view that the establishment of compliance committees was not necessary as the church has adequate processes to deal with disagreements and differing points of view.

We pray and hope that our leaders will not be scared of asking for help. You have 20 million people as a collective pool of shared wisdom. We are sure in our day and age we can tap into this wisdom and come up with a policy that fosters unity. We will continue to prayerfully engage the issue at hand. We are not ashamed of the Gospel, and will continue to speak boldly, but in the full knowledge of our duty to “Do Justice, Love Mercy, and Walk Humbly. . . .”

Yours in the Master’s service,
Members of the AdventNetwork of Southern Africa

*The AdventNetwork is a forum of both lay church members and pastors from across the Southern Africa Union Conference (in Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division). The forum engages on church related topical as well as general matters which pertain to the role of the church in society.

North American Division Issues Statement on Annual Council Vote and Message to Women Clergy

Editor's Note: On October 15, 2018, the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists issued a statement regarding the Annual Council 2018 vote on the compliance document that passed 185 in favor to 124 against, with two abstentions. The NAD has also issued a message to women clergy in the wake of the vote. Both statements follow in their entirety:

NAD Statement on 2018 General Conference Annual Council Vote

This is a very challenging time for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America. Actions taken at the 2018 General Conference Annual Council meeting in Battle Creek, Michigan, did not have the outcome for the church that we had strived toward. Many of us are dealing with fear, disappointment, and even anger.

We believe that this voted document, which outlines a system of governance to address church entities perceived not in compliance with church policy, does not follow the biblical values proclaimed by the Protestant reformers and the founders of the Adventist Church. This document, as voted, has made centralized power possible, and seeks to create a hierarchical system of governance.

In a collaborative effort, leaders in the NAD are discussing how the church in North America will move forward. Although this is difficult, amid the rancor we must keep our faith in Jesus. He is our Leader, and it is our trust in Him that will light our way. The mission, the work of the church, must and will go forward.

Policies don't hold us together. The Spirit of God holds us together. We urge you to pray for the Church; pray that we allow the Holy Spirit to do His work, to let the Holy Spirit keep us united.

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Gal. 6:9, NIV).

— North American Division Officers; October 15, 2018

A Message to the North American Division Women Clergy

My Dear Sisters in Christ,

I am sending you this brief note to let you know that our NAD leadership team believes in your ministry. You have our confidence and the assurance that we will do all in our power to strengthen and empower you.

The action of the General Conference Executive Committee on Sunday afternoon does not alter your status. You are appreciated and needed in the overall ministry/evangelistic plan of the North American Division. Your ministry is invaluable.

Please understand that we will continue to work toward the fulfillment of our dream to have one thousand female pastors in our division. There will be some temporary setbacks along the path, but we are not deterred.

May God continue to bless and direct you in every way.

— North American Division Officers

These statements originally appeared on the NAD website and in a special edition of NAD NewsPoints, the official news and information newsletter of the NAD.



PACIFIC UNION CONFERENCE
The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Pacific Southwest

Pacific Union Conference Reaffirms Commitment to Ordain Women and Men Equally

BY PACIFIC UNION CONFERENCE

Editor's Note: On October 17, 2018, the Pacific Union Conference issued a succinct statement reaffirming its commitment to ordaining both men and women. The statement follows the Annual Council vote on October 14 that approved compliance measures against leaders involved in perceived non-compliance, including ordaining women to pastoral ministry. The statement from the Pacific Union Conference follows below in its entirety:

The mission of the church is universal, while the ministry of the church is local. We are resolved in our continued commitment to ordain women and men equally. We remain stalwart in support of our churches, schools, conferences, and all of our workers. The Pacific Union Conference affirms and renews our devotion to the unique ministry that Christ has given us.

—Pacific Union Conference Officers
October 17, 2018

Florida Hospital Church Board Issues Statement on Annual Council



FLORIDA HOSPITAL CHURCH

Editor's Note: The Florida Hospital Church released a statement on October 27, 2018, announcing its solidarity with the Columbia Union and Pacific Union. These two unions both ordain women, and have therefore been deemed "non-compliant" by the General Conference. In the wake of the vote on the compliance document at the 2018 Annual Council, both unions issued statements reaffirming their commitment to women in ministry. The statement from Florida Hospital Church follows in its entirety:

We, the Florida Hospital Church Board, stand in solidarity with Pacific and Columbia Unions Conference (sic) and their honoring the decisions of their constituents. We affirm that no region of the world church can be allowed to hamper the mission of another region. When this is the effect of policy, then such policy is non-compliant with the great commission of Jesus Christ and must be opposed. We believe our unity is in Jesus Christ and not in matters of policy, or methods of operation, or systems of governance.

*This statement originally appeared on the Florida Hospital Church Facebook page.
Logo courtesy of Florida Hospital Church.*

Confounding Conundrums

A Response to Mark Finley's "Mystical Myths" Article

Editor's note: For the sake of clarity, quotes from Mark Finley's article appear in bold.

BY RANDY HARMDIERKS | OCTOBER 26, 2018

On October 9, I published an analysis of what I believe was a problematic question-and-answer article from the General Conference communication department regarding the compliance document then soon to be voted at Annual Council.

Since the document passed on October 14, several more equally problematic articles have come out. On October 17, the GC communication department released two such articles on the Adventist News Network website: "Harmony with the World Church and Questions on the Document Voted at #GCAC18." Then, on October 23, Mark Finley released his own, called "Mystifying Myths: Facts and Fiction about the General Conference's Compliance Document."

All three have significant issues, but I've chosen to focus on Finley's article because I found it more troubling than the others. Below is a point-by-point analysis. I want to remind you that what follows are my personal views; I don't speak for my conference or its leadership. Finley opens his article by saying:

If a myth is repeated often enough and loud enough a lot of people will accept it as reality.

For centuries people believed the earth was flat, and the sun revolved around the earth. Even reputed scientists and scholars of the day taught and repeated the myth. A myth is a myth no matter how loud it is trumpeted and no matter who shouts it.

Myths are running rampant on social media about the document, "Regard for and Practice of General Conference Session and General Conference Executive Committee Actions," recently voted at the 2018 Annual Council.

Before I get into my issues with this, I want to point out how amazingly ironic it is that Finley would bring up the fact that people once believed the sun revolved around the earth. The Catholic Church, in fact, taught this.

In 1613, Galileo Galilei wrote a letter explaining how the idea that the earth actually revolved around the sun wasn't unbiblical. The church wasn't ready to hear that, and it ordered Galileo not to continue this teaching. Galileo complied for seven years because of his devotion to the church, but in 1632 he published his research advocating for the theory. Inquisition proceedings began, and Galileo was pressured to recant under threat of torture. He would not. He was branded a heretic and spent the rest of his life under house arrest. The church was eventually forced to recognize they had been wrong all those years, and in 1992 Pope John Paul II expressed regret for how Galileo was treated by the church. (Are there any lessons here for us?)

Now let's look at why Finley's article is so problematic.

