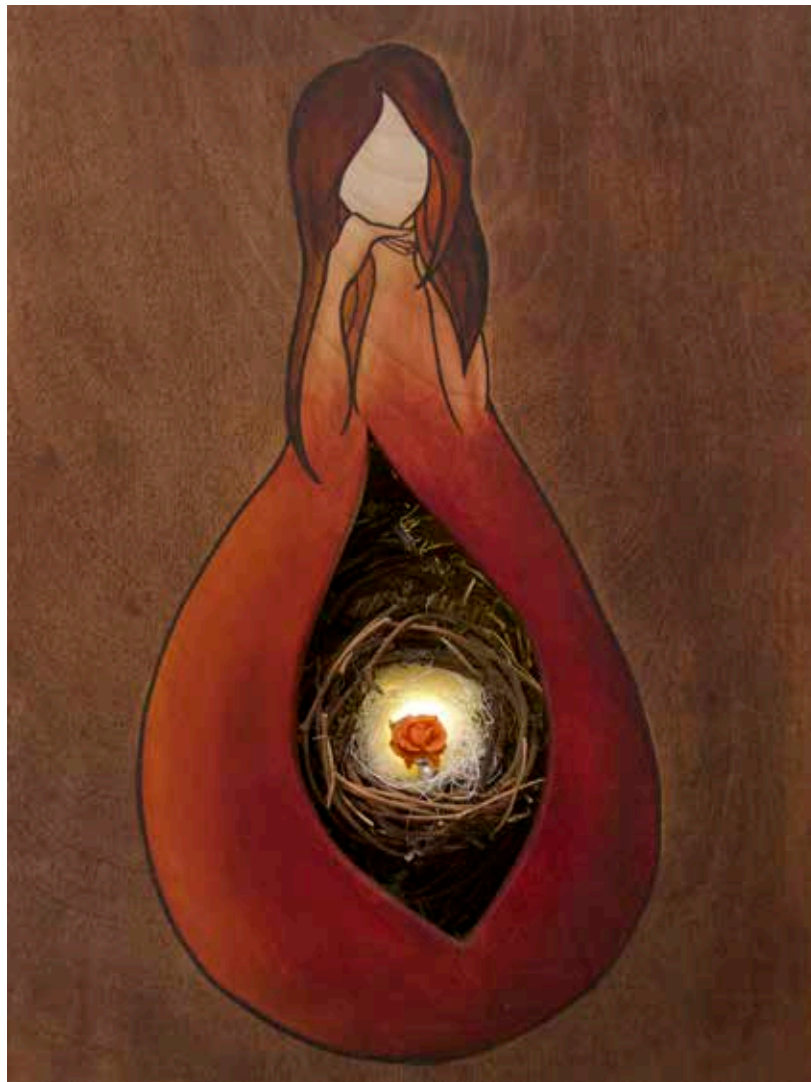


 community through conversation

SPECTRUM



Biblical Hospitality • ABORTION

World Church Affirmation Sabbath

community through conversation

SPECTRUM

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ABOUT THE COVER ARTWORK

The cover artwork is part of a mixed-media series titled *Lionheart* (2018).

"I'd been bitten by a lion, but you had to look inside me to see the scar."
—Alice Hoffmann, *The Dovekeepers*

For centuries women have been described, identified, and judged by others' interpretations and comparisons in relation to their bodies. As a woman navigating today's society, I'm constantly in my own head with thoughts and feelings about my own body. Feelings of insecurity and empowerment lead me into a flow of self-hate and self-love for this thing that I inhabit, and this has such an impact on how I navigate the world within it. As connections and comparisons are being made about my external home, how do I make a sense of my place within it a safe, comfortable and peaceful one? Women are brave to live within their own bodies: a fact that I feel should be recognized. I choose to be a lionhearted woman; waking up every day feeling empowered to call my own unique body home and appreciating my treasures on its facade as well as its interior.

ABOUT THE ARTIST: AMY CRONK



Amy Cronk has been a professor in the visual arts department at Pacific Union College for eight years. Before becoming a full-time professor, she received her BFA in fine art with a minor in psychology from La Sierra University. She went on to get her MA in art therapy at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, one of the top five art schools in the world. When working in the world of art therapy, she practiced therapeutic artmaking with groups including children with autism, elderly Alzheimer's and dementia patients, ex-offenders, and cancer patients. Currently, her favorite classes to teach are Encaustic Painting, Life Drawing, and Intro to Art Therapy. When she's not in the classroom she enjoys making art, drinking tea, and spending time with her furry, four-legged children.

Amy Cronk's artwork appears on the front and back covers, as well as within this issue.

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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Secrecy: The Adventist Experience | BY BONNIE DWYER

Secrecy is based on mistrust between those governing and those governed; and at the same time, it exacerbates that mistrust.

– JOSEPH STIGLITZ

What is true about secrecy within governments also seems true for church organizations. Writing “On Liberty, the Right to Know and Public Discourse: The Role of Transparency in Public Life,” Economist Joseph Stiglitz’ comment above on secrecy found its way into Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s book, *Secrecy: The American Experience*, in 1998, in which Moynihan concluded that secrecy has a negative impact on democratic norms, and that it is for losers.

Stiglitz’ quote also captures the current state of mistrust in the Adventist Experience. During the Wilson administration at the General Conference, secrecy has undermined the functioning of departments and agencies, and created tension between the various levels of church structure. Most conspicuously, it has interfered with the work of the General Conference Executive Committee. For the last three years, new proposals for how to discipline or control unions seen as being “non-compliant,” particularly on the issue of women’s ordination, have dominated the Annual Council meeting of the Executive Committee. The first formal proposal was for

the General Conference to take over such unions. Although it had been discussed within the halls of the General Conference, this “nuclear option” was sprung on the General Conference Executive Committee at the 2016 Annual Council, and it backfired badly.

However, a year later, during a dramatic Annual Council discussion of yet another proposal, Pastor Randy Roberts questioned General Conference President Ted Wilson about how the recommendation had come to the committee, noting that the vote of the General Conference and Division Officers (GCDO) had included (forbidden) proxy votes. “You weren’t supposed to know that,” Wilson said, as he began his explanation about a vote of the committee taken while GCDO was traveling and when some members had left to handle crises in their home territories. Wilson’s com-

ment surprised the audience and contributed to the failure of the Annual Council motion to require loyalty oaths from union conference presidents and other members of the General Conference Executive Committee. Wilson was stunned

Secrecy is a political tool that would seem to be unnecessary in our church organization that eschews politics very specifically in the Church Manual.

by the leaks from the GCDO and complained vigorously about them, but others in his administration promised openness and transparency going forward.

However, none of these experiences changed Wilson's mind about the need for discipline of the unions. In 2018, he pressured the Executive Committee to approve a system of five compliance committees at Annual Council, and planned to have them commence work immediately. While he got the vote that he wanted, he did not get the cooperation that he needed from within. The General Conference and division employees pushed back against the immediate activation of the committees. Later, in early 2019, when the GCDO members gathered, there were more questions about the advisability of the compliance committees. At the 2019 spring meeting of the Executive Committees, they were never mentioned, and now a year has essentially gone by without a single one of the committees functioning. However, a letter from the GC

Secretariat has been sent to the divisions asking about matters of non-compliance in their territories. When the letter arrived at the North American Division (NAD), it was met with a stern response calling the letter inappropriate and requesting that it be withdrawn. Other divisions have taken a more nuanced approach, hoping that a softer response would be more diplomatic.

Whether secrecy will again play a role at this year's meetings of the General Conference and Division Officers and the General Conference Executive Committee in October, of course, remains to be seen. Will there be a report on the Compliance Committees? Will there be another five- or six-hour long Annual Council debate like in the past three years? Will the leadership be transparent about what has taken place during the GCDO meetings leading up to Annual Council, letting people know when and how members of that committee differed on issues?

**Moynihan concluded that
secrecy has a negative im-
pact on democratic norms,
and that it is for losers.**

The work of first the GCDO and then the GC Executive Committee will be what sets the stage for the 2020 General Conference Session in Indianapolis. They will craft the agenda, decide what needs to be added or subtracted from the Church's various policy manuals. One could wish that a motion would be proposed requiring that minutes of the Executive Committee meeting be made public immediately at the conclusion of a meeting—not months or years later. Likewise, requiring that minutes of the General Conference and Division Officers meetings to be public records

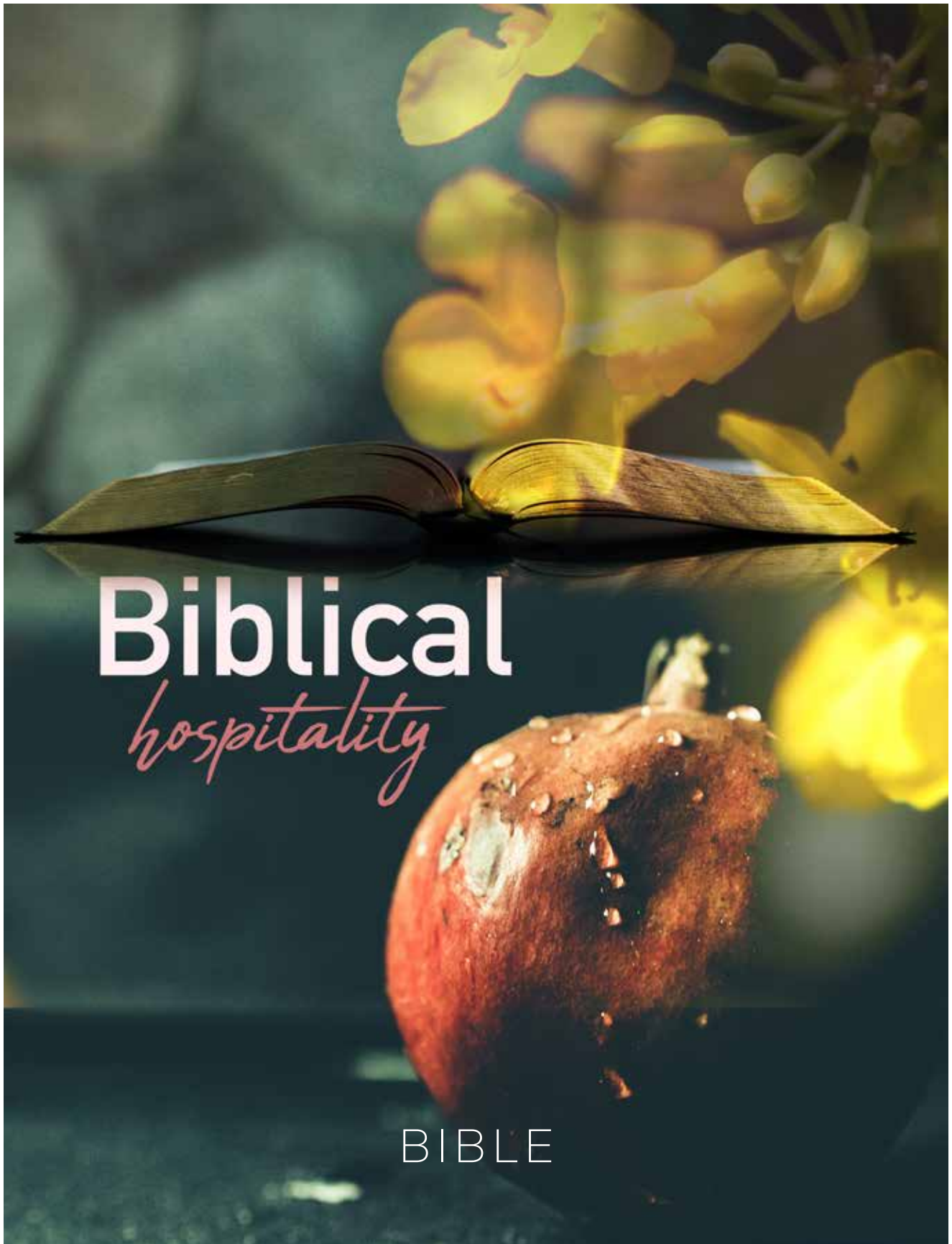
would be a positive move for openness within the Church. The GCDO with its sixty-plus members is the size of the General Conference Committee in the early days of the denomination. Surely, church members have a right to know about the discussions and actions of this committee, which plays such a crucial role in the management of the church.

Secrecy divides a body between those who know and those who are not deemed trustworthy to know. It is different from the privacy that is needed in handling of personnel issues and certain legal matters, for instance. Secrecy is a political tool that would seem to be unnecessary in our church organization, which eschews politics very specifically in the *Church Manual*.

As the Church makes plans for its future by bringing proposals for consideration to the 2020 General Conference Session, “sunshine” actions eliminating secrecy from official committees would go a long way to uniting the members who feel estranged by the secrecy that now pervades the organizational culture. Moynihan is right. Secrecy is for losers.



BONNIE DWYER is editor of Spectrum.



Biblical
hospitality

BIBLE

Revitalizing the Body

WELCOMING THE TRIUNE GOD WHO RENEWS ADVENTISTS' PRACTICE OF HOSPITALITY

BY ANNE COLLIER-FREED

This year I have been exploring the abundant hospitality of God as a transformative source of renewal of the Body of Christ—Christ's Church. Daily facing deep, ever-widening divisions in both our national politics and Church politics, I have been looking for signs of transcendence that might shake us out of our stupor as a Church graced with "all that we need" to be reconciled with "ourselves, with others, and with God."¹

A moment of grace came last February while I was traveling to attend a family event in Northern California. On the Sabbath before this event, I made a rare visit to Doug Bachelor's church with my brother, who is a member there. I elected to leave early with my brother, who was picking up a friend on the way. They had met at a Bible study at my brother's house. My brother's friend lived in government-sponsored housing, due to a mental disability. He needed a ride each week to be able to attend church. As we drove the half hour to a huge converted business complex that included a large sanctuary and adjoining classrooms, I saw that my brother was not afraid to initiate a conversation about how his companion was *really doing* as he dealt with his mental-health challenges. Having been given permission to engage in a dialogue on this topic, the man shared his recent

psycho-social struggles. Then, at the end of the trip, in the parking lot of the church, this man shared a testimony about the miraculous way in which God got his attention and saved his life. In this simple yet dramatic story, my brother and I heard the Good News of God before arriving at church!

With so many identity markers that lay claim on our allegiance in our pluralistic society, how do we as Adventist Christians find our way *together in worship* to receive the nourishment of God's abundant feast of grace, so that we may become the bold and resilient Body of Christ—a body empowered to witness (in part through our unity) to God's goodness in a world seeking hope in the midst of brokenness and polarization. Pondering this question, I revisit, in what follows, the biblical wisdom of two Baptist theologians, James McClendon, Jr. and Elizabeth Newman, and of the Anglican Christian ethicist, Samuel Wells. Each of these scholars attend to shared practices within worshiping communities that prepare disciples for the primary work of the people of God, namely, receiving their own healing (salvation) in communion with others who hunger and thirst for the reconciling love of God. Following the lead of these professor-scholars, in what follows I will seek to demonstrate ways these

authors illuminate a path by which Seventh-day Adventist religion/theology professors might help equip future leaders in church, education, and health care ministries to “reclaim the Body”² through our shared worship and service so that we are *re-membered* as a gathered people by our gracious God.³

James McClendon, Jr., in his final academic project, a three-volume set entitled, *Ethics, Doctrine, and Witness*, set out to remind churches within the “baptist” tradition, including Adventists,⁴ of the central practices integral to their renewal and witness. Throughout these three volumes, McClendon points to the way God grants us a redeemed identity and future as we appropriate these gifts as gathered communities that practice Bible reading and worship, along with other shared Christian practices. McClendon also gives careful attention throughout these volumes to the integral nature of the Church’s *convictions* and its social practices that witness to the saving power of God in Christ.

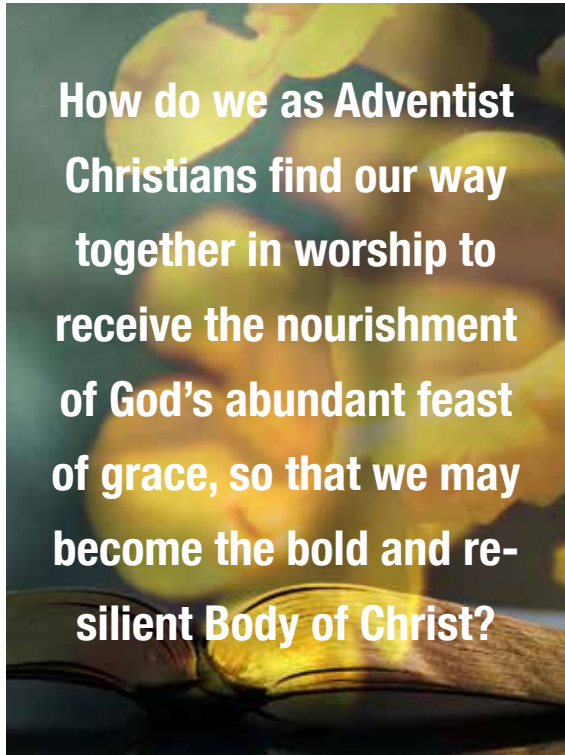
McClendon’s desire to illuminate ways faithful Christians demonstrate the coherence and truth of what the Church proclaims leads me to reflect on a communion service led by our La Sierra University professors that took place a few years ago at the Adventist Society of Religious Studies (ASRS) meetings. As our gathered community participated in this shared ritual, we celebrated together the liberating power of our “one foundation”—Jesus Christ our King, and His initiation of the unity we find within our Church’s theological, cultural, and socio-economic diversity. To this end, we partook of a variety of breads symbolizing the all-sufficient, sacrificial love of God in Christ, and its power to make our multi-faceted, often fragmented Body whole again. This service was revitalizing for many of us as we encountered a familiar symbolic structure

while allowing it to disrupt our casual acceptance of the status quo (a divided church), through an unfamiliar element (the variety of breads), through which we were able to see anew the depth and reach of God’s healing power in Jesus Christ.

At the same time, this “happy” act of communication⁵ might have been limited by our readiness to “discern the Body of Christ” (I Corinthians 11:29). Reflecting on this service at the ASRS meetings many times, I have wondered if our individualist culture as a Church (a culture that emerged during the rise of institutions informed

by modern thought and the corresponding individualism of the American ethos) may have formed us into worshippers who often fail to *discern the corporate body* as an integral part of our salvation, which I believe was offered to us in this unique communion service.

This beautiful and inspiring service did indeed highlight the unifying power of the love of Jesus Christ, while modeling liturgical competency on the part of those organizing the ritual. Their careful attention to the transformative power of Christian symbols is deeply embedded in our Master Narrative of the *kenotic* love of God proclaimed in Philipians 2:5–11.



In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.⁶

Yet many of us struggled to know how to enter fully into this potentially renewing rite.⁷ Lacking habituation to expect a transformative encounter with the unifying Spirit of Christ in such a worship service, some of us may have missed receiving the gift of God's offering, namely, the spiritual resources needed to bring us together with our brothers and sisters within the room who were significantly different from us, as well as those in our wider Church (represented by our counterparts at the Adventist Theological Society who, that Sabbath, were meeting in a separate worship space near the main conference venue that we all had traveled from around the country to visit).

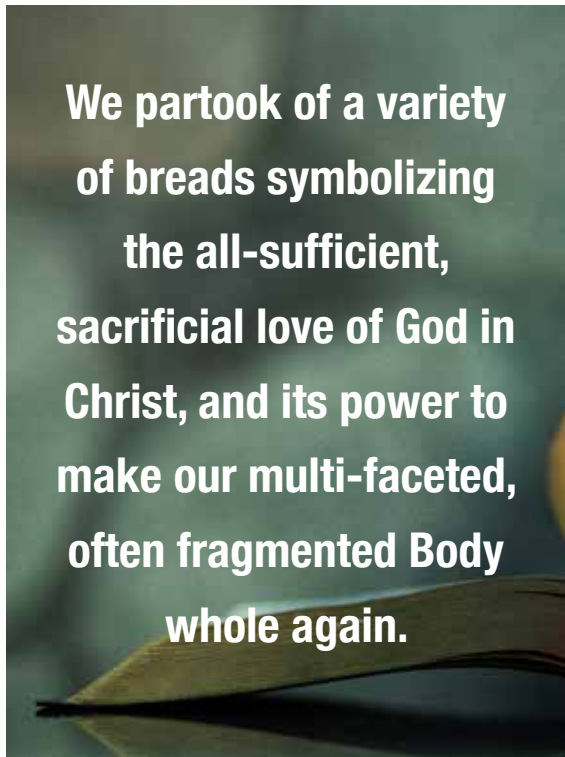
McClendon's theological project was, in part, to disabuse American Christians in particular, of the lure of our individualist cultural assumptions and practices that prevent us from recognizing that *through* shared worship, God empowers and renews the Church's faithful witness to God's saving truth through time. McClendon's theoretical perspectives and assumptions proved to be valuable tools for this task. Informed by Anglo-American philosophy, ordinary-language philosophy, speech-act and game theories, along with theological reflection on Scripture-reading practices, McClendon was able to challenge both the coherence of pluralism and the individualistic cultural practices that have weakened the

Church's witness. As he conversed with leading thinkers in these schools of thought, McClendon came to characterize *primary theology* as the churches' *lived*, or "performative" way of coming to know God. In this way, McClendon identifies "primary theology" as first and foremost a communal or shared experience of, and response to, the gift of God in Christ Jesus. Here, the central community-creating practices of Bible reading and worship, along with other church practices,⁸ through which we come to understand the depth and breadth of God's gifts, become vital means through which the Spirit of God continually

renews the Church's pilgrimage. As churches practice their faith corporately, they are equipped to discern, validate, and revitalize members' experiences of God and God's saving work.⁹

As a fellow Baptist informed by similar theoretical assumptions, Professor Elizabeth Newman shares McClendon's concern that theologians, as well as congregations, attend to their social practices. In particular, Newman points to the centrality of Christian practices of communal worship as these prepare worshippers for participation in the hospitality of God. Like McClendon, Newman discusses the practice of worship through the lens of

game theory. Equating Christian worship with "liturgical hospitality," Newman cites the Swiss Reformed theologian Jean-Jacques von Allmen, who "characterizes the liturgy as 'an eschatological game.'" Following Allmen, Newman notes the similarities between the practice of Christian worship and games, while resisting the suggestion that she is framing worship as trivial or non-serious. Like games, worship proceeds according to rules that have guided the faithful over the generations while accommodating for improvisation. Worship is also constituted by a defined purpose or end, which she summarizes with the



familiar formulation “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” According to Newman,

Worship is not all somber, for it involves a joyful participation in what God is doing in the world, a participation made possible through the Holy Spirit. The language of “game” is not intended to deny the rightful place of lament in worship, nor is it meant to suggest we have to put on a forced happy face. But it is to say that through this gathering and these actions (preaching, praying, baptizing, eating the body and blood) we enter more fully into God’s own past, present and future. The drama of God’s work is not finally a tragic one; it is marked by resurrection and new life in Christ—an eschatological game.¹⁰

Newman sees joy and playfulness in worship in the way worship positions us to become a people who give and receive the gifts of God. Such giving is central to “festive celebration.” In the “gift exchange” in worship, God extends to us the desire to gather, the desire “to call for his word and body,” and “the grace to see our sins,” all of which “He desires to give.” In response, we offer “ourselves, our gifts, our needs, our wealth, our poverty.” In this way we “learn, haltingly and by fits and starts, to give ourselves to God.” Thus, worship not only “constitutes our lives with God,” but equips us to participate in God’s hospitality—the life (or relational vitality) of God.

In this context, Newman makes clear that Christian hospitality must be situated in “God’s own communion” through the “giving and receiving, made possible in Christ through the Holy Spirit.” By participating in the Trinitarian life of God, we are freed from the compulsion to *do* generous works. Rather, we *participate* in God’s hospitality (or generosity) where the Spirit empowers the life of God in and among us, bringing together the diverse members of our communities as the visible Body of Christ. Pointing to the way we learn to participate in the communion of God, Newman notes,

This dynamic of giving and receiving can be seen when Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, ‘Our Father, who art in heaven. . .’

Through this prayer, the disciples learn to enter in to the communion that Jesus has with the Father. The disciples are adopted into this communion. . . . In learning to pray in this way and thus receive from Jesus, the disciples participate in the Son’s gift (offering) to the Father. In receiving from Jesus, the disciples learn to give. We know of course from scripture that this dynamic of learning to receive and give is a journey. . . .¹¹

In these reflections on what happens in worship, Newman is careful to place the emphasis not on “the disciples’ strengths or even their ‘gifts’ but the grace and abundance of God.” She joins with John Milbank’s view of worship, where he notes,

. . . worship gives everything back up to God, hangs onto nothing and so *disallows* any finite accumulation which will always engender conflict. Confident worship also knows that in offering it receives back, so here the temporal world is not denied, but is temporality restored as gift and thereby rendered eternal.¹²

Newman goes on to encourage us to relinquish our independence and to embrace our dependency on God’s good gifts (“our lives, the church, and the created world”). In this way we find communion with God through participation in liturgical hospitality *so that* we may together become more fully the corporate body of Christ.¹³

Like McClendon, Newman goes on to “name the Powers” that often fashion with distortion our participation in Christian practices. As these Powers structure our broader cultural practices in the West in ways that promote autonomy and isolation, they can predispose us to miss out on full participation in the life-giving gifts of God. Newman adopts a biblically informed conception of “the Powers”¹⁴ that has helped theologians to recognize the pull of our market economy and biophysical model of medicine (the fruits of an era where scientism dominated academic and public discourse). While these two dominant Powers often shape, in dehumanizing ways, the social practices we look to for human flourishing, whether in institutions of business, learning, or healing, these practices may be redeemed.¹⁵

In view of the healing and unifying work of God made present in worship, which can redeem the alienating Powers that be, I suggest that Adventists already have been given access to an antidote to what has our corporate bodies as Westerners. If so, I wonder if our religion teachers and other youth leaders might, alongside our young people, more intentionally reclaim God's gracious calling to discern the life of God's Body given for us, not only through our worshipping together, but also as we discern our unique vocations and learn in our service together to recognize and affirm the *diverse* gifts of the people of God.

We certainly have these opportunities in our schools situated in health care settings. In such settings we are invited, alongside our team members, into embodied stories and rituals of care that prompt us to imitate Jesus, as He emptied Himself so He might reveal the power of love, thereby showing us the way to participate in the joyous and revitalizing life of God. I was introduced to such rituals during my four years at boarding academy. One of these rituals was called "witnessing," in which we semi-weekly visited patients confined to skilled nursing homes, and shared our hope and faith. Such rituals became an integral part of my education and spiritual

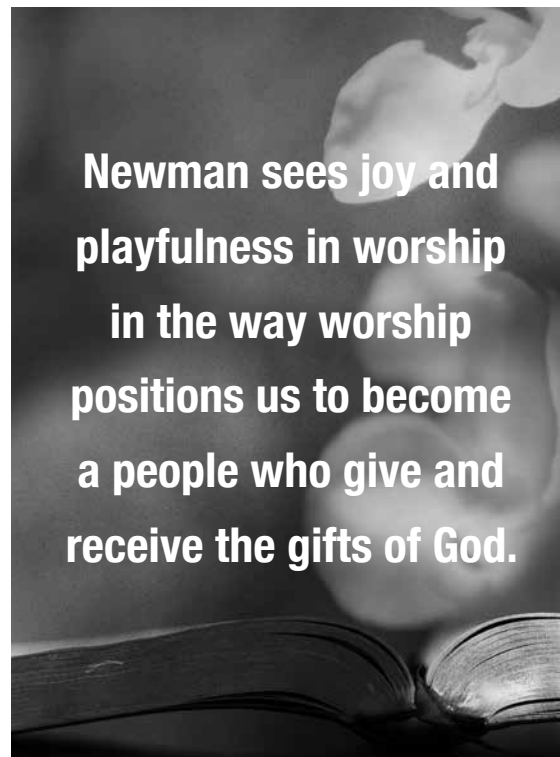
formation. Yet it would take going outside our tradition to *recognize* and name some of the skills and virtues needed for full participation in the gifts of God found in worship and service.

Shortly after graduating college I enrolled in my first unit of chaplaincy training as an intern in Loma Linda's Medical Center's Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program. Many years later, I concluded my last three CPE units in a program led by an Episcopalian chaplain from whom I learned how to see the link between my spiritual care service and my practice of worship. I remember

vividly what I learned about worship in each program. In the program at Loma Linda, 50 percent of the group were Seventh-day Adventist adherents, and 50 percent were not. We were each assigned to prepare a worship time for the group. One of the Adventist interns started her worship time with a prayer, and then introduced a biblical theme and called for the group members to discuss it, much like what we often do in a Sabbath School setting. The non-Adventist students looked baffled as the "service" concluded. Sensing the disjuncture, I made a note to myself to explore this situation with my supervisor in my next one-on-one meeting.

My introduction to learning to prepare and participate in worship as a chaplain was quite different in the program run by the Episcopalian supervisor. Not only were we given opportunities to practice creating "multi-faith worship services" for our peers, we were also invited regularly to participate in a mid-week Eucharist service. While the liturgy varied some from week to week, I recall the words most often used when the symbols of Christ's body and blood were offered: "This is Christ's Body, broken for you. May we also be broken for love's sake," and "this is Christ's blood poured out for *you*." With all the words that

were spoken in that tiny chapel over the course of more than a year, these were the most powerful. It was not the creativity or eloquence that made the difference. Rather, it was the palpable Presence in the room each time we celebrated the gifts of God together. Daily we had been taught to recognize the Spirit of God at work in the lives of people who were broken and seeking healing in our hospital. We also came to see the Spirit's healing work as we shared our own brokenness with one another. In the listening offered to us in these moments, we learned that our job was not to fix or even to heal, but to follow where



**In the end it is Jesus
not us, who is the
Good Samaritan. . .
We are the beaten,
torn and broken per-
son in the gutter. . .**



Good Samaritan sculpture by Alan Collins, Loma Linda University campus.

this Spirit was working to heal hearts and souls. This required that we allow our defenses to be broken regularly so that we could offer ourselves (our vulnerabilities as well as our strengths) and in this way join with our team members, our patients, and their families as the Body of Christ, broken, blessed, and given. In sum, in this CPE experience, we learned of the healing power of presence offered to one another as others accompanied us into our darkness, thereby empowering us to offer God’s hospitality to others, making “God With Us” real among us.

Theologian Samuel Wells, in his book *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being With God*, reminds Christians eager to serve the underserved, that in following the Way of Jesus, we must first recognize the Incarnation as God’s fulfillment of God’s intention to be with us eternally. While this is made possible by Christ’s work of redeeming our past through forgiveness and empowering us to participate in God’s reconciling and healing work, we may patiently and joyfully wait for God’s coming Kingdom as we continually learn to celebrate and rest (Sabbath) in God’s promise to Be *with* us. Wells wants us to consider that Jesus spent most of His time on earth in Nazareth, *being with us* in a place of intimate family ties and familiar community. Wells notes that this kind of place is where we all find our greatest work of reconciliation. When it comes to living life in such relationships, reconciliation is our daily fare. When we whine that reconciliation within a family of faith is too hard (or boring, or painful), Wells replies, “What else should we be doing? This is the whole

thing!” Reconciliation *is* the Kingdom come—flowing finally into eternity.

Yet in the Christian life, what makes reconciliation more than an arduous task? What shifts our perspective on the calling to participate in God’s reconciling love? For Wells, the answer may reside in his interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan.¹⁷ Wells calls readers to reconsider where we fit into this story. We often read the point of the story as a charge to “be like” the Good Samaritan. Yet this morality-fable approach is out of line with the rest of the stories Jesus tells, says Wells, because in most of Jesus’ stories, God or Jesus Himself is the central character. Eager as we are to follow Jesus, we are tempted to put ourselves in the place of Jesus who occupies the place of the Good (though despised) Samaritan. We want to see ourselves as those capable of following Jesus in His work to save the poor or disadvantaged. In the end it is Jesus, not us, who is the Good Samaritan. Wells makes clear that we are the ones desperately needing to be saved by our Lord who alone can offer us what we need to restore our humanity and hope. We are the beaten, torn and broken person in the gutter, at the mercy of a passing Stranger. We hope that our help will come from someone familiar, trusted, even respected, like the Levite or the priest; instead, it comes from a Stranger who is despised and strange to us, yet also from the same family tree. We can barely tolerate being in the same place with such a person. Yet we see now that there is no other way out. We depend on the gifts this Stranger brings to recover any hope for wholeness or restoration.

From this perspective we can recognize that we depend for our salvation on learning (in worship and service together) how to “welcome God and other strangers” (as Newman invites us to do). God in Christ seeks to teach us to love one another. He has indeed provided everything we need for this, especially in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Our health care institutions, our social-service organizations, and our education institutions provide endless avenues for encountering strangers (some of whom may be part of our own families)! While they may threaten at first our sensibilities or what we think brings us comfort, Jesus shows us another way. He has invited us to release our fears, and to learn in worship and service to receive together all the rich and abundant gifts of God.

Endnotes

1. Samuel Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto*, (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2015).

2. Joel Shuman and Brian Volck, M.E., *Reclaiming the Body: Christians and the Faithful Use of Modern Medicine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006).

3. Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 152–154.

4. McClendon specifically included Adventists in his designation of “baptists.”

5. McClendon studied for a short time with J. L. Austin, whose “speech-act theory” taught him to attend to the conditions for felicitous communication in which a performative element makes it possible for words to become actions that change our reality, such as when a bride and groom say, “I do.” See Nancey Murphy, “Textual Relativism, Philosophy of Language, and the baptist Vision,” in *Theology Without Foundations: Religious Practice and the Future of Theological Truth*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 246–252.

6. Susan Marie Smith, in *Caring Liturgies: The Pastoral Power of Christian Ritual*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 1–17, advocates that worship leaders should cultivate ritual (and ethical) competence so that they may responsibly oversee meaningful and truly healing liturgies (rituals). This requires an understanding of what makes rituals powerful (for good or ill). She helps us to think about this by pointing to the way Jesus initiated the central rituals of the Christian Church, the Communion Service, or Lord’s Supper. This central Christian ritual originat-

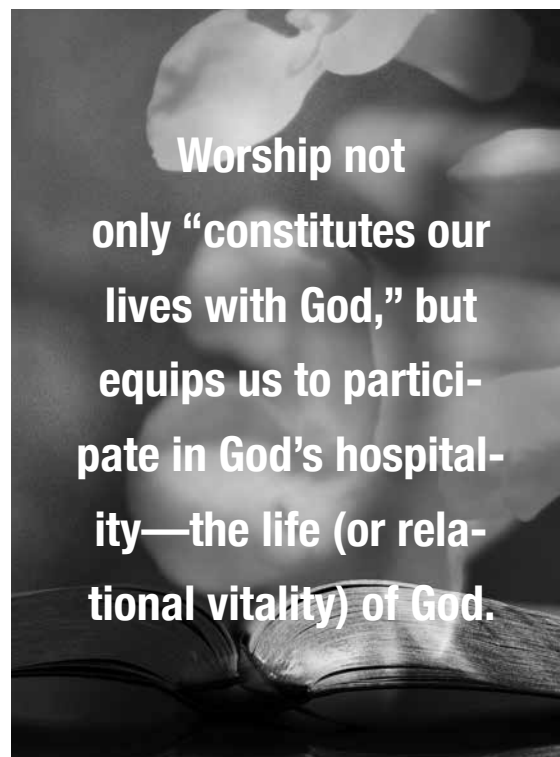
ed when Jesus prepared to give Himself over to the authorities. The Passover meal was a familiar ritual meal for the disciples of Jesus, yet He was able to re-form this rite within a singular situation filled with fear and dread, by transfiguring familiar symbols as He identified them with His soon-to-be broken and freely given body, and with His invitation for them to partake in His Body. In this way, Jesus invites the disciples to participate in His anticipation of the transfiguration of His sacrifice on the cross into the source of ultimate assurance of God’s salvation, so that they would be able to recognize His saving Presence *in the future* through the renewing power of God’s Spirit. From this vantage point we might say that Jesus initiated a “caring liturgy” at the Last Supper, by communicating something vitally important to His disciples about what was going to happen to Him, and how they could *be with Him* as often as they would “do this in remembrance” of Him. (6)

Elizabeth Newman follows Joachim Jeremis in understanding the Jewish use of anamnesis that most likely informed Jesus in His Passover celebration with the disciples. Newman holds that this way should continue to mark faithful practice of the Lord’s Supper, so we might come to know that it is God who remembers us who come together at the Lord’s Table. In this service we trustingly wait for God to remember God’s covenant faithfulness by offering the divine Presence, and by God acting on our behalf in the present as God did in the past. See Newman, *Untamed Hospitality*, 152–154.

7. James K. A. Smith, in his book *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation*, argues that the fundamental way we as humans educate our desires for what we perceive as good, is not through intellectual persuasion, but through ritual actions. He introduces this idea through a thought experiment

where pilgrims travel to huge complexes resembling elaborate temples with cultic symbols inviting them to worship at the shrines of the god of consumerism in pursuit of the “good life.” Smith goes on to argue that we learn as human beings to desire and move toward what we perceive as “good” through such participation in communal and embodied rituals, such as participation in the market economy with all its trappings. This leads Smith to pose questions for educators such as how we are engaging our students in practices and relationships such that their desires will tend toward to ultimate Good, which is grounded in God’s love. See 17–35.

8. McClendon follows John Howard Yoder in identifying practices that originated with the early Church, such as “binding and loosing,” the Lord’s Supper (or “breaking bread together”), baptism, recognizing the “complementarity of many gifts” (or



“The Fullness of Christ”), and the practice of “truth-finding” or communal discernment ordered by “the Rule of Paul.” See John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Nashville, Discipleship Resources, 1992). Yoder provides another arrangement of the “marks” and practices of the faithful church, which is summarized in Michael Cartwright, “Radical Reform, Radical Catholicity: John Howard Yoder’s Vision of the Faithful Church” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 1–49. McClendon identifies powerful, redeeming practices based in the Ten Commandments, which he discusses in *Ethics: Systematic Theology*, Volume I, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 178–189.

9. While recognizing the limitations of language in describing or testifying to members’ encounters with God through Bible reading and worship, along with other shared practices of the worshipping community, McClendon points to the ways Christian communities regulate their discourse. As they reason together, they identify norms or rules for engaging faithfully in theological conversation through a reflective, or secondary (or “second-order”) type of theological discourse. McClendon recognized that, since Christian communities are not insular, but interact intellectually and practically with the wider cultures in which they find themselves embedded, both primary and secondary kinds of discourse have a responsive quality, as their shape and formulations arise in interaction with the needs, demands, and opportunities brought by strangers—by those outside the familiar bounds of the worshipping community.

10. Newman, *Untamed Hospitality*, 59–60.

11. *Ibid.*

12. John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 228, in Newman, *Untamed Hospitality*, 61.

13. Newman, *Untamed Hospitality* 61. On page 62 and following, she discusses the practices through which we engage our bodies in worship so that we might be “re-habituated” to welcome one another with God’s hospitality. Thus, we may *experience* our communion by positioning our embodied selves for prayer, by using our “voice, mouth, and ears” in hymn singing, by passing the peace as we grasp on another’s hands, or by touching each other’s feet in foot washing.

14. Newman, *Untamed Hospitality*, 78–94, points to interaction with colleagues working from similar theological and philosophical perspectives on “the Powers” informed by Walter Wink and more specifically, John Howard Yoder, peers such as M. Therese Lysaught, David McCarthy, Ched Meyers, in their respective works: “Eucharist as Basic Training,” in *Theology and Lived Christianity*, *The Good Life: Christianity for the Middle Class*, and *Economics and the Gospel of Mark*. Newman’s comments also reflect a similar understanding of the power of medicine pursued in a book by Joel Shuman and Brian Volck, *Reclaiming the Body: Christians and the Faithful Use of Modern Medicine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006).

15. Newman, *Untamed Hospitality*, 78, reflecting on these Powers, points to that which “would have us be other than God’s hospitable people.” She contrasts these forces with the faithful path of Christians who some would describe as “inefficient exemplars and communities.” Such exemplars include the main character in

Isak Dinesen’s fictional story “Babette’s Feast,” and the real-life core members and assistants who practice Christian hospitality and freedom in the L’Arche communities, centered around those with intellectual disabilities, founded by Jean Vanier.

16. For a profound meditation on ways we might live out these spiritual movements of our Lord, symbolized in the Lord’s Supper, see Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1992).

17. Samuel Wells, “The Stories of Jesus,” in *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being with God*, (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 86–99.

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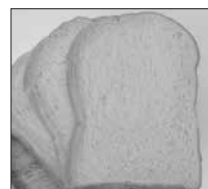
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LIVING and SERVING on a SURE FOUNDATION

A Liturgy for our Worship: Adventist Society for Religious Studies
San Diego, CA: November 22, 2014



BY MAURY JACKSON AND CHRIS OBERG

INVITING

In Christ we are all children of God through faith.
We are not divided by race or by social or economic status, or by gender.

We are all one in Christ Jesus.

Together we are called to proclaim by our words and lives the mighty acts of our gracious God, who has brought us out of spiritual darkness into glorious light.

We are God's people.

We want to live and love and serve and grow in God's name.

Hear the word of the apostle:

There are different kinds of gifts,
But the same Spirit distributes them.
There are different kinds of service,
But the same Lord.
There are different kinds of working,
But in all of them and in everyone
It is the same God at work.

God of all people in every land, obeying the word of our Lord Jesus we come today to ordain two persons you have called.

As we participate in this service, remind us of what it means to be members of the body of Christ, and to join in his ministry of love and peace.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior and Lord, our Mentor and Model.

Amen.

SEEKING

I invite you to kneel and join in The Lord's Prayer.

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from the evil one.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever.**

Amen.

God of empowering love, we pray for our community of faith, for all our members, for all our lay leaders, for our educators and pastors, and all our administrators. May we live consistently as your faithful people, making your love visible and powerful in our families and neighborhoods.

Hear our prayer, O God.

We pray also for the confused, broken, and messy world you still love. Illumine and encourage efforts toward understanding, peace, and justice everywhere.

Hear our prayer, O God.

We pray for those close to our hearts—our families and friends. Enable and inspire us to enhance the lives of others with courage and hope.

Hear our prayer, O God.

We offer our prayers in the name of God our Creator, Savior, and Guiding Presence.

Amen.

LISTENING

Listen to the selected readings for this day.

We are listening.

Leviticus 19:1–2
Psalm 119:33–40
1 Corinthians 3:10, 11 and 16–23
Matthew 5:38–48

The gospel of Jesus Christ!

Thanks be to God for this word.

SINGING

I invite you to stand and join in singing the first three stanzas of “The Church Has One Foundation.”

**The church has one foundation,
'Tis Jesus Christ her Lord;**

**She is His new creation,
By water and the word.
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With God's own life He bought her,
And for her life God died.**

**Elect from every nation,
Yet one o'er all the earth;
Her charter of salvation,
One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses,
With every grace endued.**

**Though with a scornful wonder
We see her sore oppressed,
Tough foes would rend asunder,
The Rock where she doth rest,
Yet saints their faith are keeping;
Their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song.**

CONSIDERING

By your Spirit, O God, teach us what we need to know.

Amen.

WE RESPOND

During Sabbath time, gathered as a challenged and challenging community of faith, we respond to what the Spirit is saying.

We are reminded of our diversity, which is nothing other than the Body of Christ.

We are humbled and grateful. We are hopeful and hope-filled.

We are mindful of our sisters and brothers around the world.

We rejoice that all are welcome at this table.

We receive the Grace of this table at this time.

I bring *rice cakes* to our community table.

For many centuries, rice has been a primary source of life and strength throughout Asia.

The people of Asia face the threat of armed conflict as our governments increase military spending and weapons testing.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Encircle, O God, those who live under the threat of war or violence with your peace.

I bring Hawaiian *sweet bread* to our community table.

It is made from coconut milk, flour, and sugar cane.

Our Islands and the South Pacific face constant threat of environmental devastation.

We are easily overwhelmed by forces outside our control.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Encircle, O God, those whose lives and homes have been destroyed by nature.

I bring *corn tortillas* to our community table.

**Corn is a staple food for Meso-American civilizations.
The corn in these tortillas reminds us of the daily labor of men and women who struggle to provide for their families and communities.**

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Encircle, O God, those who face hunger and poverty daily with your compassion and justice.