Look, there's a lot of debate about the structure of the Adventist Church, the roles each entity within the church has, what authority is granted to each based on their respective constitutions, as well as the role of policy in solving these issues. While that debate has intensified in the last few years, it has been going on long before this latest compliance document and, I suspect, will continue for a long time to come. Though I believe Finley profoundly misunderstands church structure, my aim here isn't to refute his views so much as the manner with which he frames them.

What is especially troubling, besides his unfortunate decision to use a word like myth to describe views that differ from his own, is how he parallels those differing views with falsehoods so obvious that to most rational people (sorry, flat-earthers!) they seem, well, silly. Of course the earth is

round! Of course the sun doesn't revolve around the earth! Everyone (err, most everyone) knows that! (Even though the church didn't for centuries...)

The conclusion Finley wants you to draw is: Of course the GC and this document are right! Everyone knows that! To believe otherwise is silly. This is both another form of demonizing (i.e. those who disagree with the GC are spreading false teachings) and classic gaslighting (manipulation by psychological means to cause one to question their own sanity).

Please hear this! There are equally dedicated Adventists who see matters of structure and authority—and women's ordination—differently. It doesn't help matters when we demonize one another.

I believe God calls women, but I've not said those who disagree are evil or insane or that they must not be serious Bible students.

I believe GC leadership has a flawed view of church structure and God's government, as well as their role in keeping the church together. I've said and supported statements that claim this compliance document moves us toward a papal system. What I've not said is that those who view things this way are obviously being led by Satan. (By contrast, I invite you to listen carefully to Elder Wilson's prayer appeal leading into Annual Council.)

I'm disheartened that Finley, a prominent church leader with significant influence—an icon of Adventism—so easily dismisses the heartfelt concerns of a multitude of Adventist members and leaders in various parts of the world who happen to disagree with the direction the church is headed.

Finley continues:

Some claim the General Conference desires to control what happens even on the local church level and no one is safe from its tentacles of control. The document has been called “papal,” “anti-prot-estant,” and “unbiblical.”

Let's consider seven common myths and the facts of the document.

Myth #1: The document is an overreach by the General Conference to centralize power.

Fact #1: The document actually states, “Planning for and ensuring compliance shall initially be entrusted to the entity closest to the matter” (p. 1, line 25).

The intent of the document is to allow the entity closest to the issue of non-compliance to handle the matter. Rather than a centralization of power, it encourages the opposite. It urges all issues of policy non-compliance to be solved at the local level. If that is not possible the next highest level of church organization may become involved. For example, if a local conference has a challenge with non-compliance that it cannot or will not solve, the Union Conference/Mission can become involved in working out a solution. This is true for each level of church organization.

If there is non-compliance of a General Conference Session or Executive Committee voted action, the GC Executive Committee may become involved.

Policies that had already been established for decades called for the entity nearest the matter to deal with issues of discipline. That's not new, and it's not some act of patient benevolence on the part of the GC. Those existing policies didn't allow for the GC to step in at any point. Why? Because church discipline isn't their role. Local churches are (were) to hold their members accountable. The sisterhood of churches in a given territory—the conference—is (was) to hold their sister churches accountable. The union's role is (was) to maintain the work already being done in specific regions of the world and to serve as a resource for the sisterhoods of churches within their borders. The GC's role, then, is (was) to move the mission forward into unreached areas.

This document flips that all on its head. Now the GC is diverting energy away from advancing mission to maintaining mission. They have been empowered to hold all other levels accountable to itself, and leaders at every level are expected to comply with policy, even if it means violating their own consciences or the collective consciences of the constituencies that elected them. Keep in mind, conference and union leaders are not employees of the GC. They are elected representatives of the

constituencies that govern their territories. This was done intentionally to decentralize power. By making leaders and entities accountable to the GC and not to their own constituencies, power is most certainly being centralized once more.

Myth # 2: The document uses a non-biblical method of coercion.

Fact #2: The document does just the opposite. Here is what the document states, “Administrators dealing with any matter of non-compliance shall exercise Christian due process which will include much prayer and dialogue” (p. 2, line 35).

The document is designed to be redemptive, not punitive. It provides for a process of dialogue, prayer, and counsel to determine how best to solve the matter of non-compliance. It follows the Scriptural pattern of reconciliation and resolution as outlined in Matthew 18.

Prayer and dialogue are great. But those words are meaningless if the actions that follow stray from a biblical approach. Those who have asserted the document is coercive aren't talking about the aspects that call for prayer. They're talking about the aspects that call for public reprimand and the threat of removal from the GC executive committee. They're talking about the reprimand being extended to leaders of compliant entities who are part of a larger noncompliant entity in order to place additional pressure on the noncompliant entity.

Using Matthew 18 here presumes the noncompliant leader has “sinned” against the GC and that the GC, then, is even rightly in a position to apply Matthew 18 principles. There are two major problems with that: 1) As it pertains to women's ordination, for example, noncompliant leaders—and the majority of their constituents, as reflected in their voting themselves out of compliance—believe they would

be sinning against God by complying with the GC, and 2) Matthew 18 says that if the erring party refuses to listen, they are to be treated as a pagan or tax collector—in other words, left to their own devices—not forced to comply. To properly implement Matthew 18, then, would require the GC to let the actions of the noncompliant entities stand or fall by their own merits. In other words, if the unions' actions are of human devising, they will fail, but if they are of God, who can stop them?

Myth #3: The document is a heavy-handed authoritarian approach to problem solving.

Fact #3: The document provides for tolerance. It allows the administrators of the entity that is perceived to be out of compliance a 60-day period to further dialogue and offer solutions to the challenging situation (p. 2, line 14).

The due process provisions in the document encourage discussion and prayerful consideration on how to solve non-compliance issues. Rather than a heavy-handed dictatorial mandate, the document assures a process of collaboration and seeks to find solutions to problems of non-compliance.

The proposed “warning” and “reprimand” are designed to enable entities to think of the seriousness of non-compliance to voted actions of the world church, and to encourage them to come back into harmony with the world church. Any warning, reprimand, or other consequences must be voted by the General Conference Executive Committee with worldwide representation.

It's easy to understand why “Do what we say or face the consequences” might be interpreted as a heavy-handed authoritarian approach.

A sixty-day window might be sufficient to work through an unintentional area of noncompliance that requires little correction, but I think it's fair to assume the primary issue of noncompliance on everyone's mind is women's ordination. It took less than a week following this document's passing for the Pacific Union to issue a statement that they have no intention of going backwards on this issue. Others will certainly follow.

If a noncompliant entity believes they are doing what God requires of them, no warning or reprimand will cause them to turn back. The only purpose for public reprimand is to hurt someone and diminish their standing in the group.

Finley's assertion that the document is bathed in a spirit of tolerance is betrayed by the fact that ADCOM activated the compliance committee tasked with dealing with ordination before the Annual Council vote even took place, completely disregarding the first three steps of their own suggested process. Actions matter so much more than words.

Myth #4: The final vote of authority regarding consequences rests in Silver Spring, Maryland, with the GC Administrative Committee.

Fact #4: The document clearly states, "If, after the organization closest to the matter has been unable to resolve a compliance issue and the General Conference Compliance Review Committee has recommended consequences, only the General Conference Executive Committee and/or the General Conference in session has authority to implement the recommendation" (p. 3, lines 27-30).