I bring *cornbread* to our community table.

**Cornbread represents our African-American sisters and brothers.
They are an integral part of this society, we continue to struggle daily to overcome structures of racism, sexism, and exploitation.**

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Encircle, O God, those who bear the weight of oppressive systems with your liberating freedom.

I bring *Wonder bread* to our community table.

**White, enriched sandwich bread epitomizes the state of our modern, consumer-driven, materialistic society.
We suffer from a malnourished relationship with our Maker.**

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Encircle, O God, those who diligently seek the Bread of Life.
May we come to see You as the source of life everlasting.

We present these gifts of the earth which represents the uniqueness we each bring to the body of Christ.
We honor and celebrate our diversity.
We lift up those who face violence, hunger, poverty, and oppression.
As we are gathered as a community of faith to celebrate this joyful occasion, we rejoice, knowing the common element that unites us all—the love of God.

AFFIRMING

I invite you to stand and join in an affirmation of our faith.

You, O God, have created heaven and earth and everything in them.

You have created humanity, male and female, in your own image. You have established Sabbath time—

Sign and source of liberation and rest, of renewal and fulfillment.

You have called prophets and rulers—

To proclaim truth and enact justice.

You have become human and lived with us—

Announcing grace, granting freedom, and ministering to the poor;

Empowering women, breaking down barriers, and building community;

Suffering and crucified, risen and glorified, ministering now and always on our behalf.

You call the church to proclaim your love—

To accept all people, practice reconciliation, and embody hope.

You preserve our past—

Keeping rich memories alive, making the past present in new ways, and ensuring that nothing good is ever lost.

You draw us toward our future—

Presenting new possibilities of grace, offering new challenges for action, and creating new opportunities for joy.

We look forward to the redemption of history and the defeat of death—

To the end of enmity and the ultimate triumph of love.

Please stand and join in singing the last stanza of “The Church Has One Foundation.”

**Mid toil and tribulation,
And tumult of her war,
She waits the consumption
Of peace forevermore;
Till with the vision glorious
Her longing eyes are blest,
And the great church victorious
Shall be the church at rest.**

BLESSING



MAURY JACKSON (far left) teaches in the H.M.S. Richards Divinity School at La Sierra University. He received his MDiv from Andrews University Theological Seminary, his MA in philosophy from California State University, Los Angeles, and his DMin from Claremont School of Theology.

CHRIS OBERG (left) is lead pastor at La Sierra University Church. She received both her undergraduate and graduate degrees from La Sierra University. She was the first female pastor of an Adventist university church.

Cycle | Amy Cronk

The creative process is inevitably a raw and vulnerable process for me and one that I often struggle through. I've come to learn that my artwork is much more about the process than the finished product; sometimes even to the point where I have no feeling about the finished product at all. Because art comes from such a vulnerable place, I often choose to represent concepts in an ambiguous way that allows viewers to come to their own conclusions about the meaning. Mostly this has the intention of inviting others to see a piece of themselves in the work through the process of contemplating meaning. Doing this gives me just enough of a sense of detachment that I feel safe in sharing such raw vulnerabilities, which are ultimately on display for others to witness.

In this series I chose to use very recognizable, representational imagery to visually communicate an abstract concept that has little or nothing to do with the literal interpretation of it. The pieces form a cycle of individual events that happen when we've been wounded in some way and have to process through an acceptance of those wounds. That isn't to say that when something bad happens everything turns out perfect in the end; but the fact is that wounds remain, and what changes is our perspective of them through the process of acceptance.



AMY CRONK has been a professor in the visual arts department at Pacific Union College for eight years. Before becoming a full-time professor, she received her BFA in fine art with a minor in psychology from La Sierra University. She went on to get her MA in art therapy at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, one of the top five art schools in the world.



Cycle by Amy Cronk, mixed media/encaustic on wood panel (2017)

ABORTION

the questions | the unspoken stories

The Unspoken Stories

BY SHARON FUJIMOTO-JOHNSON

間

Essential to Japanese aesthetics is the concept called “*ma*,” which can be understood as a space or a void between things—a pure emptiness that creates a relationship (spatially or rhythmically, for example) with the tangible objects around it. In calligraphy, flower arrangement, traditional music, and even in pauses in conversation, *ma* is not an absence but a presence, a place, that creates balance and rhythm. It is not barrenness but rather the heart of the matter. *Ma* is written graphically as a kanji character 間 that depicts the sun within an open double-sided gate¹. It is the space between the open gate doors through which light can enter.

In the pages that follow, the reader may realize there are voices missing from this conversation—namely, the voices of women who cannot tell us their own stories of abortion. These stories are not being spoken aloud in our lives, except perhaps in whispered confidence. These are the unspoken stories.

Between the lines of the articles that follow, in the pauses in the reader’s mind, may there be space, may there be *ma*, or what the poet Mary Oliver called “... a silence in which/another voice may speak.”² Hear the voices of the women who cannot tell their stories. Perhaps they fear judgment or perhaps they know how speaking this story will cause their families immeasurable pain. Hear their voices: the one who knows it was the right decision but will never, ever tell her parents, even years later; the one pressured into terminating pregnancies; the one who has regrets; the one who lives because she made a choice she never wanted to make....

Let us remember, even in the ethical and spiritual considerations of this topic, that abortion is an experience that belongs uniquely to a woman’s body. It takes place within the vessel of her body, to the flesh of her flesh: sometimes for her very life, sometimes against her deepest wish. Let us hold space, create *ma*, for the women whose stories are the heart of this matter.

Endnotes

1. 間 is also used in conjunction with numerous other kanji characters to create other words, such as human being: 人間, literally a person in place; and society: 世間, literally the world in place. <https://kyotojournal.org/culture-arts/ma-place-space-void/>.

2. Mary Oliver, “Praying” from *Thirst* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2007).



SHARON FUJIMOTO-JOHNSON is associate editor and designer of *Spectrum*.

ADVENTISTS, ABORTION, *and* PRINCIPLED INTEGRITY

BY GERALD R. WINSLOW

A Little History

It has been about twenty years since I last wrote about abortion. Even though I work in a health care setting and my primary academic field is bioethics, I thought I had written and said enough. In 1992, the Seventh-day Adventist Church had adopted principled guidelines for abortion.¹ Those normative statements continue to be followed carefully where I work. The same is true in the other Adventist health systems with which I am well acquainted. The biblical basis for the guidelines was clearly stated as an integral part of the statement approved by my Church. Despite the fact that the subject of abortion continued to generate deep divisions in my culture, and despite the efforts of some vocal critics of the Adventist guidelines, the Adventist health ministries have been blessed to have unifying guidance that is clinically applicable for those rare cases when abortion is deemed medically necessary. I saw no opportunity to add anything new, nor any reason to try.

Times have changed. Throughout the culture I know best, the divisions occasioned by abortion have become

deeper and meaner. Influenced significantly by the religious right, several new state laws have been enacted. It appears inevitable that the matter will be taken up again by the US Supreme Court. The Adventist Church, never entirely exempt from such cultural currents, may also be on the verge of reconsidering its guidelines. So, I have rather reluctantly accepted this invitation to share some personal reflections based on just over a half century of experience, seeking to apply Christian ethics in the setting of Adventist health care.

The story, for me, begins in 1967. Just after graduating with a theology degree, my first full-time job was to serve as an Adventist hospital chaplain in Oregon at what was then called Portland Sanitarium and Hospital. I was filling in temporarily for the head chaplain who was on study leave. I had only been a chaplain for about a month when the physician in charge of the obstetrics department asked for a “consultation.” It would have helped if I had known in advance that he was a devout

Catholic and that his questions had to do with “therapeutic abortions”—those legally permitted for significant medical reasons. When we met later that day, it was obvious that he was frustrated. How, he wanted to know, could we justify abortions as “therapeutic” when the medical reasons seemed so trivial? (I only learned later that he was probably exaggerating the problem.) At that time, a committee of five or six physicians and administrators, all of them men, decided which abortions would be permitted in the facility. My unhappy physician colleague pulled out a number of charts that, in his view, represented errors in judgment. And, he wondered, if we did not care much about the morality of abortion, did it matter to us that some of these cases might represent a breach of Oregon State law?

(Like most states at that time, Oregon only allowed abortion for significant medical reasons.²) His final questions to me are still memorable: What is your church’s position? Have your theologians said nothing about this matter?

Where would a young Adventist chaplain turn for answers in 1967? I began to look, and found little. We were still four years away from the publication of the first Adventist guidelines. *Spectrum* was not yet in existence and a search of the official Adventist journals at that time yielded nothing. It is not as though no Adventist leaders had offered their views. Noteworthy among the most strident critics of abortion was Dr. John Harvey Kellogg. In his 1894 book, *Man, the Masterpiece*, he expressed the belief that from the “very moment of conception” the embryo “acquires the right to life, a right so sacred that in every land to violate it is to incur the penalty of death.”³

While Kellogg surely overstated the extent of existing penalties for abortion, it is apparent that restrictive state laws in the US did provide a kind of legal umbrella under

which, for decades, it seemed unnecessary to engage in further debate. When asked about what medical students and residents were taught regarding abortion in earlier decades, the long-term head of the gynecology and obstetrics department at one Adventist university told me that students were taught to follow the law.⁴ In his view, because abortion was illegal in most jurisdictions, there was not much more to say about the subject.

However, by the time I was serving as a young chaplain in 1967, the laws were already beginning to change. The influential American Law Institute published its *Model Penal Code* with a proposed abortion law reform in 1962.⁵ According to the proposed model, abortion should be permitted for three categories of cases: 1) when the

pregnancy represents a serious threat to the woman’s life or health; 2) when the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest; and 3) when the fetus is known to have devastating anomalies.⁶ In 1967, first Colorado then California passed legislation liberalizing their restrictive abortion laws. Several other states soon did the same. Then, in January 1973, as most American citizens know, the US Supreme Court, in the case of *Roe v. Wade*, found state laws restricting abortion in the early phases of pregnancy were unconstitutional because of a lack of due process and the intrusion into personal privacy.⁷

It was during this time of rapid social change that the Adventist Church published its first “suggestive guidelines for therapeutic abortions which might need to be performed in denominational hospitals in the United States.”⁸ The 1971 guidelines, as they appeared in *Ministry*, had been under development for several months in 1970.⁹ The preface emphasized the importance of care from qualified physicians working in well-regulated medical facilities and obtaining appropriate patient consent. Also included were warnings against moral laxity and affirmations of the personal

The preface to the guidelines included this rather rare admission: “It is recognized that these guidelines are not the final answer but perhaps can serve a useful purpose at the present time.”

conscience of health care professionals and patients. The guidelines listed three acceptable indications for “therapeutic abortions”: 1) threats to the pregnant woman’s life or impairment of her health; 2) pregnancies “likely to result in the in the birth of a child with grave physical deformities or mental retardation”; and 3) “when conception has occurred as the result of rape or incest.”¹⁰ It is obvious that the three categories of acceptable indications were essentially identical to those promulgated by the American Law Institute in its 1962 proposal for reform of abortion statutes.

The preface to the guidelines included this rather rare admission: “It is recognized that these guidelines are not the final answer but perhaps can serve a useful purpose at the present time.”¹¹ In fact, a conference of leading scholars and health care professionals was convened at Loma Linda University shortly *before* the initial guidelines were published. The purpose of the meeting was to resolve differences of perspective and provide a more coherent basis for the Adventist position. The most influential presenter at the gathering was physician and theologian Dr. Jack W. Provonsha. His paper, later published in *Spectrum*, presented the view that fetal life is valued because it symbolizes what we value about being human and because it has the potential to become human. For Provonsha, calling a fetus a “person symbol” was in no way intended to minimize the importance of fetal life. He wrote, “I ought to view the miracle developing in my wife’s body with the compassionate respect that it deserves as a gift of God.”¹² However, Provonsha also acknowledged that there are tragic circumstances that make abortion necessary. The symbolic value of fetal life must give way to the established needs of personal human life. In his words, “the increasingly potential human organism developing in its mother’s body is not yet human—but it ‘means’ human and can serve human values by crystallizing and conditioning respect for human life. However, if for some reason it should threaten human existence unduly, it cannot be permitted to survive.”¹³

In the months following the 1971 Loma Linda meeting, two more indications for ethically permissible abortions were added to the three that were published: 4) “When the case involves an unwed child under 15 years of age, and 5) “When for some reason the requirements

of functional human life demand the sacrifice of the lesser potential human value”¹⁴ Unlike the published guidelines, the expanded version did not appear in any Church journal. Instead, it was distributed upon request to Adventist health care institutions. The vagueness of the fifth indication’s language—“when for some reason”—was then and still is puzzling. Was it intentionally vague? Or was there a subtle meaning that somehow got lost? Years later, I asked Dr. Provonsha about his interpretation of that last indication. He said, “I think someone heard a paper I read and misunderstood it.”¹⁵

George Gainer is correct when he writes, “In effect, the church has simultaneously held two positions regarding abortion.”¹⁶ For over twenty years, until the adoption of the church’s current guidelines in 1992, these two versions were kept on file and occasionally sent to people who requested them. One of the directors of the Church’s health ministries department told me, with some evident chagrin, that he had discovered that the department occasionally distributed one or the other edition without noticing the differences.¹⁷

During those years, there were attempts to reconsider the Church’s position on abortion and other issues now included under the broad heading of bioethics. For example, in 1979 I received a letter from Dr. Samuel DeShay inviting me to come to the General Conference to deliver a paper on abortion and sex-change surgeries. I was just then completing my PhD dissertation on a topic in bioethics, and I responded that I could attempt to write a paper on one or the other of the two issues, but not both. Dr. DeShay chose abortion. The paper, presented at a meeting in Tacoma Park, MD and later published in *Spectrum*, called for a “principled approach” to abortion.¹⁸ I believed then, as I do now, that the complexities of the cases in which abortion is contemplated require careful attention to a number of Christian principles. I emphasized three essential principles, drawn from Scripture: respect for human life, respect for personal conscience, and fairness. Of course, for Christians these three and any other norms must be in the service of neighbor love (Romans 13:8–10). And no set of principles, however complete and however biblical, will be sufficient to eliminate all the ambiguities of the most difficult crisis pregnancies.

Confusion surrounding the official Adventist guidelines throughout the 1970s and 1980s might have

continued much longer had it not been for a conference held at Loma Linda University in 1989. Under the aegis of the University's newly formed Center for Christian Bioethics, more than twenty Adventist scholars were invited to present their views on abortion. Given the diversity experienced within Adventism, we should hardly be surprised by the wide range of views on full display. Sixteen of the presentations became chapters in a book edited by David Larson and subsequently published in 1992.¹⁹ The thoughts of biblical scholars, theologians, ethicists, physicians, nurses, feminists, right-to-life activists, and others provided all the evidence anyone would need to show that faithful Adventists, all reading the same inspired sources and all seeking to address the issue of abortion with ethical integrity, could arrive at vastly different positions.

The Christian View of Human Life Committee

The Loma Linda conference and the resultant collection of essays obviously did not settle the matter of abortion for Adventist thought or practice. What it did do was prompt the Church to appoint a committee to address the matter and a number of other issues within bioethics.²⁰ The Christian View of Human Life Committee, a group of about thirty Adventist scholars and health care professionals led by Dr. Albert S. Whiting, then director of the Church's health ministries department, met throughout the 1990s to develop principled consensus statements. The first item on the agenda was abortion. The practice of the group was to spend significant time hearing presentations by acknowledged Adventist experts prior to drafting guidelines.²¹ Then the committee sought to produce drafts and share them widely for comment. Over the course of two years, the abortion guidelines went through eight drafts before a final version was presented to General Conference leaders in the fall of 1992. The leaders approved the guidelines, and they are included in this issue of *Spectrum*.

Here, I want to take the opportunity to honor the memory of the late Dr. Whiting. His even-handed, non-anxious way of leading the Christian View of Human Life Committee was exemplary. His willingness to share drafts of the abortion statement with all of the Church's divisions in order to solicit comments that were then carefully considered was, so far as I know, unprecedented. His

courage to champion the committee's insistence that the membership be gender balanced was essential. His determination that we gather extensive input from theological and clinical leaders prior to drafting a statement was remarkably helpful in coming to consensus. His own faithfulness, spiritual depth, and commitment to biblical principles gave the entire process a sense of genuine Christian service. The legacy of his exceptional leadership lives on to this day.

Of course, acceptance of the 1992 guidelines did not settle the matter of abortion for all Adventists. Some questioned the need for any such statement. In their view, individuals and institutions could find their way without normative guidance from the Church. Others found the guidelines insufficiently restrictive. Some of these wanted the list of permissible exceptions to be very specific. Inevitably, some critics also disagreed with the guidelines' expressed conviction that the final decision belongs to the pregnant woman. Unfortunately, the 1992 statement has sometimes been presented without the accompanying biblical principles intended to serve as the basis for the guidelines. This has led some critics to conclude that little or no attention was given to Scripture. It was always the intention of the drafting committee that the normative statements and their biblical foundation would be presented together.

What the approved guidelines did accomplish was to provide Adventist health care systems with a coherent statement that is clinically applicable. As an obstetrician and former leader of obstetrics in one of those systems told me, the guidelines set boundaries that provide meaningful limits while also giving the flexibility to make appropriate clinical decisions. A recent document designed to guide practice within the largest of the Adventist health systems in North America, is worth quoting at length:

In accordance with Seventh-day Adventist theological beliefs regarding human creation in the image of God and the sanctity of human life, elective abortion is prohibited in AdventHealth institutions. Therapeutic termination of pregnancy is allowable in three specific circumstances—for conditions that pose a clear threat to maternal health and life, fetal conditions that are incompatible with life outside the womb, or

documented cases of rape or incest. Each potential termination of pregnancy is subject to review by the duly constituted institutional ethics process. Across AdventHealth, the average annual incidence of pregnancy terminations is less than one per 1,000 live births.²²

Similar statements can be found in the policies governing the other Adventist systems.

Shared Convictions

The fact that faithful Adventists have continued to differ on how our church should best address the subject of abortion should not obscure the widely held agreement on the foundational beliefs. Biblical scholar and pastor John Brunt wrote of this harmony of convictions years ago in an essay on the Bible and abortion. After surveying the divergent approaches of a variety of Adventist authors, he concluded,

All agree the Bible teaches that God values life highly and that we should respond to this gracious God by valuing it as well. All agree that this important biblical principle has serious implications for the question of abortion. No one sanctions the kind of wholesale abortion of convenience that has become commonplace in our society. Differences center on the kinds of principles that must be weighed along with this basic commitment to the value of life and the kinds of considerations that would make abortion the lesser of evils in certain situations.²³

Brunt urges us not to overlook this “positive consensus” nor underestimate its importance.²⁴

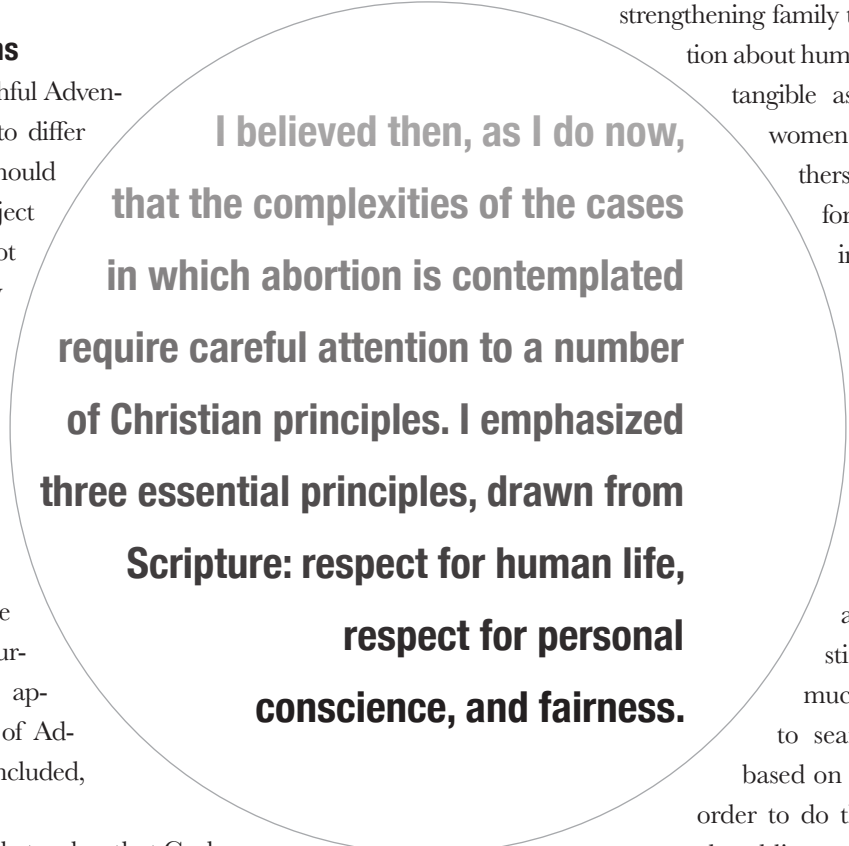
In addition to the points of agreement mentioned by Brunt, I would point to some often-overlooked elements of the Church’s statement, especially the guidelines numbered two and three. In them, there is a compelling call for church members to set aside “attitudes of condemnation” toward persons facing crisis pregnancies. Instead, the statement says, “Christians are commissioned to become a loving, caring community of faith that assists those in crisis as alternatives are considered.” The statement goes on to call for

strengthening family ties, enhancing education about human sexuality, providing tangible assistance to pregnant women, and encouraging fathers to take responsibility for parenting. Regarding these and similarly practical provisions of grace, we should hope for committed consensus.

Whether or not we can elevate the level of our ethical discourse above that of bumper stickers, will depend much on the willingness to search for such accord based on biblical principles. In order to do this, it will be helpful to read and listen, with open minds and

hearts, to those whose views differ from our own. Adventists who most thoroughly identify as “pro-life” do help to remind all of us that the Creator is also in favor of life and calls on us to protect human life. Adventists who most thoroughly identify as “pro-choice” also remind us of something essential to Christian life: The Creator gave human beings the kind of freedom that makes neighbor love possible.²⁵ An apparently heroic decision and its accompanying actions of self-sacrificial love would be robbed of their moral worth if the one acting had been coerced rather than having decided freely.