This is really an argument about de jure vs. de facto (what practice is legally recognized vs. what is practiced in reality). Yes, the document clearly states that only the GC executive committee or GC in session have the authority to implement a recommendation, but ADCOM will get to

determine what recommendations come before them. The compliance committees were formed by ADCOM. They will report directly to ADCOM. The areas of noncompliance they will focus on were selected by ADCOM. The very members of the committee were selected by ADCOM. Is it really all that farfetched to suggest this makes ADCOM "a" if not "the" de facto authority regarding compliance issues?

Myth #5: This document changes the culture of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and inhibits freedom of conscience.

Fact #5: What will change the culture of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is if the votes of the General Conference in Session and its Executive Committee are not respected. If each entity from the local church to local conferences, Unions and Divisions do not respect the decisions of the corporate church, the church will be led into

organizational chaos, fragmentation, disunity and congregationalism.

The issue before the church is whether it desires to remain as a united worldwide body, valuing the collective decisions of the General Conference in Session and its Executive Committee or whether it will become a loosely connected body of organizational entities.

This is a strawman argument. It sets up hierarchy as the model we currently have (it isn't) and the only viable alternative to anarchy (it's not).

In truth, the Adventist Church is not a hierarchy. We have a representative form of church governance that has worked well for over 150 years without requiring enforcement of policies to hold us together. Like I've stated above, churches hold their members accountable, not the

Finley's assertion that the document is bathed in a spirit of tolerance is betrayed by the fact that ADCOM activated the compliance committee tasked with dealing with ordination before the Annual Council vote even took place, completely disregarding the first three steps of their own suggested process.

GC. Sisterhoods of churches (conferences) hold their sister churches accountable, not the GC. A sisterhood of conferences (unions) hold their sister conferences accountable, not the GC. Leaders are elected by their constituencies and are held accountable by the constituents and the constitutions that govern them, not the GC.

Also, what about China? The work in China is exploding and being led by women, with ordination being a governmental requirement. Why is no one saying they are in rebellion? Why do they get a variance from policy? Why is their variance from policy not seen as a move toward chaos, fragmentation, disunity or congregationalism?

Myth #6: The General Conference does not have any entity to oversee its activities and actions.

Fact #6: The General Conference is answerable to the GC Executive Committee. This is why regular reports are given during the Spring Meeting and Annual Council.

In addition, the General Conference is regularly audited for financial compliance by the independent and well-respected auditing firm, Maner & Costerisan.

During the 2018 Spring Meeting, representatives from Maner & Costerisan, reported that the General Conference was in compliance with GC Working Policy regarding financial matters.

Also during the 2018 Spring Meeting, as part of the financial reports, GC Finance presented the “Accountability for Use of Tithe” report.

This, along with the report from Maner & Costerisan, can be read in the May 2018 GC Executive Committee Newsletter.

I’m not sure where this “myth” comes from. Perhaps there has been some confusion caused when various entities

use the term “General Conference” interchangeably for several different things (i.e. the entity located in Silver Spring vs. GC officers vs. GC ADCOM vs. GC EXCOM vs. the world field vs. delegates from the world field gathered in session). In the context of this document, some may argue it sets up a system in which “lower” entities are to be held accountable to a “higher” entity but that the “higher” entity has no one left to be held accountable to. Regarding the 2015 session vote and subsequent executive committee votes that agree with the session vote, this “myth” appears to be true.

Myth #7: The document is not biblical. It places policy above Scripture and therefore is contrary to the Protestant Reformation in that it violates freedom of conscience.

Fact #7: Church organization is a fundamental principle of New Testament teaching. The church is held together by the Holy Spirit through a common commitment to Christ, a

shared belief in Biblical teachings, a passion for mission, and a worldwide church organization. If any one of these is subtly undermined, the entire church is in danger.

The policies of the church never dictate or supersede the individual’s conscience. Every believer is free to follow the dictates of their conscience. There will be times when honest people see things differently. Policies are agreements about the way the church will operate. They determine how an international, global family will function.

Here is the point. Policies do not dictate what we believe but they should govern the actions of church leaders. Church leaders have an ethical responsibility to abide by the decisions made jointly by the representatives of the world church at a General Conference Session.

In truth, the Adventist Church is not a hierarchy.

We have a representative form of church governance that has worked well for over 150 years without requiring enforcement of policies to hold us together.

Policies are not unchangeable biblical teachings, and should never be elevated above biblical truth. They are operating principles that delegates to a General Conference Session or Executive Committee can change and at times have changed. If change to any policy passed by the General Conference in Session or to Executive Committee actions is made, it should be made by the same body where it was voted.

Yes, it's true that organization can and does create a framework that makes "going into all the world" and "teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you" much easier. But...

If the church is held together by the Holy Spirit, why don't we trust Him to do that? When did we start to trust policy more than the Holy Spirit and where did we get the idea He needs our help to keep the church together?

What if the worldwide church organization subtly undermines the other things mentioned here? If one or more of those things must be subservient to the others, which should be supreme? History testifies of what can happen when a worldwide church organization determines preservation of the organization must be supreme.

Are leaders themselves not free to follow the dictates of their own conscience? Are they really ethically bound to disregard their own consciences or the collective consciences of entire constituencies in favor of policy compliance? Doesn't that elevate policy over Scripture? What if decisions made by the GC in session are wrong? What if obedience to policy means disobedience to God?

Where the Battle Isn't

Myths never serve us well. They lead us to operate from fear in a world of illusion. Worst of all, they deter us from the mission of the church to live and preach the gospel to fulfill the mission of Christ.

Believing myths causes us to fight where the battle isn't rather than focusing our spiritual energies and attention on reaching lost people to prepare men and women for the coming of our Lord.

May the living Christ so fill our hearts and guide our thinking that we focus on the thing that really matters: souls saved eternally for His kingdom.

There are people on both sides of the policy debate who operate from fear. Finley suggests, for example, that the result of noncompliance will be organizational chaos, fragmentation and congregationalism. Is God not able to bring us through this without our intervention? Are we putting our faith in policy and not in God Himself?

It seems the policy debate, particularly as it concerns women's ordination, is a hill both sides are willing to die on. To suggest it's merely a distraction from mission ignores the fundamental reasons people are willing to die on that hill. It's also a convenient cop out. I wonder if Finley would disregard these issues as distractions to mission if the church were forcing policies on the world field that disagreed with his personal views.

Many, like myself, believe settling this matter is essential to mission. If God calls women to serve in all roles, including pastoral—and I believe He does—then the church's refusal to get out of the way is an affront to God. Either God calls women or He doesn't. If He doesn't, we shouldn't have policies that allow them to fill that role. If He does, we need to get out of His way.

Whether you agree with what I've said here, or not, I hope you'll join with me in praying that God's will be done with whatever happens next, that He brings true unity to our church and that we will put our faith and hope in Him and Him alone.

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RANDY HARMDIERKS is communication director for the Iowa-Missouri Conference. This article originally appeared on the conference website. It is reprinted here with permission.