There are many reasons for the seemingly intractable nature of the abortion debates among Christians, including Adventists. There are, to be sure, different



I believed then, as I do now, that the complexities of the cases in which abortion is contemplated require careful attention to a number of Christian principles. I emphasized three essential principles, drawn from Scripture: respect for human life, respect for personal conscience, and fairness.

understandings of how to interpret Scripture in order to derive moral guidance. People also come from different cultural backgrounds that have deeply influenced their attitudes. Then, in the society I know best, there is the polarized nature of political debates, the meanness they can engender, and the media who love the ratings they produce. In addition to all these and many other factors, there is often also a difference in the kinds of stories people have in mind when they think about abortion. What cases are most memorable or considered most typical? What are imagined to be the motivations of those who are involved in such cases?

In the setting where I work, cases in which an abortion may be considered are always heart-rending. Because my organization's policy requires an ethics consultation prior to the termination of a pregnancy, and because I have for many years helped to provide those consultations, I have sometimes been called to join in the deliberations. The calls are very infrequent, but also necessary. Of course, for those who believe there should be no ethical guidelines for such cases, and that patients and their physicians should do whatever they want without paying attention to the faith commitments of a faith-inspired health system, there would be no need for an ethics consultation. On the other hand, for those who reject the legitimacy of any exceptional circumstances and would forbid all abortions regardless of the medical situation, there would also be no need for careful deliberation. For the clinical realities I have observed, neither of these extremes is fitting. Let me mention some examples.²⁶

One night, just after midnight, a pregnant, immigrant mother of four was bleeding to death. Her pregnancy involved what is called placenta previa with accreta.²⁷ In some relatively rare cases, this condition can cause uncontrollable hemorrhaging. Such was the case with this mother. She had received several units of blood, but it was a failing effort. Tearfully, with her husband by her side, she made the decision no one would ever have wanted. Her uterus was removed, and the pregnancy was lost. The sadness of that night stays with me even now.

I had not known of a story like this, so one might imagine my shock and dismay when I was called about 2:00 a.m. the next day for a medically similar case—

similar except this was a young Latina in her early twenties, and this was a much-wanted first pregnancy. Her young husband was with her, and both were obviously frightened. A visit from their Catholic priest was comforting. But the bleeding continued to worsen. Finally, the painful decision was made. She, too, lost her uterus, her pregnancy, and the possibility of ever being pregnant again. Years after that experience, I still can't talk or write about it without overwhelming feelings of sorrow. The obstetrician attending the patient—the same one from the previous story—told me through her own tears that she had not seen such a case in over ten years, and now two in two nights.

For those who find such decisions either unnecessary or simple, I have nothing to offer except a plea for more compassionate understanding. I am inclined to think that the ease of their answers is the result of not encountering the depths of the questions or the anguish with which answers must be sought. Let me give one more example.

At one of our weekly case conferences, the story of a 12-year-old girl was discussed. She had been raped by her mother's live-in boyfriend, and now she was pregnant. Child Protective Services had removed her from her home, and she had a court-appointed guardian who was consulting about the girl's care. If twelve seems too young to be pregnant, it is. But we have seen a few younger, pregnant children. In addition to this patient's young age, she was also intellectually handicapped and demonstrated little or no capacity to comprehend what was happening to her. Her physician was certain that she was neither physically nor mentally able to complete a pregnancy.

I never learned what finally happened in this case. I believe I do understand at least some of the consternation on the part of those who wrestled with the decision. My clearest certainty, upon encountering cases like this, is that no decision will be free of a residue of moral regret. This is true whenever the conflict over core values is not between us and someone else, but within us as we seek ethical integrity in such an imperfect world. We can try to reduce or eliminate the regret by narrowing our moral attention to only one value and banishing all others. But the cost of such false simplicity is too high.

Conclusion

As the national debates about abortion continue to escalate, the time is right for Seventh-day Adventists to ponder anew the history of our Church's attempts to address the matter. If the work of previous years needs improvement, we should hope to do that work carefully and openly, without fear. We are, after all, a people of faith who believe in present truth. In this work, the example of Dr. Whiting's leadership is worthy of emulation. Let us gather for grown-up conversations that include experienced scholars and clinicians exhibiting a commitment to gender equality and cultural diversity. I am fully confident that the same Spirit that has led us toward truth in the past can do the same now if we will listen in humility.

Endnotes

1. The Seventh-day Adventist official "Guidelines" for abortion are available on the Church's website: <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/abortion/> and they are included in this issue of *Spectrum*.
2. Oregon law changed in 1969. The story of the change is told in Jonathan D. Quick, "Liberalized Abortion in Oregon," *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 68, No. 10 (October 1978): 1003–1008. The article is available at this website: <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/pdf/10.2105/AJPH.68.10.1003>.
3. John Harvey Kellogg, *Man, the Masterpiece*, (Battle Creek: Modern Medicine Publishing Company, 1894), 424–425.
4. Personal conversation with Dr. Harold F. Ziprick, 1979.
5. This history is briefly told here: <http://todayincla.com/?event=american-law-institute-proposes-abortion-law-reform>.
6. American Law Institute, Model Penal Code, 1962, para. 230.3 The document is available at this website: <http://www.icla.up.ac.za/images/un/use-of-force/western-europe-others/UnitedStatesofAmerica/Model%20Penal%20Code%20United%20States%20of%20America%201962.pdf>.
7. The full text of the Roe v. Wade decision, written by Justice Harry Blackmun, is available here: <http://cdn.loc.gov/service/ll/usrep/usrep410/usrep410113/usrep410113.pdf>.
8. General Conference Officers, "Abortion Guidelines," *Ministry*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (March 1971): 10–11. These first guidelines were developed by General Conference leaders in 1970 but were not published until 1971.
9. The development of the Adventist guidelines and the context in which they were shaped is told with helpful detail by George B. Gainer, "Abortion: History of Adventist Guidelines," *Ministry*, Vol. 64, No. 8 (August 1991): 11–17.
10. *Ibid.*, 11.
11. *Ibid.*, 10.

12. Jack W. Provonsha, "An Appraisal of Therapeutic Abortion," *Spectrum*, (Spring 1971): 34.

13. *Ibid.*, 35. An earlier version of this essay, likely the version read by Dr. Provonsha in the January 1971 meeting in Loma Linda, has recently been published in *Making the Whole Person Whole: Papers and Presentations on Religion, Ethics, and Medicine*, edited by David R. Larson (Loma Linda, CA: Center for Christian Bioethics, 2018), 55–64.

14. Gainer, "Abortion," 15.

15. Personal conversation with Jack Provonsha, c. 1980.

16. Gainer, "Abortion," 16.

17. Personal conversation with Dr. Albert S. Whiting, c. 1990.

18. Gerald R. Winslow, "Adventists and Abortion: A Principled Approach," *Spectrum*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Dec. 1981): 6–17. See also "Abortion and Christian Principles," *Ministry*, Vol. 61, No. 5 (May 1988): 12–16.

19. David R. Larson, editor, *Abortion: Ethical Issues and Options* (Loma Linda, CA: Center for Christian Bioethics, 1992).

20. A number of Church leaders have told me privately that the 1989 gathering in Loma Linda, which was funded in part by the General Conference, provided the impetus to establish the Christian View of Human Life Committee later that same year.

21. The early years of the Christian View of Human Life Committee are nicely described in Margaret McFarland, "Inside the Committee on the Christian View of Human Life," *Spectrum*, Vol. 21 (August 1991): 37–39. The opening sentence of McFarland's article no doubt described the experience of many of the committee's members: "Participating for two years as a law member of the General Conference Committee on the Christian View of Human Life has made me more hopeful about the Seventh-day Adventist Church than I have been for 20 years."

22. AdventHealth, "Mission and the Management of an AdventHealth Facility," (2019), 23, paragraph CC.3.

23. John C. Brunt, "Adventists, Abortion, and the Bible," in *Abortion: Ethical Issues*, David R. Larson, ed., 27–42.

24. *Ibid.*, 40.

25. I seek to make the case for this kind of freedom in Gerald R. Winslow, "Freedom for Neighbor Love," *Spectrum*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (April-June 2019): 66–69.

26. The details of all of the cases described here have been altered sufficiently in order to preserve patient confidentiality.

27. The condition is described here: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/placenta-accreta/symptoms-causes/syc-20376431>.



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An Appraisal of Therapeutic Abortion

THE VIEW OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

BY JACK W. PROVONSHA

This article originally appeared in Volume 3, Issue 2 of Spectrum in 1971.

Since pregnancy is sometimes called the most common tumor of the female uterus, it may be useful to frame the abortion issue as a question regarding the value of an intrauterine tumor. There are other tumors in that location, of course, and they form a useful contrast in a study of relative values. Some of these, such as ordinary leiomyoma or fibroid, if they are small and produce no discomfort or dysfunction, have little if any value, either positive or negative. At least their negative value may be so insignificant that it does not warrant risking the higher values of life and health through surgical removal. Other tumors may have only negative value. For example, even minute

leiomyosarcomas or adenocarcinomas possess such strong negative value that one must take considerable risk to eliminate them, including the risk of relatively permanent impairment of health.

The term independence is crucial here and raises several questions, among them whether the newborn, who is nutritionally bound to its mother's breast or artificial equivalent, is really so different from the fetus bound by an umbilical cord and placenta.

The pregnancy “tumor” differs from these in that, although it may possess a similar disvalue in the sense of jeopardizing the life and health of the maternal host, or even a different disvalue relating to the disruption of social relationships, it may also possess positive values so strong that they warrant subjecting the mother to considerable danger in order to preserve the pregnancy. The essential difference, that is, the positive value placed on the pregnancy tumor as over against the others, is based on its potential for becoming a human life and thus

on the fact that it shares in the worth we ascribe to human existence.

Present attempts to liberalize abortion laws tend to obscure this distinction. It seems important, therefore, that we go over the ground again lest we lose something of importance to all of us. This discussion should be considered as one more contribution to what should remain, as yet, an ongoing conversation.

I

A number of medical voices suggest that the issue be entirely removed from the moral arena, that it is solely a medical or technical problem and should be so treated. This is to say that the pregnancy “tumor” has precisely the same kind of amoral value as any other tumor. However, these same voices would be unwilling to assign to the newborn child a similar status. They would not grant the mother equal right, for example, to dispose of her newborn at will. It is evident, then, that there is thought to be a morally significant difference between the two, the former being considered “tissue” and the latter “human,” which throws into focus one of the chief points at issue in the abortion problem. When exactly does the metamorphosis from tissue to human being take place? Without detailing arguments, let us look at some *moments of transition* from tissue to human that have been proposed in the past.

According to the chronology of the developing organism (not the time the theory was in vogue), the earliest “moment” has traditionally been the instant of conception. No one that I know of has granted human status to pre-fertilized germ cells; nature’s prodigality in its treatment of

such cells provides a kind of value-index. It is manifestly impossible for any but a very small fraction of the cells to become anything more than what they are—cells, useless and short-lived at that. By contrast, the fertilized cell, to use a simplistic metaphor, rallies the resources of the whole parent body around it for nurture and protection.

Theological dogma about the infusion of the soul into the body largely conditioned ideas of the value of a newly fertilized ovum throughout much of Christian history. (In earlier times, opinion followed Aristotle’s belief that the male embryo received its soul at forty days and the female at eighty days.) According to such a view, the fertilized ovum possesses the rights of a human

being from the beginning, and its willful destruction constitutes a crime. In a situation of competition between this life and the life of the mother, the issue is resolved on other grounds; for instance, on which person has had opportunity to prepare for the hereafter.

In a logical sequence the next “moment” would probably be that of transition from embryo to fetus, that is, the time when all the features of the future organism are finally present, even if in small and underdeveloped form.

Practical reasons prevented this from being considered seriously by our forefathers, but it does have some relevance to present considerations of possible injury to the embryonic organism from chemical, viral, or other agents, and whether this justifies abortion.

Other “moments” such as “quickening” have been suggested. This proposal possesses a certain inner logic, since it is at this time that the “tumor” may assume a new kind of “human” meaning to the people in its life. Even the physician, as he checks fetal position and heart tones, is likely to find the term tumor increasingly inappropriate. To the parents, fetal movements often produce a new relationship characterized by a

The phrase normal fertilized ovum is employed because a “blighted” or abnormal ovum may never be able to become a human by our functional definition and, if recognized, it may be assigned nonhuman value.

heightened feeling of identification with that little “somebody in there.”

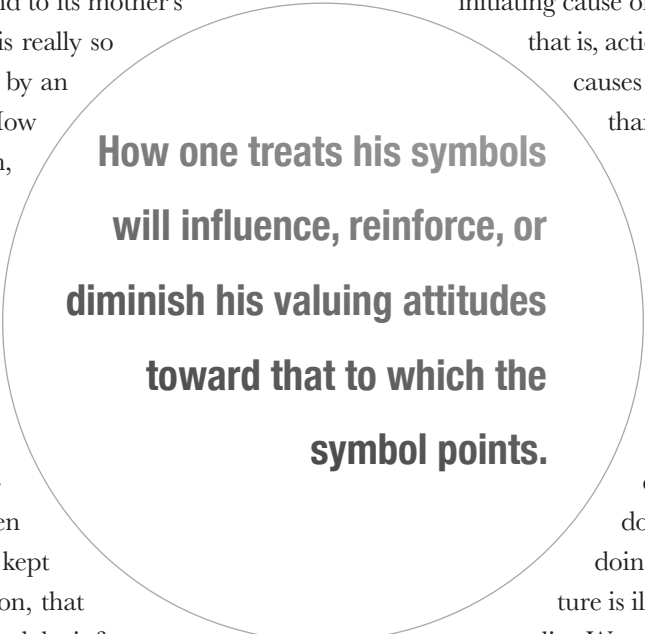
The commonest modern proposal is the “moment” of viability, when the fetus has achieved sufficient maturity to be able to “go it alone” if necessary — when it is potentially independent from the maternal organism. The issue has not yet been legally clarified, but there is a tendency to consider willful destruction of the fetus after this time a crime other than abortion. The term independence is crucial here and raises several questions, among them whether the newborn, who is nutritionally bound to its mother’s breast or artificial equivalent, is really so different from the fetus bound by an umbilical cord and placenta. How independent is the newborn, even for years afterward? Even in adulthood, independence is relative. Probably no one survives long without someone else somewhere along the line.

The independence of the newborn from his mother’s oxygen supply is obvious, but even this is not absolute. Air must be kept available and free of obstruction, that is, from blankets and the like, and the infant may not be able to do all of this for himself. To be sure, the fetus or newborn at viability can be related to in new ways. Never before did it mean human to quite this extent. But the question remains: Is it in fact human? Can it perform a single, exclusively human action? Most of its activities are performed by lower animals at least as effectively. A “moment” sometimes suggested as the time the fetus becomes human is that first breath of air, which has some biblical support going for it. The Bible does describe the creation of the first human as God breathing “into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). This definition may seem a bit arbitrary, however, since breathing is not an exclusively human activity, and the definition we seek is the moment when the organism becomes human. Similar to this moment in its arbitrariness is the rabbinical notion that the infant becomes human when the greater part of his body is delivered. Whether it makes any difference which end comes first I am unable to discover.

The last “moment” seriously proposed is difficult to locate with precision, since it depends on an elusive function that is itself difficult to define. Moral theorists and others sometimes contrast man with lower members of the animal kingdom in terms of his freedom—his capacity to create, to initiate, to do novel things he does not have to do. Lesser animals are assumed to behave within the general pattern of causality, in which every effect has a previous cause, however devious and remote. Most animals merely respond to stimuli in reflex ways. But man may be the initiating cause of at least some of his actions—that is, actions can take place in which the causes are traceable no further back than the man who acted.

This possibility in man cannot be absolutely either confirmed or disconfirmed, of course, and some reject the notion out of hand. But it is a theoretical necessity if one uses such terms as *responsibility* seriously. A man cannot be held responsible for doing what he could not help doing. Our whole normative structure is illusory if such freedom is not a reality. We can describe how people in fact behave (descriptive ethics), but we cannot say how they “ought” to behave (normative ethics) unless they can choose so to behave.

The Christian commandment to love is posited on such a reality. The biblical command to love has to do with love as a principle related to will, commitment, and choice, rather than to mere sentimentality. Such a command makes nonsense if man cannot will an act with his private label on it, if he cannot do something about which he can say, “I did it. It is mine.” It is this freedom that defines a human being in the biblical or Judeo-Christian context. If this is so, then we may define man as becoming human at the instant he becomes responsible. But when is that? Can we know? Probably no one but an omniscient being would know the exact moment, although it probably occurs somewhere in early childhood, depending on individual precocity and other variables.



**How one treats his symbols
will influence, reinforce, or
diminish his valuing attitudes
toward that to which the
symbol points.**

But of what possible use can so imprecise a definition be to the problem at hand? Or worse, how disturbing might such a definition be, since it extends our “tissue” definition far beyond anything currently proposed—even into infancy and early childhood. On such grounds it would be as morally defensible to practice infanticide as to carry out an early abortion—a horrible thought.

And that is precisely the point I wish to make and precisely the reason for extending the discussion of “moments” so far. The morality of abortion concerns other levels of value than the “moment” of human value for which we have been searching. One of these is the potentiality for becoming human. (The “human” value conditions the quest, to be sure. When we speak of the value of one tumor over another in terms of the potentiality of one to become a human being, we are obviously influenced by our regard for the essentially human.)

II

Potentiality for becoming human begins at the moment a normal fertilized ovum is implanted. This point is chosen because, at least at present, it is not possible for an in vitro conception, that is, one in an extracorporeal test-tube environment, to continue to maturation. Perhaps one day Huxley’s *Brave New World* will be upon us, perish the thought, but not yet. Nor is it usually possible for an embryo to mature in a fallopian tube or some other extrauterine location in the mother’s body. Potentiality implies the “possibility of becoming.” (One can also speak of an ascending scale of potentiality. The more nearly the embryo or fetus approaches the conditions of being human, the higher its level of potentiality.) The phrase *normal fertilized ovum* is employed because a “blighted” or abnormal ovum may never be able to become a human by our functional definition and, if recognized, it may be assigned nonhuman value.

Another basis for considering abortion as a moral matter goes beyond such human potentiality, however, and is based on that quality in man that makes him a moral being, his capacity for experiencing value and meaning. Man is by definition a symbol-using animal. He is *homo faber*, man the maker (of tools, that is), *homo sapiens*, man the thinker, but he is also man the symbol-user.

By symbol I mean an entity that “means,” refers to, or points to another entity, and that may in some cases be treated as if it were in fact this other entity. The capacity for doing this may possibly be derived from, certainly is involved in, both his *faber* and *sapiens* qualities. It is the basis for his speech: words are such

symbols. It is also the major basis for his intellection. (Try thinking without using words.) Certainly it is the essential foundation of his capacity to communicate and thus of his whole social structure.

The value of meaning, of symbols, even if they are only word symbols, to religion and morals, for example, should be obvious. It is the meaning of the act, not the act per se, that gives the act its moral quality. Killing with intent constitutes the crime, not the mere fact of killing, as in an accident

where no culpable neglect was involved. This is a fact of great importance to the whole of morals; numerous examples can be given in its support.

Another fact regarding symbols is of importance to our present consideration. Symbols point to, or refer to something beyond themselves; thus, they are vehicles of communication. But they may also be “taken for” that to which they point. In other words, the attitudes toward the symbols will deeply condition the attitudes toward that to which they point. Religious people have always known this when they have demanded respect for the sacred symbols—the Holy Bible, for example. Disrespect for the sacred book negatively conditions one’s respect for the God of the book.

If all men were ethically sensitive and informed, and if all possessed a high level of sound judgment, we would require very little regulation in these matters.

How one treats his symbols will influence, reinforce, or diminish his valuing attitudes toward that to which the symbol points. That's the way it is because that's the way man is.

Let us now relate this to the subject at hand. It is perfectly possible to bring “thing” meanings to an embryo and even to a fetus, to think of them in “tumor” terms and thus as objects of medical technique rather than morals. It is also possible, however, to think of babies, children, and men and women in the same terms, as Dachau and My Lai have violently told us. The question is, ought we to do this? Do we really want to endanger human existence by rejecting what keeps it human? This is what may happen if we do not use and preserve all the reinforcing resources and techniques available. Nuremberg taught us this at least: I ought to view the miracle developing in my wife's body with the compassionate respect that it deserves as a gift from God. To the extent that I am able to do this, my anticipation of the miracle will condition the nest into which it is brought into the world. And this has all kinds of implications for the future of the child and its society, as every depth study has amply shown. At least a part of the world's ills have descended upon us because we have lost the capacity to celebrate life, especially at its beginnings.

Unfortunately, conception cannot always be a celebration. Babies are conceived by accident, lust, incest, and rape, unwanted and often foredoomed to the worst that society can do to them. And there are already too many mouths to feed, there is a sick society, there are mothers who are ill and therefore there must be abortions, not because it is good, but because it is necessary. The question remains: When?¹

III

A symbol's value is derived from that to which it points. The symbol possesses, therefore, a lesser, secondary kind of value which means that when the symbol seriously competes with, rather than serves, that to which it points, we must be prepared to sacrifice the symbol. In the terms of the present problem, the increasingly potential human organism developing in its mother's body is not yet human but it “means” human and can serve human values by crystallizing and conditioning respect for human life. However, if for some reason it should threaten human existence unduly, it cannot be permitted to survive.

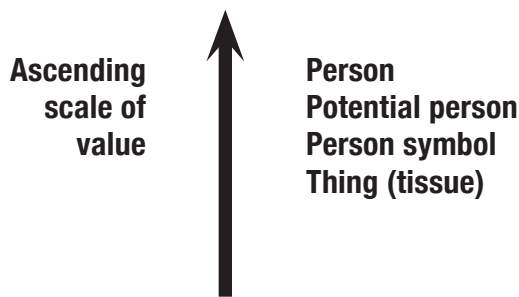
Notice that I have referred to *human existence* and not merely to life itself. “Human” existence can cease, even while the organism lives on, whenever that quality we spoke of earlier that separates man from the brutes is lost. It is a tenuous quality at best, easily diminished or destroyed by a variety of functional disturbances—physical, mental, emotional, social. A threat in any or all of these areas may seriously jeopardize what makes life human; and if such a threat is posed by a secondary symbolic value, the symbol must go.