November
2018

YEAR-END MEETINGS CONVENE

Each division holds its own year-end meeting after Annual Council. Actions taken by the General Conference Executive Committee in October are reviewed at the regional level with the (General Conference's) expectation that they will be ratified. The Compliance Document voted in October did not meet with universal approval. Displeasure with the document in North America spawned an energetic conversation about how the division should respond. Two specific actions were taken by the NAD Executive Committee: a vote to bring down the amount of the division's tithe that goes to the General Conference, so that it would be at parity with other divisions; and a vote to request that the Compliance Document be rescinded. The South Pacific Division asked that women's ordination be again placed on the agenda for the General Conference Session in 2020.

Lay-member reactions to the ongoing controversy included a video, produced in the Southern United States, supporting the General Conference action, which was posted to the General Conference YouTube channel. In the Pacific Northwest, some lay members formed the World Church Affirmation Sabbath to also support the General Conference. However, the Upper Columbia Conference Executive Committee voted to ban the WCAS activities in their conference, calling their agenda divisive.



NAD Year-End Meetings, Day 5 (Photos: Pieter Damsteegt/NAD).

North American Division Votes Request for Tithe Parity

BY ALISA WILLIAMS | NOVEMBER 6, 2018

The penultimate day of the 2018 North American Division Year-end Meetings on Monday, November 5, slowly built to a crescendo that ended in a motion to reduce the amount of tithe the NAD gives to the General Conference to parity with other divisions, and a personal appeal from NAD President Dan Jackson.

The day began with the Treasurer's Report from G. Thomas Evans, retiring NAD treasurer. The bulk of the report and subsequent discussion focused on tithe: what the NAD receives, how much is returned to the conferences/unions, and how much is given to the GC for use in other divisions around the world.

The total tithe received from members in the NAD in 2017 was \$1,020,674,628. This was an increase of over \$18 million from 2016. NAD tithe has gradually increased over the last ten years, and has topped \$1 billion for the last two years. In 2016, 44 percent of the total world tithe came from the NAD.

Evans reminded the delegates that several years ago it was voted, in conversation with the General Conference, that the NAD would gradually reduce the amount of tithe it gives back to the GC, from 8 percent in 2012 down to 5.85 percent in 2020. The NAD currently gives 6.35 percent (2018). In 2016, the NAD gave \$74.2 million to the GC, while the rest of the world combined gave \$25.8 million.

Of the over \$1 billion that was received in 2017, \$846.68

million (82.95 percent) was kept at the local conference and union levels for use and \$173.99 million (17.05 percent) was remitted to the NAD, which it then distributed as shown in Diagram 1.

The amount left for use by the NAD is approximately three cents per gross tithe dollar, which is then spent as shown in Diagram 2.

After the report, several delegates appealed to the NAD for more money to be allocated to helping immigrants and refugees within the United States. "We need to let them know we know they're here and we need to support them," said Dean Coridan, president of the Iowa-Missouri Conference. He continued, saying that this needs to be addressed with the GC—they need to understand that North America *is* a mission field, and serving, for example, the Karen immigrants here in the United States is just as important as supporting the Karen people in refugee camps across the world.

Debbie Jackson, a lay member from Colorado, spoke to the fact that there are children born right here in America who don't have access to food or water. "North America *is* a mission field. . . . There is a mission field here with our children, and I don't see us reaching out to them, and it hurts my heart."

The Treasurer's Report was accepted unanimously by the body, and then Juan Prestol-Puesan, GC treasurer, appealed to the delegates saying the GC has needs, too. It has ministries it hasn't even touched, not because of lack



NAD Year-End Meetings, Day 5 (Photos: Pieter Damsteegt/NAD).

of heart, but because of funding limitations. “This is not our money, it is God’s money,” he said, and God will provide for needs. No division has enough money for its needs, but we trust God to provide. Prestol seemed well aware of where the conversation of the day was headed—toward a discussion and ultimately a vote on tithe parity.

A few more financial reports, including ones from the Adventist Retirement department and the General Conference Auditing Services (GCAS), finished out the morning. The average mortality of an Adventist employee is actually less than that of the general population, retirement director Ray Jimenez told the audience. Robin Kajjura from GCAS told the audience that there are 321 entities within the NAD that are evaluated by GCAS. Of these, 73 percent were evaluated in 2017, and 90 percent of these received a standard (compliant) report. “That’s a really good percentage,” she said.

After lunch, a slew of additional reports were presented, including Christian Record Services, Adventist Media Ministries, and Oakwood University, before the discussion turned back to finance and Jackson opened the floor for discussion.

Terry Shaw, president of Adventist Health System, was first at the mic and immediately made a motion:

“Recommend the NAD Administration to discuss with General Conference the issue of financial parity.”

Ohio Conference President Ron Halvorsen spoke in favor of the motion, saying that despite the fact tithe has increased in his territory, because so much of it goes to other divisions, there simply isn’t enough left to fund their mission here. The church in the NAD is aging, the faithful NAD tithe givers who are funding mission are dying. “I want us to be the giving-est division in the world,” concluded Halvorsen, but if we don’t do something now to support our NAD churches and schools, everyone, every division all over the world, will be hurt.

Calvin Watkins, president of the Southwest Regional Conference, said “We may fund a great majority of the world church, but when you look at our numbers of what we’re baptizing, *this* is the new mission field.”

Lee-Roy Chacon, Texico Conference president, asked how the amount of tithe the other divisions give compares to what the NAD gives. Jackson replied that the other divisions all give 2 percent of their tithe to the GC, as is required by the *Working Policy*. Chacon then asked for an amendment to the motion as follows: “Recommend the NAD Administration to discuss with General Conference the issue of

North American Division 2017 Use of Funds:		
Tithe Income		\$173,986,369
Sent on to GC	\$67,364,525	
Tithe Exchange—(See Non-Tithe Graph Later)	\$30,720,000	
Evangelism Reversion	\$14,704,353	
Special Assistance	\$10,000,582	
Retirement-(Defined Benefit Plan Extra Appr.)	\$2,865,782	
Adventist Media Ministry	\$5,090,010	
Seminary--Min/Bus/Com/WIM Apprpr.	\$4,429,585	
Auditing Services (pay ½ of Conferences fees)	\$4,146,120	
Oakwood/Other Appropriations	\$2,137,656	
NADEI/AIM	\$1,735,275	<u>\$143,193,888</u>
Left for North American Division Use		<u>\$30,792,481</u>
<p>This \$30.79 million is right at 3% of the \$1,020.67 million gross Tithe (3 cents per gross tithe dollar)</p>		

Diagram 1

How We Used the \$30.79 Million NAD Pie Slice in 2017:	
All Admin. Functions/Expenses	\$22,223,150
Strategic Initiatives-Building Blocks	\$2,051,448
Projects-(Broken out later)	\$1,477,326
Evangelism	\$1,137,996
Adv. Giving/Schl Pay/ACC/eAdventist	\$1,084,151
Adventist Church Treasury Solutions	\$761,110
Guam Micronesia—Our Mission	\$502,083
Adventist Rev./El Centinela/Message	\$548,928
Plusline-AdventSource	\$282,361
Title VII Cases/Other/Misc	\$130,500
GC Session/Ministries & HR Conventions	\$352,778
Esperanza TV	\$173,408
Miscellaneous	<u>\$67,242</u>
	<u>\$30,792,481</u>

Diagram 2

financial parity to be accomplished in two to three years.” At the recommendation of another delegate, this wording was further clarified to read, “Recommend the NAD Administration to discuss with General Conference the issue of financial parity, with parity to be accomplished in two to three years.”

Jackson asked Prestol-Puesan to come to the mic and explain how the GC would be affected by the proposed

change. Prestol said that he wanted to interject some intelligence into the discussion. “You are voting with emotion,” he told the delegates, to murmurs of protest. He then continued, saying that to vote tithe parity is actually out of compliance, because only the GC can decide tithe policy.

“Tithe percentages are in the black book [*Working Policy*] as policy. If you say you want to change tithe percentages, you’re saying you want to change policy.” It can be

done, he continued, but it takes time and can't be done this quickly, and even with these discussions, the NAD still wouldn't be granted parity because the money from the NAD is necessary to fund mission. He said there are 500 families here serving the GC who would have to turn around and go home if this tithe parity motion is voted, because what is received from the NAD funds their salaries.

In conclusion, Prestol said the motion on the floor was out of compliance and world budgets have already been decided based on NAD tithe and cannot be changed now. We can't go back to the other divisions and say they won't have the money they were promised, he said. Jackson had to ask the room to maintain respect several times, as there were murmurs of dissent throughout Prestol's remarks.

The responses to the amended motion were mixed, with some saying the NAD has a responsibility to the rest of the world to fund mission in less prosperous areas. Several said that to move to reduce tithe now sends the wrong message and seems retaliatory after what happened at Annual Council. But others spoke to the specific, urgent needs within the NAD. One delegate pointed out that we have the equivalent of third world countries right here in the United States.

A delegate called question, which was voted through, thereby ceasing discussion and moving directly to voting the amendment on the motion. The amended motion of adding "two to three years" to the motion was then voted and passed: 119 yes, 114 no, and one abstention. Only a simple majority was needed to pass the amendment.

The floor then opened for discussion on the amended motion. Mike Hewitt from the Mountain View Conference, after identifying his conference as the smallest in the United States, said, "We have real challenges, our people are faithful, they believe in mission...but I can tell you we have churches who won't be here in five years...How are we supposed to help other parts of the world when we can't help ourselves?"

Carlton Byrd, director of Breath of Life, said the cost of doing ministry is rising faster and higher than what current tithe allocations can fund. "Salvation is free, but ministry takes money."



Diane Thurber, president of Christian Record Services, responds at the NAD Year-End Meetings (Photos: Pieter Damsteegt/NAD).

Keith Bowman, who founded the young adult ministry, *The Haystack*, said it is impossible to find money to fund youth and young-adult missions and meet them where they're at, which is online. He spoke to digital missionaries such as himself and Justin Khoe who runs "That Christian Vlogger." Though *The Haystack* is now under the NAD's purview, other great ministries are not because there is no funding to help them. But digital missionaries are the future and they need funding, concluded Bowman.

Dean Coridan, Iowa-Missouri Conference president, said he doesn't appreciate accusations of being in rebellion. If the GC recognizes the NAD is giving more than other divisions, but sees there's need here, they should have offered a solution themselves. But they didn't. And because they didn't offer a solution, they shouldn't kick or threaten the people on the ground when they are asking for a solution today. "In compliance, out of compliance, we are going to do mission," concluded Coridan.

Ron Carlson, Kansas-Nebraska Conference president said we can't keep kicking this can down the road. We've known about the needs for decades and our hands have been tied, but our members are saying enough is enough. We need to do something.

Todd Pascoe, lay member, stood in opposition to the motion. He said we have abundance in this country. "God is delaying the second coming so none are lost...and there are unintended consequences when we try to move this much money around."

After many responses, some in favor, some against, and several conflicted, a delegate moved to end the discussion and take the vote immediately. That motion passed, and so the vote on the motion then occurred. The motion passed with 121 yes and 90 no and was worded as follows: “Recommend the NAD Administration to discuss with General Conference the issue of financial parity, with parity to be accomplished in two to three years.”

With the vote out of the way, Jackson seemed to feel the time was right to share his personal opinion on the actions of the GC. In what appeared to be an off-the-cuff appeal, Jackson spoke for twenty minutes on the way the Church has mistreated women and the NAD’s dedication to women pastors.

Lastly, the writing committee’s proposed document was passed out to delegates to study overnight and to discuss the next day. Alex Bryant, NAD executive secretary, made an appeal from the dais that no one share the document with anyone outside the room. Media outlets were asked not to post it until Tuesday, after the discussion was underway. (The document has since been voted and officially released.)

Although the NAD officials are now tasked with beginning conversations with the GC regarding tithe parity, only time will tell whether the GC is willing to acquiesce to the request. If Prestol’s comments earlier in the day are any indication, the GC may simply say “no,” claiming such a request is out of compliance.

ALISA WILLIAMS is managing editor of www.spectrummagazine.org.

NAD Calls for GC Compliance Document to be Rescinded

BY BONNIE DWYER | NOVEMBER 7, 2018

On the last day of the North American Division Year-end Meetings, an hour was set aside to discuss the statement of how the Division would officially respond to the General Conference’s recently approved process regarding non-compliance with General Conference actions. A writing committee had been appointed earlier in the week to draft a statement, and delegates had been given an opportunity to make suggestions they thought should be included.

John Freedman, president of the North Pacific Union and a member of the writing committee, read the statement to the delegates. It affirmed commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist faith and oneness in the body of Christ.

It recognized Christ as the head of the church, the Bible as “our only creed,” the work of the Holy Spirit, the writings of Ellen G. White, and the resulting spirit of Christlike forbearance. It continued:

As such, we are compelled to reject the spirit and direction of this document voted at the 2018 Annual Council (hereafter indicated as ‘the document’),

as it is not consistent with the biblical model of the church. We simply cannot, in good conscience, support or participate in the implementation of the process outlined in the document, as it is contrary to the culture of respect and collaboration taught in the Bible

Additionally, the NAD statement said the GC document “moves us away from the principles behind the 1901–03 reorganization.”

There were three requests for action: 1) that the General Conference Executive Committee at its 2019 Annual Council rescind the action approving this document, 2) that it revise any policies that enable majority fields to dictate the management of non-doctrinal, non-biblical issues to minority fields and create policies that protect the interests of minority fields, 3) that an item be placed on the 2020 General Conference Session agenda calling for a statement that affirms respect for the multiple cultures and practices in which we minister and empower ministry that is sensitive to the local context.

With an admonition from the chair “not to wordsmith the document,” the floor was open for discussion.

Jim Micheff, president of the Michigan Conference, was first to the microphone. He spoke against the document, but in a conciliatory manner. “This is my family. I have agreed to disagree with those in favor of women’s ordination. It is not an issue I wish to discuss.” But he said this document makes that very difficult, because he felt that to accept the three requests for action would be to deny the authority of the General Conference. And the third item, in particular, the GC could not do. “We would have independent divisions interpreting what Adventism is throughout this whole field.” He concluded that,

If this vote goes, Michigan is a member of the North American Division of the General Conference. We will embrace it. You are still my brothers and sisters. We may not agree. I know that God is going to bring unity into this church. I don’t know how he is going to do it, but he is going to bring us into unity.