To express this idea in traditional terms: Whenever the developing embryo or fetus places in jeopardy the mother's physical, mental, or emotional health, and that jeopardy is judged to be of sufficiently serious nature, the potential human symbol, the embryo or fetus, may be sacrificed. It is the judgment of jeopardy, however, that is difficult, and society must not thrust such a decision upon a potential mother unassisted.

The value of the potentially human is largely a supporting, reinforcing value; and when the threat to the already human exceeds the value of this support, morally the potentially human becomes expendable.

If all men were ethically sensitive and informed, and if all possessed a high level of sound judgment, we would require very little regulation in these matters. But since not all men are so gifted, they ought to assist each other and protect the weak and the inept from themselves and from others. Undoubtedly it will be important for some time to come for good men to place their heads together and share the burden of deciding what is ultimately best for everyone involved, share it with each other, with hospital administrators, and with the troubled potential mothers on whom the burden chiefly falls. It is also incumbent on a society, as it protects its collective moral sensitivities, to be prepared to “pick up the tab” for such protection.

A few specifics remain. What of the chemical (for example, thalidomide), viral (rubella, for example), or otherwise damaged embryo or fetus? On a Christian scale of values such as suggested by the diagram, in which the actual human takes priority over the potential human, what cannot ever be human because of genetic or developmental defect must find its place farther down the scale. The subhuman, even if it has certain symbolic value, cannot take priority over the potential human. It would not be right, therefore, to sacrifice normal potential humans in the process of eradicating abnormal individuals estimated on a purely statistical basis.



This is particularly true if we have no way of accurately predetermining the extent of congenital defects. Ordinarily the abnormality must be cared for after delivery, again with society prepared to pay the price for

preserving the human values involved. Abortion might be performed, however, if the mother’s mental health were sufficiently threatened by the possibility of abnormality. When the day arrives that serious dehumanizing defects can be diagnosed with certainty in utero, then it will be possible to abort routinely certain defective fetuses.

The time of performing a legitimate abortion on the above terms is largely a technical matter, but for symbolic reasons it should be done as early as possible, especially since we are dealing with an ascending scale of potentiality and thus increasing symbolic meaning and value.

To summarize: What is at present subhuman, or what merely “means” human, although it actually is not human, may possess a value that warrants reasonable efforts for its preservation. However, we must not usually allow what is subhuman to enter into serious competition with actual human existence, either directly or indirectly. The value of the potentially human is largely a supporting, reinforcing value; and when the threat to the already human exceeds the value of this support, morally the potentially human becomes expendable. An abortion may be performed whenever it threatens not just life but what makes life human. But it can never be right to interfere with so important a value for trivial or casual reasons. And since this problem requires judgment and a certain expertise, it is probable that the decision making should be shared by a community of sensitive and informed persons in addition to the persons subjectively involved.

Endnote

1. Extreme indications for terminating pregnancy might conceivably include the obvious as well as the more subtle effects of serious overpopulation. For symbolic reasons, however, contraception will always be preferable to abortion as a means of population control, but we must be prepared to admit abortion on moral grounds where the situation is grave and no other practical means of control is available. In principle it is morally indefensible to allow additional fully human swimmers—let alone what is only potentially or symbolically human—to jeopardize a life raft already filled to its limit.



JACK W. PROVONSHA (May 30, 1919–August 11, 2004) was a Seventh-day Adventist lecturer and theologian. He was an emeritus professor of Christian ethics and philosophy of religion at Loma Linda University and also the founding director of the Center for Christian Bioethics at the university.

General Conference Guidelines on Abortion

These guidelines were approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council session in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 12, 1992.

Many contemporary societies have faced conflict over the morality of abortion.* Such conflict also has affected large numbers within Christianity who want to accept responsibility for the protection of prenatal human life while also preserving the personal liberty of women. The need for guidelines has become evident, as the Church attempts to follow scripture, and to provide moral guidance while respecting individual conscience. Seventh-day Adventists want to relate to the question of abortion in ways that reveal faith in God as the Creator and Sustainer of all life and in ways that reflect Christian responsibility and freedom. Though honest differences on the question of abortion exist among Seventh-day Adventists, the following represents an attempt to provide guidelines on a number of principles and issues. The guidelines are based on broad biblical principles that are presented for study at the end of the document.**

1) Prenatal human life is a magnificent gift of God. God's ideal for human beings affirms the sanctity of human life, in God's image, and requires respect for prenatal life. However, decisions about life must be made in the context of a fallen world. Abortion is never an action of little moral consequence. Thus prenatal life must not be thoughtlessly destroyed. Abortion should be performed only for the most serious reasons.

2) Abortion is one of the tragic dilemmas of human fallenness. The Church should offer gracious support to those who personally face the decision concerning an abortion. Attitudes of condemnation are inappropriate in those who have accepted the gospel. Christians are commissioned to become a loving, caring community of faith that assists those in crisis as alternatives are considered.

3) In practical, tangible ways the Church as a supportive community should express its commitment to the value of human life. These ways should include:

1. strengthening family relationships
2. educating both genders concerning Christian principles of human sexuality
3. emphasizing responsibility of both male and female for family planning
4. calling both to be responsible for the consequences of behaviors that are inconsistent with Christian principles
5. creating a safe climate for ongoing discussion of the moral questions associated with abortion
6. offering support and assistance to women who choose to complete crisis pregnancies

7. encouraging and assisting fathers to participate responsibly in the parenting of their children.

The Church also should commit itself to assist in alleviating the unfortunate social, economic, and psychological factors that add to abortion and to care redemptively for those suffering the consequences of individual decisions on this issue.

4) The Church does not serve as conscience for individuals; however, it should provide moral guidance. Abortions for reasons of birth control, gender selection, or convenience are not condoned by the Church. Women, at times however, may face exceptional circumstances that present serious moral or medical dilemmas, such as significant threats to the pregnant woman's life, serious jeopardy to her health, severe congenital defects carefully diagnosed in the fetus, and pregnancy resulting from rape or incest. The final decision whether to terminate the pregnancy or not should be made by the pregnant woman after appropriate consultation. She should be aided in her decision by accurate information, biblical principles, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, these decisions are best made within the context of healthy family relationships.

5) Christians acknowledge as first and foremost their accountability to God. They seek balance between the exercise of individual liberty and their accountability to the faith community and the larger society and its laws. They make their choices according to scripture and the laws of God rather than the norms of society. Therefore, any attempts to coerce women either to remain pregnant or to terminate pregnancy should be rejected as infringements of personal freedom.

6) Church institutions should be provided with guidelines for developing their own institutional policies in harmony with this statement. Persons having a religious or ethical objection to abortion should not be required to participate in the performance of abortions.

7) Church members should be encouraged to participate in the ongoing consideration of their moral responsibilities with regard to abortion in light of the teaching of scripture.

Principles for a Christian View of Life

Introduction

"Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3, NIV). In Christ is the promise of eternal life; but since human life is mortal, humans are confronted with difficult issues regarding life and death. The following principles refer to the whole person (body, soul, and spirit), an indivisible whole (Genesis 2:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Life: Our Valuable Gift from God

1) God is the Source, Giver, and Sustainer of all life (Acts 17:25, 28; Job 33:4; Genesis 1:30, 2:7; Psalm 36:9; John 1:3, 4).

2) Human life has unique value because human beings, though fallen, are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27; Romans 3:23; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 3:2; John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:18, 19).

3) God values human life not on the basis of human accomplishments or contributions but because we are God's creation and the object of His redeeming love (Romans

5:6, 8; Ephesians 2:2–6; 1 Timothy 1:15; Titus 3:4, 5; Matthew 5:43–48; Ephesians 2:4–9; John 1:3, 10:10).

Life: Our Response to God's Gift

4) Valuable as it is, human life is not the only or ultimate concern. Self-sacrifice in devotion to God and His principles may take precedence over life itself (Revelation 12:11; 1 Corinthians 13).

5) God calls for the protection of human life and holds humanity accountable for its destruction (Exodus 20:13; Revelation 21:8; Exodus 23:7; Deuteronomy 24:16; Proverbs 6:16, 17; Jeremiah 7:3–34; Micah 6:7; Genesis 9:5, 6).

6) God is especially concerned for the protection of the weak, the defenseless, and the oppressed (Psalm 82:3, 4; James 1:27; Micah 6:8; Acts 20:35; Proverbs 24:11, 12; Luke 1:52–54).

7) Christian love (agape) is the costly dedication of our lives to enhancing the lives of others. Love also respects personal dignity and does not condone the oppression of one person to support the abusive behavior of another (Matthew 16:21; Philippians 2:1–11; 1 John 3:16; 1 John 4:8–11; Matthew 22:39; John 18:22, 23; John 13:34).

8) The believing community is called to demonstrate Christian love in tangible, practical, and substantive ways. God calls us to restore gently the broken (Galatians 6:1, 2; 1 John 3:17, 18; Matthew 1:23; Philippians 2:1–11; John 8:2–11; Romans 8:1–14; Matthew 7:1, 2, 12:20; Isaiah 40:42, 62:2–4).

Life: Our Right and Responsibility to Decide

9) God gives humanity the freedom of choice, even if it leads to abuse and tragic consequences. His unwillingness to coerce human obedience necessitated the sacrifice of His Son. He requires us to use His gifts in accordance with His will and ultimately will judge their misuse (Deuteronomy 30:19, 20; Genesis 3; 1 Peter 2:24; Romans 3:5, 6, 6:1, 2; Galatians 5:13).

10) God calls each of us individually to moral decision making and to search the scriptures for the biblical principles underlying such choices (John 5:39; Acts 17:11; 1 Peter 2:9; Romans 7:13–25).

11) Decisions about human life from its beginning to its end are best made within the context of healthy family relationships with the support of the faith community (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 5, 6).

12) Human decisions should always be centered in seeking the will of God (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 6:6; Luke 22:42).

*Abortion, as understood in these guidelines, is defined as any action aimed at the termination of a pregnancy already established. This is distinguished from contraception, which is intended to prevent a pregnancy. The focus of the document is on abortion.

**The fundamental perspective of these guidelines is taken from a broad study of scripture as shown in the “Principles for a Christian View of Human Life” included at the end of this document.

Grace and Truth in Life and Death

BY TED HAMILTON

“For the law was given through Moses; Grace and truth were realized through Christ Jesus.” John 1:17 (NASB)

She’s pregnant with her first child. This long-anticipated, much-wanted baby was conceived following years of disappointment for her and her husband. Diagnostic studies at five months gestation reveal anencephaly, a devastating neurological malformation in which the fetal brain fails to form. The truth is, that in the unlikely event her baby survives to term, it will be profoundly disabled and not expected to live more than a few minutes or hours outside the womb. This mother, these parents, now face perhaps the most tragic, emotionally wrenching decision they will ever encounter. Do we carry on, in full knowledge of the inevitability of a fatal outcome at an uncertain time in the near future, or do we consider the possibility of terminating this pregnancy?

That’s the unvarnished truth.

Where is grace to be found?

The current Seventh-day Adventist Church Guidelines on Abortion, as noted in this issue of *Spectrum*, do not condone abortion for birth control, gender selection, or convenience. In keeping with this position, hospitals affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America do not perform elective abortions.

The Church’s Guidelines go on to acknowledge exceptional circumstances of moral and medical complexity, including a threat to the health or life of a pregnant woman, severe fetal anomalies, and pregnancy resulting from rape or incest. Such circumstances impose painfully difficult decisions deemed properly to be the province of a mother in consultation with trusted professionals. The remarkable balance evident in these Guidelines, developed by a duly appointed committee under the auspices of the General Conference, and with due regard for Adventist theology, bioethics, medical science, and life experience, has served Adventist health care institutions well over the past quarter century.

AdventHealth, a system of almost fifty hospitals located in nine states, is an expression of the health ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, operating in harmony with the Church’s Guidelines on Abortion. Each year, AdventHealth hospitals care for well over thirty thousand live births. Meticulous records reveal a total of twenty-five (plus or minus three) clinical terminations of pregnancy occurring annually across the company, comprising less than one in 1,000 (or less than one-tenth of 1 percent) of live births. The majority of these heart-breaking decisions and procedures are due to severe fetal anomalies, with a relative few due to life-threatening maternal conditions. Each prospective termination is subjected to review by a well-defined biomedical ethics process. The number of pregnancy terminations, along with the documented reason for each termination, is reported annually to the AdventHealth Board of Directors, which is composed almost entirely of Adventist church leaders at union and conference levels of responsibility.

The truth is that we inhabit a failed, flawed world in which an enemy works tirelessly to destroy the image of the Creator in His beloved creation. But an opposite, and ultimately more powerful, redemptive truth is that we have the opportunity to demonstrate the mercy of our Creator to patients facing the most challenging of circumstances.

Where is grace then, if not in our hands, as we skillfully, compassionately, and prayerfully extend the healing grace of Jesus Christ through the care we provide to His children in need?



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Eight Problems

WITH THE

Adventist Abortion Guidelines

BY JONATHAN MARTIN

Like most Adventists raised in the church, I have for most of my life been somewhat ignorant and ambivalent about abortion. I saw it as a concern of the “Christian Right”; a political wedge issue. Although I was never fully comfortable with it, I saw it as something we had to tolerate in a fallen world and didn’t spend much time thinking about what the Church’s hospitals were doing. Despite having a theology degree from an Adventist university, I was not aware the Church even had a policy on abortion. I assumed that our hospitals probably didn’t perform abortions, but didn’t really enquire. In my experience, most Adventists are unaware of the Church’s official stance on this topic. In fact, most pastors are not aware of it.

Abortion stopped being theoretical for me and my wife when we found ourselves pregnant with a child who was diagnosed with a rare congenital heart defect which made survival outside of the womb uncertain, and a long, hard road ahead, a certainty. Abortion was offered as an option right away but there was never a doubt in our minds that this was not what God wanted. We went through the painful ordeal, choosing to have faith and hope that God would somehow be glorified whatever may come. I will not hide the fact that my wife suffered the brunt of this experience. But killing that innocent life was just not an option. I look back and shudder at the thought of ripping our own child’s limbs off. Our resolution was that Caleb (what we named him) might die, but he would die loved. He would not die because his parents rejected him as unworthy of their tears and suffering. If the devil would take Caleb, God would have

to allow it. We were not going to hand Caleb over to death voluntarily.

Caleb died in the womb a few days before his due date. He was delivered by caesarian and we got to hold him and spend time with him before we had to lay him to rest, awaiting the resurrection. We know that to God, he is as much a person as you and I. After that experience, the grieving and recovery period for my wife was quite long. She never wanted to be pregnant again. We had two children and that was her third delivery by caesarian and pregnancy becomes quite risky after three caesarians. A ruptured uterus is a very dangerous thing. As a Type 1 diabetic, pregnancy was always especially difficult and stressful for my wife, and recovery afterwards takes years. She was therefore not happy when we became unexpectedly pregnant, three years after Caleb died. She was scared. This was the first time in my wife’s life that she considered abortion as a legitimate option for her. She found strength in verses like: “children are a blessing from the Lord” (Psalm 127:3) and “your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed, and in your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them” (Psalm 139:16).

This was an unwanted and unplanned, high-risk pregnancy, at a time in our life that was not convenient. I was a first-year lawyer working insane hours but not making much money and we were heavily in debt, far from home and without a very developed support network. The strain on our marriage and family took years to recover from. It was not until Layla was born that my wife really felt bonded to her. But as soon as she saw her,

that bond was instant and incredibly strong. As much as Layla was not what we had planned and it was a difficult and stressful pregnancy that we did not want or feel we could handle, we cannot imagine life without her today. She has brought such joy and healing to our home.

My wife found strength through her pregnancy with Caleb in books like *I Will Carry You* by Angie Smith. Another great book we learned of later is *Perfectly Human* by Sarah Williams. These women carried children with fatal congenital defects to term and gained a powerful story and spiritual growth through this experience. These stories would not have been possible if all churches were providing the moral relativism found in the Guidelines. It is because these Christian women, like my wife, knew what was right and true that they were able to make the powerful decisions they made.

My beliefs about abortion were further solidified by assisting various Canadian pro-life organizations in freedom of speech litigation against various government entities in Canada. In Canada, speaking out against abortion is seen as borderline hate speech and the government is working very hard to prevent it.

As I have looked at the evidence and been confronted with the facts, statistics, and numerous personal stories, I have had to conclude that abortion really is a great evil in this world and not a solution to any problem. It does not belong in our church and this terrible stain from our collective conscience must be removed.

1. The Guidelines do not uphold a biblical view of the unborn.

The Bible only ever refers to the unborn as children: Luke 1:36 (*huion* – son); Luke 1:41, 44 (*brepheos* – baby); Genesis 25:22; 2 Kings 19:3; Ruth 1:11; Isaiah 37:3 (*banim* – sons). Many of the Church's leading scholars such as Dr. Richard Davidson, Dr. Ron DuPreez, Dr. Roy Gane, Dr. Richard Fredericks and Dr. Colin Standish have agreed that the Bible unequivocally presents the unborn in this way. Dr. Gerald Winslow, who was involved in the drafting of the current Guidelines, has, in at least two articles, taken the position that the unborn are fully human lives and ought to be protected as such:

But from a biblical perspective, human life is not respected because of some human agreement or

some human capacity. Rather, it is respected and preserved because it is the gift of the Creator, because in His love He has given it value. We love because He loved us first (see 1 John 4:17–20). The right to life and the duty to preserve it are secured first of all by His love. Human contracts can always be broken or ignored, but God's love is steadfast. Human traits wax and wane, but God's love is unconditional.¹

Acceptance of the principle of respect for human life establishes a strong moral presumption in favor of preserving human life, including prenatal human life. Exceptions such as abortion must bear a heavy burden of proof.²

The Guidelines cannot be said to uphold the biblical view that the unborn are children. With the exception of the provision for abortion to save a mother's life in a situation where both lives cannot be preserved, none of the exceptions permitting abortion in the Guidelines would be permissible for the intentional killing of any other child. One could not morally kill a child because they were conceived in rape or incest, had a severe congenital defect, or if caring for the child presented a risk to the mental or even physical health of his or her mother. The Church appears to be adopting an unstated agnostic stance about the state of the unborn, and then using the language of autonomy to paper over the lack of clarity on that crucial point to condone some abortions, and restrict others, with no clear reason why, besides appeals to compassion in difficult situations.

2. The Guidelines are a compass without a needle which could be used to support genocide.

Valuable as it is, human life is not the only or ultimate concern.
(Guidelines)

The Guidelines present various biblical principles in non-committal, open-ended ways and leave it open to the reader to conclude that the biblical freedom of the Christian includes the right to intentionally kill innocent human life in self-defense against speculative fears. This is exactly the kind of loose moral reasoning that is used to justify wars of aggression and genocide. This may seem extreme, but my point is that this is a supportable reading of the

Guidelines. It is the fallout of being agnostic about what an unborn child is, saying that it might be fully human, and then saying it's okay to intentionally kill it anyway in some cases. The middle ground the Church is trying to walk on this issue has no clear principled basis and can thus be easily manipulated.

3. The exceptions for abortion in the Guidelines are mostly based on emotional reasoning and have no real science to support them.

In his 1981 *Spectrum* article, Dr. Winslow stated that exceptions to the protection of the unborn must be subject to a “heavy burden of proof.” However, despite their appeal to emotion to encourage the reader to accept the exceptions provided in the Guidelines, there is no scientific evidence at all that the exceptions for abortion in the Guidelines (other than situations of strict life or death, which is self-evident) are in fact compassionate towards women. There is no science showing that rape victims who abort their pregnancies have a better emotional recovery. Most, in fact, choose to carry to term, and most who do, choose to keep the baby. I personally know someone who did this and that is the only child she was ever able to have—a daughter who now attends an Adventist University.

There is significant evidence, that goes unaddressed in the Guidelines, that abortion merely victimizes a victim of rape a second time. Most who have kept their babies would agree that the baby was the silver lining in a terrible life event. Why would we, as a church, want to in any way encourage the destruction of that silver lining in the absence of some compelling evidence that we are doing any good?

Ministries like Silent No More Awareness³ are presenting a very important perspective that Adventist leaders generally seem unaware of. There, you can read several thousand heart-breaking testimonies from abortion victims.

There are no websites which show similar regret and shame by women who chose to carry their unwanted pregnancies to term.⁴ Though the data on the psychological harm from abortion is admittedly contradictory, scientific data has not clearly shown that women who abort their unplanned pregnancies have better mental health outcomes than those who carry to term.

4. The Guidelines falsely present the preserving of one's freedom or autonomy as a biblical basis for killing innocent human life.

Women, at times however, may face exceptional circumstances that present serious moral or medical dilemmas, such as significant threats to the pregnant woman's life, serious jeopardy to her health, severe congenital defects carefully diagnosed in the fetus, and pregnancy resulting from rape or incest. (Guidelines)

It is no secret that individual freedom and autonomy are the sole moral principle used in the Guidelines to justify the intentional taking of the innocent human life. Yet the Bible does not present the preserving of our freedom or autonomy as justifying the murder of the innocent. In fact, the Bible invariably teaches the opposite, that suffering personal loss of freedom for what is good is pleasing to God. (Acts 5:41; Romans 8:17; Ephesians 6:20; Philippians 1:3,29; Colossians 4:3; 1 Peter 3:17, 4:13, 19; Hebrews 11:35–38). It is not only unbiblical, but anti-biblical, to classify situations that call for principled self-denial as cases of “serious moral dilemma,” opening the door to what may in fact be murder. If there is no countering moral imperative, then there is no moral dilemma, only a biblical imperative to suffer for what is good. Thus, the Guidelines nullify the Word of God for the sake of human ideas, prejudices, desires, and traditions (Matthew 15:3).

5. In the same way that euthanasia creates a cynical culture where certain people are expected to die, the Guidelines create a cynical culture where women are expected to get abortions in certain situations.

The Guidelines implicitly suggest that abortion is likely the wise and best choice for women who are raped, are victims of incest, are pregnant with a child with a congenital defect, or face a high-risk pregnancy or a pregnancy that otherwise threatens their current way of life. The Guidelines thus create an expectation that those in this type of situation should have abortions and fails to shine the bright light of faith and optimism in a dark, cynical and hopeless world. Rather, it succumbs to the darkness and invites women to think as though there was no God and no promise of Divine care, provision and protection. Rather than upholding the promises of God and the promise that we can do all things through Christ who

strengthens us, (Philippians 4:13), the Church essentially teaches that there are situations that the redeeming and sustaining love of Christ simply cannot reach.