Ramiro Cano, the president of the Central California Conference, who in a previous speech had told the gathering that he was from a compliant conference in a non-compliant union, opened his comments with a reference to the principles Jackson had set when the writing committee was given its task to draft a statement: 1) reflecting NAD mission, 2) in a Christ-like manner, 3) in harmony with biblical principles. “I want to affirm the work of the writing committee,” he said “it meets the principles that you outlined.” He said he was opposed to the document presented in Battle Creek, he was disappointed by that action. And then he closed with a question, “This document when it gets to the GC, will there be a receptivity to the document?”

Darrel Lindensmith, a pastor from the Dakota Conference, gave the shortest speech. “I did not have high expectations. Thanks committee. It is perfect. Shorten the first page a little, but just thank you.”

Ricardo Graham, president of the Pacific Union, also expressed appreciation to the writing committee saying that he liked the length and the tone. “It does not sound angry or rebellious. It sets out clearly the direction the division has been moving towards.” He reminded the delegates of a 2012 action taken at a Pacific Union Conference special constituency meeting (by a vote of 79 percent to 21 percent to recognize ordination without regard to gender. “We have moved in that direction because that is what our people

asked us to do. As an employee of the Pacific Union Conference, I have moved in the direction.” He closed by saying that “God is an equal opportunity employer.”

Diane Thurber, the president of Christian Record Services, was the only woman to speak. She began her comments in support of the document by pointing out that women are a majority in our Church’s membership, and that she was speaking “for those women whose voices have been silenced by those who don’t understand or recognize God’s love for women and His plans to deploy women to help Him reach a dying world.”

I stand here because I could not say no to the call of God to serve in leadership for our Church. I am not a pastor but I am charged to help reach the more than 217 million visually impaired and 39 million who are blind in the world and ultimately to ‘empower people who are blind to engage their community and embrace the Blessed Hope.’ It was not a decision I made without confirmation of His call, a recognition that none of us are fully equipped for what He calls us to do, and belief that the message of His saving grace will only reach the whole world if we allow God to use and equip whomever He chooses to use for whichever task He needs done whenever He desires. We have seen many women, like men, submit their lives to Him and accomplish His purpose in powerful ways. How can we stand in His way?

She asserted her belief that the Compliance Committees that will convene as a result of the document voted at Annual Council, “will ultimately punish women, perpetuate more pain, and may ultimately prohibit women from serving as God calls and ordains.”

In spite of the chair’s request that people “not wordsmith the document,” there were multiple suggestions for additions of words and phrases for clarification. Before breaking for lunch, the chair called for a vote, even though the writing committee was charged with making corrections over the lunch hour. The statement was approved with 176 in favor and 48 no votes. Late in the afternoon, the edited document was returned to the floor, the modifications were read, and then a second approval of the document was made via a raising of hands.

BONNIE DWYER is editor of *Spectrum*.



North American Division President Dan Jackson speaks at the 2018 year-end meetings.
(Photo: Flickr.com/NAD/Mylon Medley)

Hooy and Credulity

BY DANIEL R. JACKSON | NOVEMBER 6, 2018

Editor's Note: This is a transcript of the November 5, 2018 statement from North American Division President Dan Jackson following the discussion and vote to bring the amount of tithe sent by the NAD to the General Conference into parity with the other world divisions within the next three years.

I think we are done for the day. Now please come tomorrow with your running shoes, because we have a lot to accomplish tomorrow. I want to make a statement before you get up.

I want to make a statement that is very sensitive. But I am saying it to you, and I don't know if we are streaming still. It doesn't matter if we are, or if we are not. I think the discussion of the last two days demonstrates a malaise in the church. I believe that all of us need to pray that we will overcome that malaise, or at least the spirit of God will overcome that malaise in the church. We must appeal to God to bring us together.

I will say from the perspective of serving as the president of this division for eight years, that I am very tired and probably angry at the way our division is looked at by the world. We are

not rebels. We are Seventh-day Adventists. There is tremendous loyalty to the church in the North American Division. Once again, I would challenge—and I mean challenge—someone to find any of the divisions that are more loyal to the church, both in terms of policy and finances than the North American Division. I will not sit here and tell you what I know, because it would be embarrassing to the world church. But if we have two unions, or forty-nine women who have been ordained, these are small matters compared to some of the other matters that exist around the world .

I don't know where the discussions will go that we've just voted, but I will tell you, there had better be a spirit of reconciliation on the part of all. No condescension. No, we are not your students. We are colleagues together in ministry with our brethren from the General Conference. Period. It will be unacceptable to the three of us, as it is unacceptable to you, that you're looked down upon. It's just not acceptable. I will not tolerate it, and I mean that just as I say it. I will walk away so fast it will make anybody's head spin. This division has not only been the breadbasket, but it has been the source of human resources that have fanned and fueled mission and growth and development in the world church for decades. And I hope and pray it will continue to be. I hope and pray that we can come to an amicable resolution of the financial issue that is pregnant in this division. Because we don't live in the days. "The days of wine and roses." We don't live in that world anymore. We just don't.

And so, I am making this statement so that you all know, and so our world leaders know, and my good brothers, my fellow division presidents: Be a little careful. I'm not saying this militantly, I'm appealing: Be a little careful about how you talk about this precious division. And the precious people who lead in this division.

I want Jesus to come. I expressed some time ago to Elder Wilson, following the 2015 General Conference [Session], these sentiments: "I know that you believe we are on the borders of Canaan. I don't believe that. I believe we are headed back into the wilderness."

We all bear a responsibility here. We have got to stop talking about the brethren like they're scumbags. We must pay respect, give respect, and appeal that we work together. Condescension isn't pretty on anybody. So, by God's grace, this has been a serious period of time these last two days. And we still have some territory to cover.

Punishing people is something that God ultimately will do. In my opinion, and I know this steps on toes, I will never agree to that document. It was voted by the world church. There was a majority vote. And the General Conference will have to apply whatever principles it needs to apply or it thinks to apply. Because you see,

you understand, the North American Division has never said we do not think there should be any accountability. We have never said that. As a matter of fact, as I said the other day, we offered a way through by request from the president of the General Conference. We offered a way. It was rejected. So what I'm saying now is that I am praying that God will give us the collective sense to assist us to find that document in the paper shredders.

If God is with a movement, it will prosper. If He's not, it is doomed to failure. I just have a very hard time believing that women are doomed to failure who are guided by the Holy Spirit.

I believe this church, this doesn't sound pretty, but I believe this church one day in the future is going to stand up in embarrassment and apologize for the absolute abuse of women.

I am not talking about—you know, people have different opinions—and I want the folks who think right now that I'm an absolute raving lunatic, to know I support your right to believe women should not be ordained. I support your right. You are a member of God's church. You are our brothers and sisters, and I'm not talking about that. I am talking about words entrenched in policies that beg credulity. You can't tell people today, "We love everybody, and everybody can do everything, except those positions that require...." Get that policy out of there. Just come out and say, "We do not believe in ordination of women. Period." That's all you have to say. But that nonsense, that hooley, in the B60 policy that allows us to put a noose around the neck of women is garbage. It's a good word. Don't say three times, "We love everybody, and everybody's acceptable, and you can do anything, except if there's an ordination requirement, and then come to the end of the policy and say all of these 'except' statements in parentheses do not apply—and do not apply them—to women who have been ordained as elders as it has been voted by the General Conference." I'm sorry it begs credulity.

Our women in the North American Division who serve as pastors and leaders will be protected by the North American Division and every conference and union president in this place.

There is more hooley—there is hooley in the male headship theology. It was never Seventh-day Adventist, it is not Seventh-day Adventist, and it is not going to become Seventh-day Adventist. So, here's a story. My good secretary just said, "Calm down." He's a good man. You know, we will continue to pray that God's spirit will lead the church, so that our women will not be held back or limited by glass ceilings that we have created to in order to protect our own positions.

So, I just wanted to tell you a thing or two at the end of the meeting. I know there will be some folks who will be madder than a hornet with me. And my basic statement is that if you are mad as a hornet, “Buzz off.” Because I have to tell you, I have lived through this for eight years and I am tired.

Let us determine by God’s grace that we will work: a) to support our women, that we will work—and this is painful—in harmony with the brethren, because that is part of our role, and the brethren around the world have said, “No.” So the onus is on us to demonstrate that our women are spiritual women of God serving Him, building ministry for Him, and we will not pull back. We are not going to quit a) hiring women pastors. If you feel we’re going to, or you’re going to kick up a fuss about it, too bad. We will not stop. Furthermore, we will continue to agitate for the ordination of women to the Gospel ministry.

Having said all that I have said in the last twenty minutes, I want to say: I have made an issue of this, because of the last two days. But this division, having said that, is not about Women’s Ordination. It’s about evangelizing the world with the Gospel of Jesus. And I don’t remember who it was, I think it was Todd Pascoe, who said we need, no, it was our brother from Columbia Union, we need to find new ways and new methods of evangelizing for Jesus Christ.

Some of us will do that believing in Women’s Ordination, some will do that not believing. I’m appealing to all of us, let’s touch each other, let’s work into each other’s hearts. We are brethren, or we are the bristers, you know? You know what a brister is? That’s a combination of a brother and a sister. We are the bristers. And we must work together. We have, and will always have, some impediments, but let us not be deterred. Let us move forward in our mission and with joy in our hearts—not anger—but joy in our hearts because the Lord Jesus, who came as a baby in a manger, is going to come again. And He wants us to live with Him, and with each other, forever.

And you know what I know about heaven? There’s not going to be one argument about women’s ordination. It’s like we used to say when I was a pastor: “There are good things about every period in history, for instance, the time of trouble, there will be no Ingathering.”

God bless you.

DANIEL R. JACKSON is president of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

South Pacific Division Asks GC to Reconsider Women's Ordination at GC Session 2020

BY ALISA WILLIAMS | NOVEMBER 15, 2018

The South Pacific Division (SPD) began its year-end meetings on Wednesday, November 14, 2018, with a unanimously voted motion regarding women in ministry and a request that the GC “place on the GC 2020 Session agenda an action item on the ordination of women in light of the missional needs of some areas of the world church.”

In a video released by the Adventist Record, SPD President Glenn Townend recapped the day's events, including the motion that was voted. Below is a transcript of Townend's remarks regarding the motion:

The issue that probably took the longest was the Women in Ministry report, and there was much discussion and debate after Dr. Danijela Schubert, who leads that area, gave her report. And I just want to read you the motion:

RESOLVED to receive the Development of Women in Ministry and Leadership Report as presented by Dr. Danijela Schubert and attached to the official minutes.

And further, to note and share with the GC the high proportion of women who are employed in local church ministry and leadership positions throughout the South Pacific Division, and that the South Pacific Division has been and remains willing to work within the will and policy of the world church.

And further, to reaffirm the decision of the South Pacific Division Executive Committee Action 12.1 held on the 12th of November 2013 to affirm the Biblical Research Committee recommendations as follows:

1) The Biblical Research Committee of the South Pacific Division does not see any scriptural principle which would be an impediment to women being ordained.

2) The calling of the Holy Spirit needs to be recognized for both men and women. There is a sense of injustice that needs to be addressed.

3) The mission of the church is the primary determinant of praxis both in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and in its climax as the Holy Spirit is poured out on both men and women during the latter rain.

Further, to continue to encourage and support the empowering of women in fulfilling the gospel commission and being employed in ministry and leadership positions throughout the SPD and— here's more furthers.

Further to continue to influence the church within the SPD and the world church to recognize and utilize women who have been called, and have accepted the call of God into the gospel ministry, and who are gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit as evidenced by their fruitfulness in ministry.

Further, to request the GC to reconsider the recommendations made last quinquennium by the divisions' Biblical Research Committees, the TOSC committee, and to review the GC Session 1990 action referring to women's ordination for its context and its relevance to the missional needs of the church at this time, and further, and that in the context of the above items, and specifically in relation to the Fundamental Beliefs numbers 6, 7, 14, and 17, to request the GC to place on the GC 2020 Session agenda an action item on the ordination of women in light of the missional needs of some areas of the world church.

Now that was a mouthful. But let me summarize. It really affirmed women in leadership and ministry within our division. And when we looked at some of the statistics, as a division we have a high percentage compared to the rest of the world church of women in leadership and in pastoral ministry and we can be proud of that, but we want to do better, and we still believe in women's ordination and we want it discussed and we don't want winners and losers. We actually want the world church to move on, and we think it can move on, and we want it to move on in a more wholesome way.

And so, the discussion was not at all threatening or antagonistic. It was really done in good spirits, a lot of interaction. And everyone stood. It was a unanimous vote, and it was a vote taken by standing, and it was just a really wonderful, wonderful time. And so that's basically this day. God bless you.

ALISA WILLIAMS is managing editor of www.spectrummagazine.org.



AWAITING COMPLIANCE COMMITTEE ACTION

As the year came to a close, there was no word of when the Compliance Committees would meet. Posting a video created by lay members in the Southern Union to the General Conference Youtube Channel was the only official action. Reaction to the video was swift and loud. When questioned about the video, the Communication Department of the General Conference declined to comment.

Church Members and Official Entities Respond to the General Conference Unity Video

BY ALISA WILLIAMS | DECEMBER 8, 2018

On November 20, 2018, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists released a video via Adventist News Network titled *Unity #GCAC18*. The five-and-a-half minute video, created in the aftermath of Annual Council 2018 (#GCAC18), features several lay members appealing to others to “trust the decisions of the General Conference in session” and “support the decisions that we as a church family made.”

“We are at an important point in our church history,” an earnest-looking woman intones as the video opens. Additional participants appear, all grave and unsmiling, many echoing phrases and words of previous participants. The individuals included in the video represent a variety of ages and ethnicities, though all appear to be from North America. None are identified by name.