By treating these situations as moral dilemmas, rather than practical challenges in doing what is right, the suggestion is made that women who keep such pregnancies may in fact be making the wrong decision. The Church thus fails miserably to be a faithful light to those women who seek God's glory above all else and betrays its pastoral responsibility to these faithful women so it can approve the decisions of those who place their personal autonomy first.

In my religious-liberty work as a lawyer who defends pro-life organizations against the Canadian government's attempts at censorship, I have come across many stories from women for whom abortion was not some act of personal liberation, but rather an act of submission to the wishes of those around them.⁵ Some may argue that the Guidelines oppose coercing women into having abortions. But anyone with any degree of experience in clinical ethics understands that we cannot effectively eliminate or detect subtle, soft, suggestive coercion that family members regularly exert on one another in these types of situations.

The Adventist Health slogan on its headquarters building in Roseville, California is "Living God's Love by Inspiring Health, Wholeness and Hope." The Adventist health mission was supposed to present an alternative to the quick, but shallow, fixes of drug-based medicine. We were instead supposed to seek to heal the whole person by calling people down the more difficult path of following all of the laws of physical and spiritual health, and walking along with them in that path. This would serve as the right arm of the church by both advancing the healing ministry of Jesus Christ, and also growing true disciples of Christ who know from experience what love really means. The Church is supposed to be encouraging us with the hope that we can, with the help of God and one another, be better and stronger than we think we can be and it is in these moments that the most significant spiritual growth can take place as God's promises are truly put to the test. The Guidelines, however, encourage the easy way out of the situation, not just for the woman, but for Adventists who then don't have to be burdened with the duty to provide

material and spiritual support to those who would make the more difficult, but faith-inspired decision. It is no accident that our health care system has no crisis pregnancy centers, like other Bible-believing Christians do. This is the inevitable result of presenting abortion as a solution to difficult situations.

6. The "serious jeopardy to her health" exception is unnecessary and has no real outer limit.

None of the exceptions for abortion in the Guidelines are as wide as this one. Those in the know within the Adventist health care system will readily admit that they do not know how far this exception actually applies in practice. So far, none I have spoken with have been willing to commit to the position that it only applies to physical health risks, and not to emotional, economic, psychological, or psychosocial health risks. Basically, any woman with a story that sounds sad enough can qualify for an abortion under this exception. This exception is unnecessary because the "serious jeopardy to a mother's life" exception provides for therapeutic, unintentional abortions, in life or death situations.

7. The Guidelines represent the relics of a legalistic and elitist Adventism we have yet to fully renounce.

The Guidelines come from an era in the church when members faced tremendous pressure to be "perfect" and abortion fit nicely within this culture of hiding one's sins for the sake of preserving status in the church. The church's obsession with perfection led many to the belief that we are only of value in the eyes of God to the extent we can overcome sin through our personal efforts. A person who believes that God's love or regard for us is based on performance—on personal efforts in self-discipline and responsible behavior—will naturally see those less capable of this as being less important in God's eyes. It thus comes as no surprise that Dr. Jack Provonsha's views on the value of human life at various stages were readily accepted by the church in the 1970s and became the basis for the predecessor to the current Guidelines. Dr. Provonsha's view was that human dignity is linked to the ability to exercise individual responsibility. Perfectionism and humanism are essentially one and the same when it comes to their view of human worth.

This spirit of ableism is now understood to be out of sync with biblical understanding of God's salvation as being based on grace rather than merit, and received through childlike faith and dependence rather than personal resolutions to do what's right. It is those who are the humblest who are most precious to God, and none are humbler than little children. God's love for little children is thus arguably greater than for the carefully disciplined and trained religious adult. As Christians, the biblical exercise of our will is not towards a self-obsessed quest for perfection through individual effort, but rather towards a continual quest for the childlike, innocent heart that rests in God's faithfulness and lives by gratitude and praise.

8. The Guidelines destroy our moral high ground to teach that God's Ten Commandments are binding and that grace and gospel freedom do not justify their transgression.

The principle of individual autonomy as a counterbalance to the moral duty (in the Sixth Commandment) against the destruction of innocent human life is problematic to Adventist theology in two ways:

- A. It confuses a legal right with a moral duty. We do not have a moral duty to exercise all of our rights. I have the right in this country to be a homosexual. This does not mean I have the duty to be a homosexual. The existence of a legal right to choose does not offer any guidance on how that right ought to be exercised. Only a moral duty can counter another moral duty. So simply stating a right to bodily autonomy does not answer the question of how we ought, as Christians, to exercise it. Saying that freedom is in and of itself a moral imperative that counters obedience to God's commandments, is exactly the theological mischief the Church was raised up to put down.

- B. The statements in the Spirit of Prophecy enjoining coercion of worship (for example, *Desire of Ages*, 466, 550) cannot apply to the situation of abortion. They apply to individuals and institutions of superior power, enjoining them from

compelling worship from those of lesser power. An unborn child is not such a person of superior power. They are ones in inferior power, to whom the operative principle is that those who have received undeserved, lifesaving grace from God must not withhold it from those weaker than them because of their newfound "freedom," but are duty bound to their master to extend the grace and gift of life they themselves have received (Matthew 18:21–35).

The Adventist Church's credibility is severely undermined by the incoherent approach to the Sixth Commandment presented in the Guidelines. The ideas presented go to the heart of the Church's message about God's law and the role of grace and Gospel freedom in enabling us to keep the law, rather than excusing and enabling its transgression. The Guidelines, to many, represent a significant betrayal of those who financially support a church they believe to be the Remnant Church precisely because they are taught that it has rejected the false teachings about freedom and grace that are so prominent in the confusing religious systems we understand to be the systems of spiritual and eschatological Babylon.

Endnotes

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A Straightforward Choice

BY CARMEN LAU

The Dominant Christian Political Narrative promotes, as gospel mandate, a zero-sum definition of abortion as evil. This is part of a bundle of “family values” that gives a roadmap for a person seeking power to get the “Christian” vote. Abortion remains an issue over which Christians want to use the power of law to regulate the decisions of others and are willing to override Christian virtues of liberty, choice, and individual freedom to do this.

Legal abortion, a private matter, has invaded public discourse to become a key driver in political conversation. Those wanting to outlaw abortion speak from a Christian perspective, but such an adamant view does not account for the entirety of scripture. Some stories show consideration for nuance and seem to leave distinction for “potential” personhood vs. “actual” personhood. For example, Numbers 5 describes a priest presiding over a litmus test for a woman’s infidelity that would, in some cases, result in abortion, and Exodus 21 gives support for a nuance between actual and potential life when it describes those who cause a miscarriage to be worthy of a penalty for mere property loss, instead of the penalty for murder.

Advocacy for the powerless, a concept found in Scripture, has been used in the coercive effort to eradicate legal and safe abortion. Yet, why focus the bulk of Christian advocacy efforts in a context of legislation about a private, difficult procedure that will be enacted on another person’s body? Plenty of vulnerable people are in our world, already born, and they could benefit from someone willing to speak up on their behalf.

Earth, complicated and imperfect, will not become a place where abortion never happens. Therefore, it seems to me that seeking common good for all in the community requires that society make provision for the procedure to be safe. It is a woman’s honor and privilege to host a growing baby, but a woman should have a choice of whether or not to become a mother. In the last 100 years, reflecting

the availability of more sophisticated birth-control methods, Protestants have accepted the use of birth control and the notion of “voluntary motherhood.” While I personally feel sad to know that abortions occur, my faith will not allow me to go along with harnessing the power of the state to minimize someone else’s human rights. If an Adventist believes abortion to be immoral, then that person is free not to have an abortion and to support single mothers in one’s sphere.

Politicians in my state, Alabama, gather support by the use of the abortion issue. A couple of years ago, Roy Moore narrowly lost the Alabama Senatorial race when a lot of people apparently chose to ignore his questionable actions and vote primarily on the issue of which candidate met the arbitrary metric of being “pro-life.” The Alabama Legislature recently enacted “pro-life” legislation, claiming to honor the human rights of a fetus. I remain baffled by an argument which states that human rights are of ultimate importance in the context of what goes on in another person’s uterus, while human rights can be ignored for immigrants, prisoners, people living in other countries, children, and people who live in poverty.

Sometimes, morality seems very straightforward, but the morality of abortion is not a clear issue and is complicated by the concepts of when life begins and by the degree one thinks the political arm of the state should be harnessed to enact a particular moral framework. In addition, people who believe God values choice should be willing to allow others to choose in complex situations. We can find a multitude of vulnerable people who need advocates. Practicing advocacy on the behalf of those people is a straightforward choice.



CARMEN LAU is chairperson of Adventist Forum.

Abortion through the Lens of Culture

An Adventist Woman's Perspective

BY STELLA OLIVERAS

With the growing commotion both online and on the streets over the issue of abortion, I have encountered a personal philosophical dilemma that I never thought I would have—given that I never thought I would have premarital sex or need to have an abortion. Georgia was the fourth state to pass the heartbeat bill, which prevents a woman from getting an abortion after six weeks of pregnancy. Alabama sparked particular outrage among pro-choice advocates when the state passed the bill with the same limitations being placed on victims of rape and incest.

My biggest concern as a Christian is understanding my relationship to society and what God requires of me. I believe my role is not to bring judgment upon secular society but to bring people to the knowledge of Christ. How I go about this, matters. How can one navigate the current political climate without being judgmental?

I believe my role is not to bring judgment upon secular society but to bring people to the knowledge of Christ. How I go about this, matters.

My journey in consideration of the abortion issue began at Southern Adventist University where I took a Christian ethics course. That's when I started to think about fertility as an ethical issue. My professor taught from an absolutist perspective and told us that life began when a sperm joined an egg. I don't remember him using biblical texts or expounding on the steps of fertility and fetal development. What I do remember was when he said that taking a Plan B contraceptive after having sex was an unethical decision; That once the ball of life started rolling, it was unethical to do anything to stop it.

After I graduated from SAU in 2008, I went to South Korea to teach English as a Second Language. Engaging the advanced students in a debate helped them do critical thinking in English. We picked the topic of abortion, even though abortion was illegal at the time. Everyone in the class agreed that abortion wasn't right, but the students needed to pick a side and advocate for that cause. It was fascinating to see students who truly

believed in the pro-life concept come up with incredibly well-developed arguments as to why an abortion would be needed in certain circumstances.

One student was a female police officer. As we went around the class having each student make comments to practice their English, we started talking about the dangers of rape in South Korea. She said that the drinking scene was very popular and that it was common for women to have drugs slipped into their drinks and become victims of rape. She said that she would investigate these cases and try to bring about justice for the women who reported the crime.

These discussions helped me understand how emotional and dramatic this topic can be. Taking the time to listen to personal stories helped me see the world in a different way. My stance began to take new shape and I'm grateful for the students that brought their perspectives into my world and helped me become a more open-minded person.

Later, when I worked for the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, I became confused about the Adventist stance on abortion. A coworker said that we didn't have a stance on this issue and that our hospitals were performing abortions. I thought this was crazy, how could we allow this to happen? So, I called an Adventist hospital and I asked if they were performing abortions. They replied with an emphatic no, and then explained that they only performed abortions when a mother's life is in danger. I felt such relief when I got off the phone, but I was still a little confused about our stance; "What did Adventists really believe about abortion?"

Then, in the fall of 2018, I had a miscarriage. That experience taught me what a human life looked like at nine weeks in the womb. This experience impacted my thoughts and ideas about the unborn child. During my miscarriage, globs and globs of blood came out of me. It

was a period on steroids. I had to wear Depends because pads just didn't do the trick, but I didn't feel like I was delivering a baby; I didn't think to myself, "This is a baby." I felt loss and pain, but my loss was over my dreams and hopes for this growing life, not that I knew him/her personally, or that I had some kind of emotional attachment. It was physically painful, but the idea that a human life was dying or being killed did not cross my mind, even though my body was naturally aborting this

fetus. Having a nine-week-old fetus inside of me miscarry was vastly different than the experience of giving birth to that baby and then the baby dying in my arms. I don't understand how people can compare these two perspectives.

After a few weeks, I began to tell my family in Brazil that I had miscarried and along with condolences came the stories of women within our family and friends who had also miscarried. Through this experience I learned that in Portuguese

there is no distinction between the word miscarriage and abortion. In Portuguese, they simply called it an abortion, the technical term being "spontaneous abortion."

It felt strange hearing the word abortion when they described my miscarriage experience. I realized that in English we have created two separate narratives with these distinguishing words, miscarriage and abortion. For one group of women we feel sympathy and for the other we feel judgment. In both worlds, women can be secretive, there is a feeling of shame and failure that comes with having this type of loss and most women don't share their experiences until one person finally comes forward.

Having an abortion or having a spontaneous abortion, though differing experiences, have the same ending, it's an abrupt stop to a developing life. I didn't have any control over what happened when my body decided to

It was fascinating to see students who truly believed in the pro-life concept come up with incredibly well-developed arguments as to why an abortion would be needed in certain circumstances.

terminate this developing life inside of me. And it helped me understand that women who choose to have an abortion may also feel a lack of control over their own lives.

My husband and I waited four years before starting a family. We waited that long for many reasons, we enjoyed our freedom and we wanted to spend time with each other without a major interruption. But I honestly was scared of what it meant to become a mother. I would have to house a human in my body and then I would either need to stop working to take care of a child alone all day or put my child in the hands of an underpaid, overworked childcare worker. On one hand I would have to stop my retirement savings and extra income, and on the other I would have to face this devastating feeling every time I handed over my child to someone else. And I'm lucky, I'm in a good situation with a husband who loves me and who is incredibly supportive. There are countless women who work multiple part-time jobs without access to health care and have to make these same decisions by themselves without any support.

The majority of women who have abortions in the United States fall below poverty levels. We don't have a good health care system for all in this country, nor do we have access to paid maternity leave and the ability to afford good childcare. We have a broken social structure that does not educate women and men on the process of fertility or provide the proper support for creating a family. No wonder we feel powerless.

I can hear the rebuttal to my statements, "well they shouldn't have premarital sex," as though everyone grows up in the same situation, with the same background, education and religious affiliation. It's such a complicated issue and it doesn't help that there is this dismissive attitude towards women who choose to have an abortion, like they have abortions in between errands and possess

this flippant and careless attitude towards pregnancy. But that's not true. This negative attitude towards these women is called judgment and it's not our place to condemn individuals.

People feel justified in their judgment because they believe that a developing human is a completely developed person. And that's what the conversation around this issue doesn't address: the concept of personhood. I believe life begins when an egg and sperm meet but I believe that personhood is given at birth.

When I was asked to write about my "abortion" experience, I began to search the scriptures. Exodus 21:22 talks about the consequence of someone causing someone

else to miscarry, and what would happen if the woman was seriously injured or died. The penalty for a miscarriage is a fine and the penalty for harming the mother is an "eye for an eye." This verse clearly gives a distinction between the mother and the fetus as not holding the same status of personhood. This came from the Mosaic law where you can be stoned to death for breaking the Sabbath or dishonoring your parents.

In further study of Rabbinic Jewish teachings, I found a common thread in the treatment of the unborn. If the unborn child was posing a threat to the life of the mother, those who are

delivering the baby are to terminate the pregnancy. Explicit language is used, instructing that the fetus is to be cut limb from limb in order to save the life of the mother. This definitely parts from the idea of waiting for the baby to be born and breathe its first breath to do anything for the mother.

This Bible study, the exploration of Jewish practice, and listening to the stories of women who have faced difficult situations have helped reshape my perspective on the abortion issue. We live in a broken and fallen world and though having an abortion is an incredibly difficult decision, I believe that having an abortion is a symptom of living in a sinful world rather than the root issue of

I learned that in Portuguese there is no distinction between the word miscarriage and abortion. In Portuguese, they simply called it an abortion, the technical term being "spontaneous abortion."

the problem. Though I am in the stage of life where I'm excited to start my own family, I will advocate for women to have the freedom to make these very personal and life-altering decisions. It's my hope that through sharing my journey, individual Christians will begin to search the scriptures, have open discussions within their communities, and discover the nuances surrounding this difficult topic for themselves.

When I researched our official church stance on abortion, I was pleasantly surprised to find that our church cares not only about the growing life within the womb but also about the woman who chooses to have an abortion. We care about people's mental, physical, and spiritual health. We believe individuals have free will and we are not to serve as the conscious for these individuals. Our public stance clearly places a burden on the church to provide help and support to those in need. This could mean offering open and all-inclusive sexual education, couples counseling to strengthen marriage relationships, creating a safe environment to talk about abortion, and even, "committing itself to assist in alleviating the unfortunate social, economic, and psychological factors that add to abortion and to care redemptively for those suffering the consequences of individual decisions on this issue."

Though the Bible does not speak about abortion, it does have a lot to say about not judging people's motives and intentions. As tensions rise in our society between polarizing viewpoints, I notice fellow Christians moving away from the redemptive message of the gospel and towards judgment and condemnation, going as far as calling women who have abortions immoral, and calling doctors who perform them murderers. This type of behavior is un-Christlike and unbiblical. I urge my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to study this topic more deeply and to prayerfully discover what God is calling you to do. It is my plea that we move away from those who are wanting to condemn our neighbors and towards ways we can bring our neighbors into a meaningful relationship with our loving Savior.

**I believe life begins
when an egg and sperm
meet but I believe that
personhood is given
at birth.**

Resources:

1. <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/birth-control/fertility-awareness>.
2. <http://fertilityfriday.com/>.
3. <https://www.valleybeitmidrash.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Judaism-and-Abortion-Text-Sheet-Adult-Ed-Mini-Course-2017.pdf>.
4. <https://ffrf.org/component/k2/item/18514-what-does-the-bible-say-about-abortion>.
5. <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/lifechallenges/love-and-sex/abortion/what-the-bible-says-about-the-beginning-of-life>.
6. https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/9882/jewish/Chapter-21.htm#v26.
7. <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/285130/abortion-daf-yomi-272>.
8. <https://www.pewresearch.org/search/abortion>.
9. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_anti-abortion_movement.
10. <https://www.gutmacher.org/news-release/2017/abortion-common-experience-us-women-despite-dramatic-declines-rates>.
11. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/abortion-what-the-bible-says-and-doesnt-say_b_1856049.
12. <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/-/abortion/>.
13. <https://www.gutmacher.org/state-policy/explore/overview-abortion-laws>.



STELLA OLIVERAS is a dual citizen of Brazil and the United States. She became involved with the canvassing ministry during her time at Forest Lake Academy and spent the next eight years putting herself through Adventist education. After graduating from Southern Adventist University, Stella went to South Korea as a missionary. She now lives in the Washington DC area with her husband and two dogs. She cares deeply about environmental and social issues and how they impact the Adventist church community.



World Church Affirmation Sabbath

IN-DEPTH

Supporting the World Church *or* Subverting the Local Conference?

BY ALEXANDER AAMODT

In the Spring of 2017, mysterious flyers began arriving at churches within the Upper Columbia Conference (UCC) of Seventh-day Adventists. They advertised meetings to be held at two UCC churches a few weeks later, put on by a new organization called World Church Affirmation Sabbath (WCAS). A letter accompanying the flyers asked churches to include them in the next weekend's bulletin.

A pastor from one church that received the flyers, said, "I remember there not being enough for our bulletin," and since he had never heard of this World Church Affirmation Sabbath, the flyers were thrown out and soon forgotten.

Other confused pastors tried to find more information about these meetings by calling the Upper Columbia Conference headquarters in Spokane, Washington. But the church leaders there had not heard of World Church Affirmation Sabbath either, so they began their own research into the organization.

The UCC's search for answers would span the next year and a half, culminating in a December 2018 public statement that took many throughout the region—and beyond—by surprise. After a preamble, the statement listed a number of concerns and grievances against the upstart organization:

Therefore, let it be known that the WCAS is:

- Not authorized nor recognized as a group of the Upper Columbia Conference.
- At variance with the transparency of truth that is the foundation of the Adventist church, operating using an anonymous post office box as their address.
- Inappropriately collecting data from individual churches to further their political agenda.
- Not aligned with the Spirit of Prophecy.
- Out of harmony with the SDA Church Manual (p. 114) regarding the selection and duty of delegates.
- Recognized as causing false alarm and division among God's people.
- Distributing unauthorized materials that divide God's people, spread disharmony and bring reproach upon God's church.

The statement went on to announce the organization was prohibited from using any conference-owned properties to host its events in perpetuity.

Shortly thereafter, thousands of miles away in the Texico Conference, church leaders released a similar statement, banning World Church Affirmation Sabbath meetings in their area as well.

How could an organization rise from obscurity and in less than two years earn condemnation from Adventist leadership in disparate regions of the United States, while many had never even heard of it? Many church members asked a similar question to that of the UCC pastors: What exactly *is* World Church Affirmation Sabbath? Perhaps a simple question, but answering it soon leads to competing narratives. In one, WCAS (the organization's common abbreviation) is nothing more than a group of dedicated lay church members who hold conservative values and want to uplift each other by sharing and meeting together. But in the other, WCAS functions as a political action group, organizing Adventists who agree with their ideology—centered around, but not limited to, opposing women's ordination—in order to influence church leadership and further their agenda.

This is the story of World Church Affirmation Sabbath, reconstructed through hours of interviews, examination of written and digital materials, and the search of public records. It begins as a local story, but soon leads to a secret online network, spread across the United States and perhaps extending to leadership in the highest levels of the Adventist church. From the local churches to obscure corners of the internet, the story of WCAS raises difficult questions about the role of church leaders in policing conduct and protecting the rights of its members, and whether there should be different standards for behavior in digital spaces than in the physical world.

Depending on which WCAS narrative one believes, the same piece of information may be innocuous, or a smoking gun proving darker intent; but through it all, one certainty does remain: as in many of the disagreements that embroil the Adventist church today, there often has been little in the way of middle ground.

Affirming Women Pastors

There is a long history of conflict over women's ordination and the role of female pastors in the North Pacific

Union Conference (NPUC). In 2011, the union began to examine what role women should have in leadership, and whether NPUC might pursue a vote on ordaining pastors without regard to gender. Discussions about such a plan were met with a swift and concerted backlash, and the

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vote was delayed, then ultimately abandoned in the wake of the 2015 vote by the General Conference in session that prohibited individual divisions of the church from deciding to ordain women on their own.

Within the NPUC, the Upper Columbia Conference is neither the largest by membership nor by area, but it sits in what could be considered the heart of the region. As it includes Eastern Washington, a sliver of Oregon, and the Panhandle of Idaho, the UCC touches every single other conference in its union, save the Alaska Conference. Like many areas in the United States, its

110 churches span the range from tiny rural congregations, to a large church at Walla Walla University.

UCC leadership had watched the developments on women's ordination carefully—the delay and then cancellation of a regional ordination vote, the decision from the General Conference session—and in the spring of 2016 made their own move about how to treat policies regarding women pastors going forward. Even as the NPUC had announced it was canceling its own ordination vote, the union called for members to be committed “in line with the current NAD strategic plan, to grow the number of women in professional ministry and to value, affirm and foster their leadership gifts.”¹

On March 29, 2016, the Upper Columbia Conference Executive Committee decided its method of affirming women pastors should be similar to that of several other conferences, and they voted a policy to give commissioned and ordained pastors most of the same responsibilities. Even though female pastors would not be ordained, they would be able to perform baptisms and weddings, and participate in founding churches.

To many of the executive committee members—and to many constituents throughout the conference—the new standards were in line with General Conference policy because female pastors were still commissioned, not ordained. Some disagreed.

A contingent of church members who were staunchly anti-women's ordination had seen the worldwide church vote in 2015 as a referendum against the legitimacy of women pastors. In their eyes, the new policy was a way of subverting the General Conference decision and a contradiction to the biblical headship model that they believed should apply to church leadership.

On April 10, 2016, UCC leaders held a scheduled meeting with the Lay Advisory Committee—a group containing representatives from every conference church. After UCC president, Paul Hoover, explained the executive committee decision, some of the lay advisers became upset at what they saw as the conference going against the guidelines of the world church. During lunch that day, some of them began to talk amongst themselves about what could be done.

A small detail in the constitution of the Upper Columbia Conference presented an opening. Conferences have provisions in their governing documents that allow churches to call for special constituency sessions and ad-

dress any topic of concern. In the UCC, only 15 percent of churches had to call for such a session and the conference would be required to comply.

The lay-advisory meeting concluded that Sunday, but the upset constituents continued the conversations they had begun during lunch. Belinda Lowry, the representative from the Chewelah Adventist Church in Washington State, would later write about what happened next.

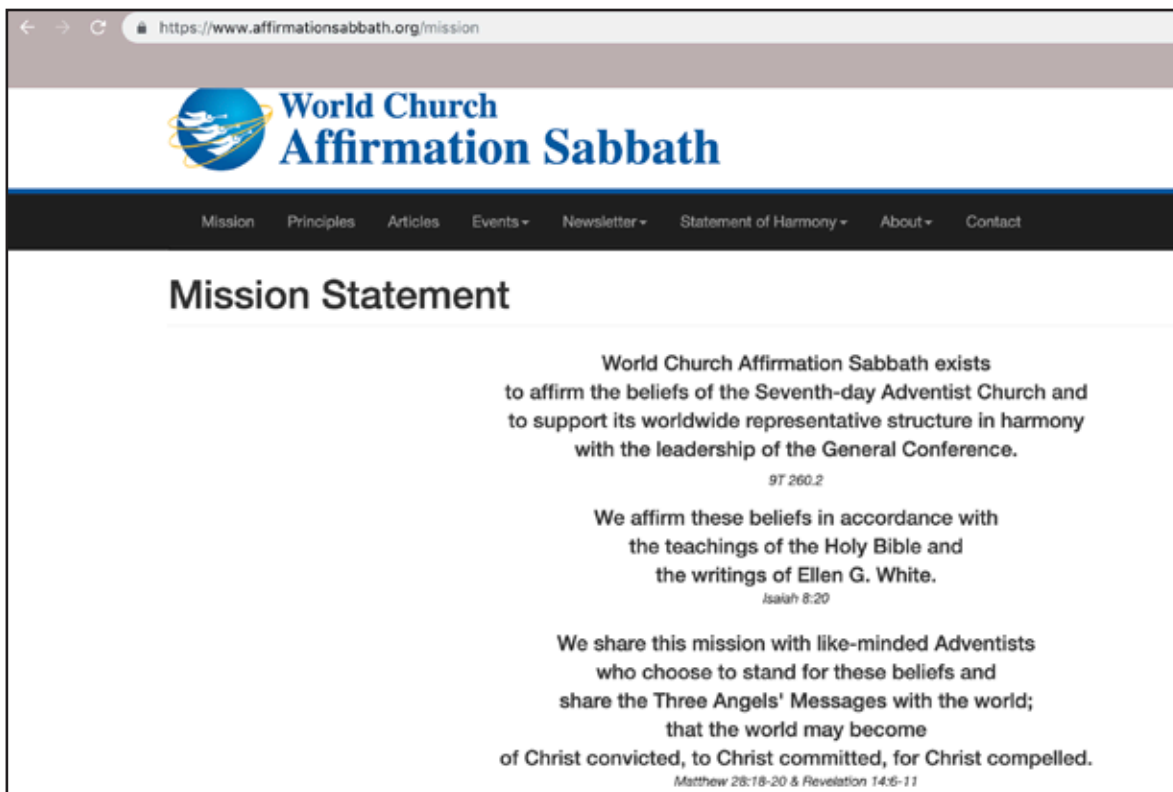
A few of us from two different churches began contacting other churches in the Upper Columbia Conference and found that many had the same concerns as we did. Therefore, an example petition was drafted and sent to the board of the concerned churches. The petition requested that the new Commissioned Minister Policy be rescinded or that a special session be held to address the issue at hand.

It's uncertain how many people were involved in the conversations, or exactly how the different churches were then contacted over the coming weeks and months. Lowry did not respond to a request for an interview.

On June 9, Larry Kirkpatrick, pastor of the Chewelah church, mailed a letter to Paul Hoover—also sending a copy to every member of the UCC Executive Committee—stating that the board of his church voted for the special session “to enable the constituency to overrule” the new policy. UCC constituents would “take any action deemed needful to provide administrative leadership consistent with the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” the Chewelah board stated.

In an email to their own church board, another UCC pastor would later characterize the letter from Chewelah as a “not-so-subtle threat” against conference leadership.

More letters arrived at the conference headquarters; seventeen were needed to trigger the meeting, and one by one they trickled in. Many constituents and church employees throughout the UCC looked on in dismay as anti-women-pastor constituents banded together in opposition to the commissioned-minister policy. Still, supporters of women pastors were not overly worried, even though they saw the situation as serious. “I think it rather unlikely that there would be a reversal of this policy,” one pastor wrote. “However, if such a reversal were voted, it



Mission statement of WCAS, as it appears on its website.

would be quite a blow to women in ministry, to a young generation of ministers in the conference, to us all.”

Different sources disagree about the exact number of letters submitted to the conference—from as few as seven to as many as eleven. Assuming the latter, analysis based on current church statistics reveals the total membership of churches that called for the special session was about 6.5 percent of total conference membership. The relatively small number of people calling to rescind the policy (combined they were fewer than the membership of the single largest UCC church on its own) gave female pastors and their supporters confidence. Even if a special constituency session were convened, there would be more representation from the larger churches. None of the churches that called for the special session had a female pastor or assistant pastor.

So, it was a shock to many when on July 22, 2016, Paul Hoover released a document titled “A Statement on Mission.” After seeing the “significant concern” among some conference members, the executive committee had decided to rescind its policy, hoping to “strengthen unity of purpose within our common mission.” Even though it was unlikely that the constituents would rescind the policy in a constituency session, it would be a large expense and distraction, and UCC administration had decided to backtrack.

By organizing themselves and understanding church government, a small group of lay church members had forced policy change for all 27,000 conference members. In the wake of their success, conversations between anti-women-pastor individuals would continue throughout the rest of 2016. Emboldened by their success, some of them would soon form a new organization, choosing a name descriptive of the public face of their mission. The groundwork had been laid for World Church Affirmation Sabbath.

Listening to Each Other

Mid-morning on a Sunday in late January 2017, cars began arriving at the Ritzville Seventh-day Adventist Church. They came from all directions: from the north, in the far reaches of Washington State edging toward Canada; from the east and the population center of Spokane; from the south, where the drive had crossed the border from Oregon. If the Upper Columbia Conference is the center of the NPUC, then Ritzville could truly be at the heart of it all, geographically at least. It is a fair distance from everywhere.

Around 15–20 people came in total. In the months since the lay-advisory meeting the previous year, people had kept in contact with one another, still concerned

that Upper Columbia Conference, as symptomatic of the whole North American Adventist Church, was not supporting the General Conference.

Janet Neumann, a member of the Stateline Adventist Church, made the trip to Ritzville. “Somebody called me

How could an organization rise from obscurity and in less than two years earn condemnation from Adventist leadership in disparate regions of the United States, while many had never even heard of it?

one day and said, ‘Would you want to come and join this group?’” Neumann explained to me during an interview. “A bunch of us are talking, as laity, as to what we might like to accomplish.”

Someone also called Ron and Carol Elder and asked them a similar question. The Elders were members of the Ritzville church, and they agreed to help host the in-person gathering. “There really wasn’t an agenda,” Carol Elder told me of that first meeting. “That’s all it was: to listen to each other and to know what to do, to leave from there and to pray about things.”

That day at the Ritzville meeting, Belinda Lowry stepped forward as a leading voice throughout the conversations. She was an eloquent speaker who was

able to express the thoughts of everyone, the attendees thought.

It may have been at the Ritzville meeting, or perhaps the idea had already begun to be discussed, but at some point everyone agreed to coalesce this group of like-minded people into a more formal organization, and to use it to organize public meetings throughout the Upper Columbia Conference. WCAS members interviewed for this story either said they didn’t know who could be considered the founder of the group, or refused to identify that person or persons. Lowry did not respond to a request for an interview, but in an article published to affirmationsabbath.org in 2018, she described herself as a “founding member of WCAS².”

At the end of that January day, everyone parted ways and headed back to their homes. Some would meet one more time in person, but the planning would not have to wait for everyone to again travel hundreds of miles, as they continued to hold weekly conference calls. It’s unclear the exact moment when the name World Church Affirmation Sabbath was chosen, but it must have been by the end of the first meeting or not long after, for on January 27, 2017, public records show that the website domain affirmationsabbath.org was created. It was registered using a proxy service—a common practice that allows website creators to remain anonymous. A date was also chosen for the first public meetings—May 20. Throughout the rest of the winter and into spring, planning took place for the first event—and beyond.

The structure of WCAS was loose and informal in those early days. “Everybody worked together equally. There was no boss, so to speak,” Carol Elder said about her time with the organization. More structure became necessary as planning intensified, and eventually those working close together would come to be known as the WCAS Planning Committee.

Before the first meetings, the planning committee worked to solidify the finances. Eiji Minami, a member of the Chewelah Church, took the role of treasurer. To help WCAS to collect donations, preparation began on paperwork to file with the State of Washington to register WCAS as a non-profit corporation—a status that wouldn’t bring tax exemption but would allow for the unlimited collection of funds.

According to several of the people involved, Belinda Lowry stepped aside from WCAS during late winter or early spring for personal reasons. Ron Elder then took the title as chair of the planning committee. “Ron was put in there temporarily,” Carol Elder explained, “But it just ended up staying that way.” Carol Elder also became the group’s secretary after the man who initially filled the role had to leave as well. She took down notes during the conference calls every Sunday afternoon when the members would talk, connecting either from a computer through

Executive Committee. “My recollection is that almost every church in the conference was initially covered,” he told me during an interview, speaking about the inserts. Even though the meetings were confined to only two locations, the announcements could “plant a seed of anticipation” for those who saw them, Knight explained, and “grow the desire on the part of concerned lay people for such meetings in their own areas.”

On April 15, such an invitation was also posted on the newly live affirmationsabbath.org. “Living at time’s end, we

WCAS PRINCIPLES OF ACTION

- 1. Participants support the decisions of the world church expressed through the General Conference.**
- 2. Participants seek unity on the basis of inspired truth rather than cultural compromise.**
- 3. Participants uphold God’s purpose for church organization and for pressing together rather than separation.**
- 4. Participants learn Protestant biblical interpretation—the historical-grammatical method.**
- 5. Participants are active and responsible members in their local congregation.**
- 6. Participants learn how to work effectively in board and constituency meetings.**
- 7. Participants commit themselves to pray for faithful workers, and for Heaven to provide godly, decisive leaders for the harvest.**
- 8. Participants embrace the conviction that God is in control, and choose not to be intimidated by factions opposing truth in the Church.**
- 9. Emphasizing connection to Jesus our Lord, participants learn how to resist pluralism, congregationalism, and other present errors.**
- 10. World Church Affirmation Sabbath emphasizes the Seventh-day Adventist representative form of church governance. We are the Church.**

the GoToMeeting web conferencing service, or calling in via phone.

As the winter turned into spring, the planning committee prepared bulletin inserts to send to churches throughout the Upper Columbia Conference. There would be two meetings: one in the north of the conference at the Chewelah church, and one in the south at the Stateline church.

Kent Knight, a retired pastor, was part of the planning committee. He was also in the position to have an intimate understanding of the Upper Columbia Conference’s structure, as he held a position on the UCC

are to uphold the government of God in a judgment-ripened world. Humans have gone feral. But Jesus’ gospel brings us back!” it read. The planning committee also decided on a theme: “Forward with Yesterday in View. 1 Cor 10:11.”

A list of speakers was given for both locations, and another description of what attendees could expect. “Inviting Upper Columbia Conference laypeople to unite together for fellowship, encouragement, and equipping.”

The WCAS Planning Committee had also been hard at work creating a list of “10 Principles of Action” to guide the organization. Different members contributed, and there was give and take on what exactly the principles should say.

Some had differences in opinion about how things should be worded.

“Ron and I could agree, [and] we were part of those that were wanting to change some of the wording,” Carol Elder said. “Not really what each of those points of action say, but to reword it. But you know, you go with the majority vote.”

The planning committee ratified the ten principles. Some would prove controversial as time went on—number six in particular: “[WCAS] Participants learn to work effectively in board and constituency meetings.”

By the end of April, the advertisements for the meetings had been sent to many churches, and pastors were calling the conference office asking about World Church Affirmation Sabbath and whether they should advertise for it.

On May 1, conference president Paul Hoover directed Mark Weir, the ministerial director for the conference, to try and find out more information.

Over the next several days, Weir talked to the head pastors of both churches hosting the meetings. Mike Lambert, pastor of the Stateline church in Milton-Freewater, Oregon, had few details to offer about the upcoming meeting in his church, except that some members had asked to use the sanctuary on a Sabbath afternoon. Lambert assured Weir anything controversial wouldn’t be tolerated, but he knew very little about what the church members were planning to do.

Larry Kirkpatrick, pastor of the Chewelah church, explained that WCAS was a lay-led organization, and that Weir needed to talk to the church members if he wanted to know more. Weir asked for help getting in touch with anyone who could provide more information.

On May 3, one such member returned Weir’s call. In addition to being treasurer of WCAS, Eiji Minami was the principal representative from the Chewelah church. Weir asked to know more about WCAS but Minami was reluctant to give more information over the phone, according to documents obtained in the course of this reporting that describe the exchange. Minami said he could ask the rest of the group and then respond via email, but on the phone would only say that WCAS was formed to support the world church.

Perplexed, Weir asked who made decisions for the group or who was its leader. Minami explained that no single person was in charge but refused to say who else was involved and the call ended.

Weir explained to Paul Hoover that he had talked to someone involved with WCAS but learned very little about the details of what the organization was, or even who was behind it. As the end of the week approached, Upper Columbia Conference leaders felt they didn’t have a good answer about what guidance to give pastors who wondered whether to include the flyers in the weekend’s bulletins.

Why Minami wouldn’t give Mark Weir information over the phone is unclear. As the treasurer for WCAS, he would have known many details about the group, and what WCAS was trying to accomplish with its meetings. He also could have provided Weir with names and contact information for Ron and Carol Elder. Ron Elder was considered the chair of the planning committee within WCAS, but without any public leadership list, the conference had no way to know or get in contact. Minami declined to give an interview for this story, though he did later describe talking to Weir in a post on the blog fulcrum7.com.

Other external evidence also points to Eiji Minami having the ability to provide more information about WCAS than he would admit to Mark Weir. Public records show that the day after he spoke to Weir on the phone, Minami filed articles of incorporation with the State of Washington to establish World Church Affirmation Sabbath as an official non-profit corporation. The filing gave Minami’s personal address and phone number as contact information, and listed Ron and Carol Elder as “Director #1” and “Director #2,” respectively.

All this, however, was unknown to the Upper Columbia Conference, so Paul Hoover directed Mark Weir to send an email to all the pastors, asking them to hold off on distributing the flyers until the conference could learn more about WCAS. Early in the evening on May 4, Weir sent an email to all the UCC pastors.

“We are not in the habit of promoting events that are not sponsored by the church,” Weir wrote in explaining why the conference didn’t want the flyers to be handed out. “Second, I have been unable to find anyone who was willing to answer several specific questions about the event, and I have talked to several people...there will be a more thorough examination of this in the near future.”

Rather than contacting the conference office to provide more information about the organization so their flyers could be distributed, the WCAS planning committee looked for other ways to promote the meetings. On May

14, Eiji Minami published the finalized ten principles in a post on advindicate.com³, concluding with a call for church members to mobilize:

God has given His people beautiful truths. And God has given His laity in every conference the voices to speak of His truth. As we pray together and ask for His leading, we will better understand how and who Jesus is leading. The laity can no longer be silent.

The First Meetings

The topics were the same at both churches on May 20. In Chewelah, Eiji Minami introduced the meeting, which began in early afternoon after the normal church service had ended.

“It is the goal of World Church Affirmation Sabbath to promote fellowship among family members and to exhort one another with biblical truth,” Minami said toward the end of his opening remarks, “To get each member involved in decision making process, and finally to bring back unity to our church.”

Pastor Larry Kirkpatrick also gave a welcome and a prayer. “I believe that we presently stand in a crisis larger than any in Adventist history...But you’ve not been idle, so here’s WCAS,” Kirkpatrick said to the gathered listeners, both in the full church sanctuary and in the overflow room where more watched on a video feed. “Everything I see about this looks promising. And so, something conceived months ago is born today. And I’m looking out here at the baby. And it’s a beautiful baby.”

Two hundred miles to the south at the Stalene church, Pastor Mike Lambert gave an introduction. “It’s our privilege to host the first World Church Affirmation Sabbath...It’s certainly my honor to welcome our leaders of the WCAS team.”

What followed at both locations were presentations by lay members on familiar Adventist topics, such as the cleansing of the sanctuary and regard for the Spirit of Prophecy. Others ventured into more turbulent waters. Dan Eckenrot, introduced at the Chewelah meeting as a retired pastor, presented on “Dangers at the Door.”

“My objective today is to demonstrate that the subject of women’s ordination is inseparably bound together with the doctrine of the nature of God, the story of creation,

and the Great Controversy,” Eckenrot said. Over his twenty minutes, he argued a biblical case for headship theology and denounced feminism as coming from the devil: “Secular feminism is [the devil’s] willing agent,” he declared.

Some presentations seemed more driven by practical matters of influencing change within the structure of Seventh-day Adventist church government rather than theology. “We must be true watchman on the walls of Zion, taking an active part in our churches,” said Randy Bierwagen in the sixth talk of the afternoon at Chewelah,

Standing against any deviation from right principles and choosing only those to church offices who have proven themselves faithful to the Bible, and to the Spirit of Prophecy, and to right principles. This is especially true in choosing delegates to our conferences and other divisions of the church.

After all the presentations at both churches came to a close, attendees were encouraged to join together in a meal. Janet Neumann, the WCAS facilitator at the Stalene Church and member of the planning committee, explained that the meal had a purpose. It would be a “time so we can talk and get to know one another,” she said. “We’ve got some tables down there that are designated district tables. Do you know what district you’re from in this conference? Well, I’ll give you a way to figure it out. We’ve got a map that shows you.”

The districts Neumann spoke of (described as regions in UCC documents) are utilized by the conference to choose lay-representatives from all the geographic sections of the conference for various committees, but have little utility beyond that.

At the Chewelah church on May 20, tables at dinner were labeled with signs stating different regions. Everyone was encouraged to not just sit with friends from their own churches, but to meet others from their own region. Later in 2017, there would be a new name used for these meals following WCAS meetings: “Intentional Fellowship.”

“We felt like it was a success,” Janet Neumann said in an interview about the first meetings. During the program, WCAS gave out surveys for people to give feedback, and collected an offering to help fund future activities. On the survey, people could give their email address and sign up for a newsletter. “There were a lot of favorable comments on

the written [form] as well as people coming up afterwards,” she added.

Just a few days later, WCAS received outside validation of their efforts. In the June 2017⁴ issue of the *General Conference Executive Committee Newsletter*—a new publication distributed every month beginning in 2017 to provide “informative, inspirational and educational articles especially for General Conference Executive Committee members”—a paragraph highlighted WCAS. “Organized by

By organizing themselves and understanding church government, a small group of lay church members had forced policy change for all 27,000 conference members.

lay members, the special sabbath uplifted Christ and supported the world-wide Seventh-day Adventist church,” the blurb read. It also listed the WCAS website and claimed that the first Affirmation Sabbath was attended by “more than 600 constituents from 55 churches in the UCC.”

Upper Columbia Conference leaders would later find it curious that the General Conference came to feature WCAS in its official publication. The mention of WCAS was brief, but there is no record of that specific number of attendees or represented churches being shared publicly in the days following the WCAS meetings, either on the WCAS website or on other Adventist websites or blogs. The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists did not respond to

a request for comment about how their newsletter came to mention the specific information about WCAS. If not an official endorsement, to the members of the WCAS planning committee it seemed to be an implication of approval from the General Conference. “We were pleased that they were reporting on what we were doing,” Janet Neumann told me.

On June 1, WCAS sent out the first edition of their own newsletter. The first two articles of the newsletter showed the WCAS leaders’ optimism at what had transpired, titled “Affirmation Sabbath Tantalizes with Hope” and “General Conference Executive Committee Newsletter.”

Plans for Expansion

Representatives from the conference attended the first meeting at the Chewelah church. Although a wide variety of topics were presented, they noticed that a tone of dissatisfaction about women’s ordination and the role of women pastors undergirded the event.