The video leads viewers through a skewed version of history regarding women’s ordination and the decisions made at the 1990, 1995, and 2015 General Conference Sessions. Participants state:

In 2015, the vote was preceded by years of prayer and study of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. Every delegate was encouraged to study the issue for themselves and vote on their own prayerful study from the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. They were to review the reports of the study commissions and carefully consider what is best for the church and the fulfillment of our mission, our God-given mission. And once again, our global family decided to not allow individual divisions to decide for themselves.

Though true that the vote was preceded by years of study, the video neglects to mention that the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC) overwhelmingly agreed that no biblical reason exists to prevent women being ordained to pastoral ministry. The video also implies that the 2,000-plus delegates to GC Session 2015 were provided with the TOSC reports to aid their study

of the matter, though it has been previously reported this did not occur.

The video then asks, “What do we do when some of our family members decide to do the opposite of what we, as a family, decided?” as they move on to a discussion about the recent Annual Council 2018 vote to punish unions deemed out of compliance.

“We finally decided to create and implement a system of understanding, dialogue, and eventually consequences to bring all our family members back into harmony with our collective decision. It’s not about control, politics, or power,” state the participants.

“We support our church. Won’t you?” the video concludes, before giving a website address of BeInformed.Adventist.org, a page on the official church site with links to the document voted at Annual Council, as well as additional articles on the topic.

Reactions to the video were swift and overwhelmingly severe. As of this writing, the video has been viewed over 72,000 times and garnered over 3,500 “reactions,” with 893 being thumbs up and over 2,700 thumbs down (approximately 75 percent).

The more than 1,800 comments also appear to be mostly negative. Some pointed to the fact that the recent Annual Council vote was very close (approximately 60 percent to 40 percent), others took issue with the tone of the video, saying it created the very division it was trying to mend, while still others used humor to lighten the mood.

Barely Adventist, the popular satirical blog, joined in with an article titled, “GC Takes Hostages, Releases Ransom Video.”

Humor was also the method Erik Stenbakken, a freelance commercial photographer and videographer, decided to employ in his response: a video titled *Conformity #GCAC18* that eerily matched the GC’s original in tone, cadence, and even set-up.

When asked what prompted him to create his own parody version, Stenbakken replied,

I watched [the GC video] and, honestly, it made me physically ill for a few moments. Poor technical execution and editing decisions aside, the video content was appalling. It was about as subtle as a brick to the face. The repetition (favorite technique in propaganda), the doublespeak, the misleading notion that this was done for the good of everyone,

the cultish “just surrender your will to the leader” vibe—all of it—I was incredulous that a Protestant church in 2018 would ever make or endorse this. All of it was beyond belief. But there it was. . . .

I wanted to get it out of my mind, so I went to exercise. I couldn’t. I kept pacing around and around with dialogue to a different video in my head, the video you see. I couldn’t concentrate. I figured the only way to get rid of it was to just let the whole thing out. So I sat down and in less than 20 minutes typed it out. Done. I felt better and went and exercised. Sent the script to [a] friend who.... wrote back immediately, “This should def be made man!!!” Well, I hadn’t written it to actually DO it. I wrote it for catharsis. I showed it to my wife and she said instantly, “I want to be in it. . . .” “I had not even asked her.

That was on Friday afternoon. By Saturday night, he had his full cast, and by early Sunday it had been shot. He edited it that afternoon and then published it to Facebook and YouTube. “Apparently, it struck a chord with a LOT of other people,” he said, adding, “The cast are all folks from my local church. I showed the script to them and each one of them said immediately, ‘Yes. I’m in.’ They are not ex-Adventists or disgruntled people. To a person, they all want to see the Kingdom of God move forward.”

“I get it that some folks are super concerned about the fate of the denomination,” Stenbakken continued,

I don’t doubt that the sincerity of the people in the original video is very real. I have no hate for them. But I disagree strongly with the idea that the SDA denomination (or ‘General Conference in session’) is God’s authority on earth to make new doctrine (and/or punishment for breaking policy held to be on par with doctrine). I disagree strongly that there should be a special set of people sent out from headquarters to find troublemakers who dare flout the will of the world leadership.

With almost 12,000 views on YouTube and an additional 14,000 on Facebook, Stenbakken’s video has become the most viral response to date. Unlike the original, Stenbakken’s has received an overwhelmingly positive response.

Individual church members aren't the only ones who have responded to the GC's video, however. The Norwegian Union issued an official response, strongly criticizing the video. Point one of seven in the NU's statement read:

We are disappointed with the obvious lack of understanding among those responsible at the General Conference as to how this video would be perceived among many in the church. We are astonished that our international headquarters chooses over-simplification as a method and means of communication in a very complex question.

Meanwhile, the Trans-European Division issued its own video, titled *Permission to Dream*. Though they don't reference the GC's "Unity" video at all, it's easy to compare and contrast the two. Both make use of a diverse cast that recites directly into the camera, but while the GC video participants gravely demand obedience to the General Conference, the TED participants joyfully recite a sermon given in 1975 by British theologian John Stott. "Permission to Dream" is an attempt by the Trans-European ministry team not only to say, 'this is who we are' but 'how we and our church should be,'" writes David Neal who is featured in the video.

Despite the strong response the GC's Unity video has received, the General Conference has remained silent in

the weeks following. The video contains a vague description which reads, "This video was created by lay members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and was produced in partnership with the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists." This raises more questions than it answers. What did this partnership entail? Who wrote the script for the video? Who paid for it, and how much was spent to produce it? Where did that money come from? How were the individuals included in the video chosen?

In response to these questions and more, the GC Communication Department simply replied, "we are not able to release any information about this particular video."

What comes next is anyone's guess. Are there more videos in store? Have the compliance committees begun meeting, and if so, what decisions have been made? Will the GC respond to the North American Division who recently requested the compliance document be rescinded at Annual Council 2019? Or to the South Pacific Division who requested that a vote on women's ordination be placed on the GC Session 2020 agenda?

Only one thing seems certain: Though the world church may be divided, all eyes appear united in watching what the General Conference does next. When will the compliance committees meet?

ALISA WILLIAMS is managing editor of www.spectrummagazine.org.

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GC Compliance Review Committee with Doctrine, Policies, Statements & Guidelines for Church Organizations and Institutions Teaching Creation/Origins

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GC Compliance Review Committee with Doctrine, Policies, Statements and Guidelines for Church Organizations and Institutions Regarding Homosexuality

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General Conference Compliance Review Committee with the Distinctive Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for Church Organizations and Institutions

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River Abstract, Southern Iceland (Photo by Grant Ordelleide)

Christianity in one hundred words, or less

The first Christian known to us, Paul of Tarsus, preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ, heir of the promise God made to Abraham to bless all nations through him.

The Greeks made it a mystical philosophy.
The Romans a legal institution.
The Europeans an imperial culture.
Colonial peoples received a compulsory discipline.
The Americans made it a capitalistic enterprise.

Now peoples struggle to make it again faith in the God who raised Christ from the dead to give life and freedom to all who, like Abraham, live in peaceful coexistence under the faithful God who keeps promises.

-Herold Weiss

(with apologies to all church historians)