The temporary directive telling pastors not to distribute WCAS advertisements remained in effect after the first meetings, though it seemed WCAS hadn’t had much trouble getting the word out anyway. The icy silence in response to conference administrators’ questions, and talk about needing church leaders who were faithful to the Bible, made them feel that WCAS believed the conference was not supporting the world church—a characterization they strongly disagreed with. And still, UCC leaders felt they knew very little about WCAS and wished to talk more with someone who was in charge, for surely someone was calling the shots. At the WCAS meetings, there had been no explanation of leadership structure or any history beyond that it was just an organization of lay people. By early summer, the website still gave only two sentences about who was behind WCAS, though it did add another letter to the acronym.

The World Church Affirmation Sabbath Committee of Laypeople of the Upper Columbia Conference (WCASC for short) is composed of laypersons who are members in regular standing in Upper Columbia Conference churches and who support the Seventh-day Adventist world church. In Upper Columbia Conference, Affirmation Sabbath meetings are voted by church boards and held by local churches in liason [sic] with WCASC.

WCAS continued to hold its regular planning committee meetings throughout the summer, working on the details for the next events. This time, there would be five locations: three in the Upper Columbia Conference and two in the Oregon Conference. WCAS was expanding.

After nearly four months, one of the Upper Columbia Conference's requests was finally granted, when on August 30, WCAS published a list of its leadership team on affirmationsabbath.org. Ron Elder was listed as chair of the planning committee, along with a chair from each of the five conference regions. For the first time, UCC leaders knew who they could approach to learn more.

The Second Meetings

The second set of WCAS public meetings took place over two weekends in September 2017 and followed much the same format as the first—this time with the theme “Forward in Unity and Faith. Ephesians 4:3.” Again, many of the presentations covered doctrinal and biblical topics that would be expected in a conservative Adventist setting, but an underlying sentiment that women's ordination drove the meetings also remained apparent. At the UCC meeting in Northern Washington State, this time held in the Newport church, WCAS moderator Will Fults asked one of the presenters during a panel discussion to explain the purpose of the meeting to the audience. “We are affirming the vote that the General Conference took when they were in session,” the presenter said, in reference to the 2015 vote prohibiting the global divisions of the church from deciding whether or not to ordain women. Fults nodded in agreement.

Intentional Fellowship again followed the presentations. At the start of the Newport meeting, Will Fults had held up one of the programs, which had a map of the Upper Columbia Conference showing the five different regions. On the back was also a list of all the conference churches organized by region. “This region map is to get to know other people in your region, alright?” Fults said, “And also to know which region you are a part of.”

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By the fall of 2017, the Upper Columbia Conference and World Church Affirmation Sabbath were no closer to

coming to an understanding. The members of WCAS felt that they were being censored by the conference; conference leaders saw political posturing in the rhetoric from the meetings and the 10 Principles, and a distinct ele-

“We need to have a voice, as conservative Seventh-day Adventists,” Neumann said in describing why WCAS needed to exist. “You hear so many voices that are not in support of the world church right now.”

ment of secrecy in how the group wouldn't speak openly with the conference. A reluctance to disclose names also extended to the WCAS newsletter, which was emailed out every two weeks. The articles never carried authors' names. There was also no editorial team or masthead—the only contact information included was a post office box in Spokane, WA and a Gmail address.

UCC president, Paul Hoover, did have a short list of names after they were published online, and he requested a meeting with WCAS leaders to try and resolve differences, and a date was set. Yet when the day of the meeting came, bad weather caused WCAS members traveling to the conference office to postpone.

During November and December, UCC leaders also tried to dialogue with their pastors in the last of the “pastoral clusters” of 2017—the regular meetings when conference

leaders meet with all the pastors by region. Doug Johnson, then the UCC vice president for administration, shared his concerns about WCAS—that the organization appeared to be using its meetings to organize people together by the different political regions of the conference, and that WCAS was suggesting to church members that the UCC was not in harmony with the General Conference.

Johnson shared how the conference was concerned that WCAS was out of accordance with the official *Church Manual* that directs how all local churches should conduct business. “It is not permissible for church or conference delegations to organize or attempt to direct their votes as a unit,” the *Manual* states. To the Upper Columbia Conference, all the talk about working effectively in committee meetings and organizing people by the regions suggested political maneuvering. The aversion to sharing leadership structure and relying almost exclusively on anonymous content in the newsletter also meant a lack of accountability for what happened under the WCAS name.

A UCC document describing those cluster meetings, said it “got a bit heated” because there were many pastors who thought “that there [were] other pastors who could answer questions, yet refuse to do so.” (Doug Johnson retired in early 2019 and declined to be interviewed for this story.)

After Johnson’s speech at the pastoral cluster meetings, conference leaders noted a distinct shift in how WCAS presented itself. Starting in December, articles in the newsletter abruptly began to carry author names. In January 2018, the newsletter carried an article titled simply “Politics?” that argued WCAS was in accordance with the *Church Manual* as in fact “all of our decision-making processes in the church are political in nature.” It appeared that someone had told WCAS that they needed to tread more carefully.

In the coming WCAS public meetings, there would be more distance kept from controversial topics. There would also be less talk about women’s ordination and female pastors.

The Long-Awaited Meeting

Finally, on a sunny and brisk Valentine’s Day in 2018, UCC and WCAS leadership met. Perhaps, after nearly a year of conflict with the conference, the second year of WCAS could start on different terms.

For the most part, those who came matched the list that had been published on affirmationsabbath.org, including Ron Elder, Carol Elder, and Janet Neumann; however, to the surprise of the conference officers, there were also people who had not been listed. Approximately eight representatives from WCAS attended.

“I think everybody came wondering how is this going to turn out, because of the tension there had been,” Carol Elder said. Both sides had time to speak, with Ron Elder sharing that his vision of WCAS was not political—rather just a way to show support for the world church and its leadership that he felt had been much maligned. Paul Hoover also shared how the conference was concerned about the potential for politicking and the lack of clarity to questions about leadership, intent, and history of the organization.

The meetings stretched on for several hours, until people had to leave for the drive home. Recollections of how the meeting went vary among those who were there. To Carol Elder, the tension at the beginning of the meeting soon dissolved and she was encouraged that the conference officers seemed to express a desire similar to her own to uplift church members. When Paul Hoover spoke, she “totally agreed with what he said” about the mission of the conference. “In the end, we were shaking each other’s hands and they were welcoming us back to come visit and talk with them,” Carol Elder told me. “And we invited them to the next meetings.”

Conference leaders left feeling the meeting was constructive but still only a starting point, according to a source familiar with the meeting. Although there was common ground between the two sides, the conference leaders still felt like they didn’t receive much clarification about the details of WCAS.

The meeting may not have mended the rift, but to many who attended it seemed a step towards a better relationship. Yet it would be the only such dialogue in 2018, and soon the disagreements would spiral to new lows.

Not long after the Valentine’s meeting, Carol and Ron Elder left WCAS leadership. Carol Elder would tell me that due to caring for an ill relative, they “had to back out.” Two weeks after the meeting, the Elders were removed from the list of leadership on affirmationsabbath.org—and at the same time, region tags were dropped from the rest. Janet Neumann, who in the first year of WCAS was listed as a regional chair, soon assumed Ron Elder’s position as chair of the planning committee.

Neumann had come away with a somewhat different perception of the meeting with the conference than others interviewed for this story. “It started out as a half-hour to 40-minute description of what they thought of us before even asking us what we were doing or what our intent was,” Neumann told me. “Their concepts were so skewed from what the truth was.”

Then, in the spring of 2018, Paul Hoover retired as president of the Upper Columbia Conference. He had abruptly announced at the end of 2017 that he would not finish the rest of his term. Perhaps the gap in leadership was a factor, as some in WCAS describe, or perhaps it was due to the changes in leadership of WCAS itself—but whatever the cause, there were no further meetings between WCAS and the UCC through the rest of 2018.

In April, Minner Labrador, who had worked in the leadership of the Southwestern Union, was chosen to be the next UCC president.⁵ He assumed the role in June.

For a time, it seemed that everything would continue as it had: WCAS continuing to hold events in UCC churches but still without being sanctioned by the conference.

Then, in the fall of 2018, the tenuous peace disintegrated once again.

Disagreements with the North American Division

In the days following the 2018 North American Division (NAD) Year-End Meeting, WCAS began to circulate a “Statement of Harmony with the World Church of Seventh-day Adventists.” NAD President Dan Jackson had made an impassioned plea about the church’s “mandate” to help and encourage women pastors at the November meeting.⁶ Doing so was not in violation with the General Conference policies, Jackson said, as the recent debates had only concerned the official designation of ordained pastors in regard to gender. This argument was similar to the one that leaders in the Upper Columbia Conference had made when they announced the ill-fated 2016 policy to expand the role of commissioned pastors. The 2015 GC vote on policy had no wording about women pastors more broadly.

“‘In Case of Emergency’—A Call to L.A.I.T.Y [sic],” the letter introducing the Statement of Harmony began.⁷ It went on to call for individual churches to vote on the statement in their board sessions, then notify WCAS so that the organization could “share the names of supportive churches to encourage others throughout the Adventist world.”

On affirmationsabbath.org, a list appeared of all the churches that had signed. The text was also published in the WCAS newsletter and on fulcrum7.com.

In the Upper Columbia Conference, the statement was the final straw. Such an open registry could only create division between churches, conference leaders thought. If a church didn’t sign the statement, it could imply that they didn’t support the world church, but if a church did, it could be seen as a referendum against Dan Jackson’s statements. There was also an implicit accusation in saying the statement was necessary—that the leadership of the Upper Columbia Conference (and elsewhere, as the Statement of Harmony was meant to be used worldwide) didn’t support the world church. And so, on December 4, 2018, the UCC Executive Committee voted its own statement banning WCAS from using any churches or conference-owned buildings for its meetings.⁸

“We do not impugn the WCAS members’ motives or character or their desire to serve the mission of our church,” the executive committee wrote, “And yet, the fruits of their efforts, under the banner of the WCAS, have increasingly led to further dissension among our members and the spread of false information.” In the space of some 1,000 words, the UCC laid out many of the concerns that had been discussed in the meetings with its pastors, and with WCAS leaders in person.

The Upper Columbia Conference did not wish to facilitate the controversy any longer.

According to a source familiar with Upper Columbia Conference Executive Committee proceedings, speaking on condition of anonymity as they had not been authorized to address the matter publicly, the committee’s decision was near unanimous.

“It was on the agenda and it was presented by the administration,” the source said. After some “minor editorial work” a voice vote ratified the document. “I think that the central concern has been that [WCAS] is a political action committee,” the source explained to me. “Simply read what they’re producing. The kind of rhetoric they’re using is squarely in line with pushing a particular ideology into the nomination process and into the leader selection process.”

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Just before Christmas of 2018, I called Janet Neumann to ask for an interview and we arranged to meet at the Stateline Adventist Church, her home congregation. The morning we were set to meet, Neumann called to warn me that the boiler had gone out in the church. I should make sure to dress warmly, she said.

The members of WCAS felt that they were being censored by the conference; conference leaders saw political posturing in the rhetoric from the meetings and the 10 Principles, and a distinct element of secrecy in how the group wouldn't speak openly with the conference.

Neumann gave a warm greeting when I arrived, and we went and sat in the hushed and empty sanctuary. If Neumann carries herself with the effusive persona of a grandmother, it's because she is one—a fact she talks about it with pride. Although we had not talked about anyone else providing an interview, Neumann came accompanied by another member of WCAS leadership, Linda Brehm, who is listed on the website as the “Communications Director,” and whose husband Ed is described as head of “Internet Technology.”

It had been several weeks since the Upper Columbia Conference had released its statement chastising WCAS, and Neumann and Brehm were determined to portray the assertions of the statement as erroneous and defamatory. Neumann did most of the talking.

“We need to have a voice, as conservative Seventh-day Adventists,” Neumann said in describing why WCAS needed to exist. “You hear so many voices that are not in support of the world church right now.”

In the narrative Neumann laid out, there was no hidden agenda to what WCAS had done, although she did talk about how it all began after the conference released the policy enhancing the role of women pastors in UCC. Anything that looked political was just a misunderstanding, and the conference had always had an ax to grind. WCAS was never trying to organize people in the conference according to the regions used to help select leaders—the regions were just a convenient way to divide up such a large geographic area. “What does just showing the regions have to do with voting?” Neumann said. “It's never been our intent to change anybody's vote or direct anybody's vote.” The interview lasted two and a half hours, and we went our separate ways.

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On a day in late January, I pulled off Interstate 90 and drove toward the heart of Ritzville, Washington—just as the founders of WCAS had done two years before. It was a sunny winter day, the sky a shocking blue and the air deceptively cold. The fields surrounding town were brown and fallow, stretching unbroken to the horizon in most directions, some still showing remains of the summer's wheat stubble. Near the Interstate, fast-food restaurants, gas stations, and a Starbucks predominate, but give way to brick buildings and grain silos as one approaches the historic main street. Ritzville feels both isolated from and connected to the outside world.

I was looking for the Adventist church but drove past it on the first try, only realizing when the road started to leave town and re-enter fields on the other side. In Ritzville, boarded up buildings sit next to occupied houses. In the last census the population was 1,673, but it is likely less now as the town has been shrinking. Circling back, I

found the Adventist church—a tidy white building, across the street from a Methodist church and kitty-corner to the Empire Motel, where a sign advertised rooms from \$47 a night. On the front of the Adventist church, a sign proclaimed Sabbath School at 10, Sabbath worship at 11, and at the bottom added, “Pastor TBA”; the church had been without a pastor for some time.

The Rest of the Story

Perhaps, if WCAS really is only that which exists in the public sphere—a time every three months when people can gather together and hear a conservative message from lay presenters—the narrative of WCAS that Janet Neumann and Linda Brehm gave me would be wholly true. Certainly, it is good for lay members to be involved in their churches, and certainly it could be valuable to give those members an opportunity to speak and share with others.

But the public face of WCAS is only part of the story, for there exists another side to the organization—a side that its members have fought to keep in the shadows. Once you venture into those shadows, it becomes difficult to maintain a narrative that WCAS is defined only by pure intentions, with no ulterior motives; the shadows are fraught with ethical implications, both for the leaders of WCAS and for pastors and administrators throughout church structure—from local all the way to General Conference.

The true story of WCAS can only be understood through the lens of the Internet; the story of WCAS cannot be separated from that of the “Nameless Network.”

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Every Sunday at 5:00 p.m., the call begins. Like meetings of the WCAS Planning Committee, it utilizes the ubiquitous web conferencing service GoToMeeting. A day or two before, an email will have been sent out to everyone on the list with the week’s presenter and links for pre-reading material—often articles from the fulcrum7.com blog.

Names begin to appear on the web interface as the clock rolls past 5:00 and people log on, yet for the most part they aren’t names one would expect. Instead of given names, most participants log in with a pseudonym of their

choosing. Everything that takes place will be under a cloak of anonymity.

According to individuals interviewed for this story who have participated, the meeting always begins with the organizer calling for someone to give an opening prayer, followed by a reading of the “Nameless Network Principles and Goals.” These principles are identical to the WCAS 10 Principles of Action, published on affirmationsabbath.org and shared at every WCAS public meeting since 2017. The only difference is that references to “WCAS” are replaced with “Nameless Network.”

There is a leader of the Nameless Network, but their identity also remains shrouded in secrecy. On November 1, 2017, the WCAS newsletter carried a manifesto titled “Introducing Nameless Network.” This first public mention of the network was credited to “Anna Zwingli”—presumably the pseudonym of the network’s operator (the historical Anna Reinhard Zwingli was wife of the Swiss church reformer). In the manifesto, Zwingli lays out in a militant call how the network can help Adventist church members take action against a church described as off the rails.

“Have we lost the Adventist Church?” Zwingli writes, “...as laypeople, our voice has often been silent. When there have been problems in the Church, we permitted the wrong changes to be made. We hung back complacent; we lacked courage; we grumbled to our friends. We did not take effective action.”

Zwingli calls for the readers of the WCAS newsletter to seek out “proactive solutions” because they have been given a “representative form of church governance.”

The language of the manifesto is strident, at times even militaristic.

“Nameless Network is an effort by the laypeople to mobilize faithful members of the Adventist Church to go forth ‘fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners’ (Song of Solomon 6:10).” Multiple times, Zwingli makes clear a desire to help people become involved in church leadership: “Total Member Involvement (TMI) not only means involvement in outreach but also in church governance.”

The manifesto declares that the individuals behind the network were “heaven led” as they adopted their mission statement and ten principles of action. Those wishing to join are directed to send an email to an

included anonymous address, after which Zwingli will respond about how to become a member.

Following publication in the WCAS newsletter, the manifesto was soon posted on the website for Secrets Unsealed, the California independent ministry headed by evangelist Stephen Bohr. Inquiries about the document to Secrets Unsealed were referred to Aileen Pyburn, director of marketing. Pyburn did not respond to multiple phone and email messages requesting comment on the document or how it came to be published by Secrets Unsealed. (During the course of reporting this story, the Nameless Network manifesto was moved from its initial location to a different section of the Secrets Unsealed website, where it is not visible from the homepage or indexed by search engines but is still accessible if a visitor knows the correct place to look.)

While Anna Zwingli is listed as author both in the newsletter and on Secrets Unsealed, the manifesto concludes with another simple signature: “We are the church. WCAS.”

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When I first interviewed Janet Neumann and Linda Brehm of the WCAS leadership team, I asked about the Nameless Network. I had read the manifesto on Secrets Unsealed and was curious about the strange need for pseudonyms.

“My understanding is it was a group of concerned laity with basically the same concerns WCAS has, that wanted an avenue for communication,” Neumann told me. “We’re basically on the same page, kind of sister organizations.” Yet when asked if there was someone I could speak to about the Nameless Network or how it operates, Neumann replied, “I don’t know who that would be.”

In an interview, Kent Knight, who had simultaneously been on the WCAS Planning Committee and UCC Executive Committee as a lay member, described how WCAS and the Nameless Network are intertwined (Knight remains on the UCC Executive Committee, but says that he resigned his position in WCAS leadership after the UCC issued its statement against the organization). The Nameless Network is really “an extension” of WCAS, Knight told me. WCAS in the Upper Columbia Conference was the “pioneering chapter” and then the Nameless Network was a “vehicle by which to bring people from a larger sphere, geographically,

nationally, even some international.” I also asked Knight if he knew who was behind the network. “There are several lay persons that are key to the logistics,” he said, but those individuals were “not open to an interview.”

In another interview several months later, I again asked Janet Neumann about the leadership of the Nameless Network and its connections to WCAS. In the intervening time since our first conversation, I had obtained the WCAS newsletter where the manifesto had first been published, something that Neumann and Linda Brehm had not mentioned.

“I *do* know who is in charge,” Neumann told me, “But that is to remain nameless.” She explained that in our first conversation she hadn’t meant that she didn’t know who operated the Nameless Network, but that she didn’t know of anyone who would be willing to speak about it.

Multiple inquiries were made to the Nameless Network email, asking to join the meetings in order to better understand their purpose. The same request was also relayed to WCAS leaders, who called the Nameless Network “uplifting” when asked what it was, and who claimed that there was nothing political in its purpose. The pseudonyms were necessary because people with conservative viewpoints are blacklisted in their local churches or even fired from denominational positions, I was told.

My emails to the Nameless Network were never answered; I received no reply of any kind to inquiries about reporting on the network itself. However, one individual familiar with WCAS proceedings later told me that my request had been discussed—both by the planning committee and on the Nameless Network—with my name coming up specifically. However, no communication ever made its way back to me.

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“If you and I wanted to have a conversation and wanted it to be private, wouldn’t we have the right to have private?” Neumann told me in our initial interview when I explained how such an anonymous network might be concerning to church members and leaders not a part of it. “We live in a free country, don’t we?”

I asked if just anyone would be allowed to join the Nameless Network if they wished to do so.

“Well do they agree with those ten principles?” Linda Brehm replied. “That’s the criteria.”

Contained in Brehm’s answer is a perhaps troubling question about what standards of conduct should be deemed acceptable today, in the age of the internet and unlimited global communication. If someone stood outside the door to a church or building where a WCAS meeting was taking place and only allowed those to enter who would swear an oath of loyalty to a certain set of principles, it surely would be concerning. If those who entered were then encouraged to wear a mask or disguise, and the meeting was led by someone whose face was hidden, it would, without a doubt, be considered strange and problematic.

Despite explanations from WCAS leaders to the contrary, the Nameless Network is not just a conversation between private individuals. It has been advertised publicly, both in the WCAS newsletter and on the website of a large independent ministry. Contact information for the newsletter was collected at the WCAS meetings held in conference churches. But when those meetings are taken online, the operators of the Nameless Network ask for different standards of discourse—as if, if it doesn’t take place in a physical space, the same rules don’t apply.

Looking at the Nameless Network’s ideological litmus test also makes its emphasis on educating members about church government more troubling. Throughout many hours I spent talking with WCAS leaders, the rhetoric about nominating committees and rules of order was explained to me as just an attempt to help educate lay members about how church governance worked—a public service of sorts. However, when that education is extended only to a certain group of people, it demands to be viewed differently. It then becomes a means for advancing specific ideologies.

It’s unclear which came first: WCAS or the Nameless Network. Anna Zwingli’s manifesto says that the Nameless Network meetings began “via the Internet in 2016.” It was also in 2016 that members of the Upper Columbia Conference started their meetings online to continue the discussions that followed the controversial commissioned-minister policy. As the operators of the Nameless Network have refused to identify themselves—or to share any details of the network whatsoever—it remains unclear if any practical distinction between WCAS and the Nameless Network is possible at all.

The Nameless Network also helps explain how WCAS has grown beyond its origins in the Upper Columbia Conference. Although WCAS leaders have done more traditional outreach to grow the organization, such as paying to have a booth at the Generation of Youth for Christ convention, the Nameless Network has provided a

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truly national reach. Church employees, of the UCC and perhaps elsewhere, have been presenters on the network. Mike Lambert, pastor of the Stateline Oregon church, has been featured multiple times.

Evidence also suggests individuals within General Conference leadership may be connected to the Nameless Network. It was mere days after the first WCAS public meetings in 2017 that the *General Conference Executive Newsletter* featured the paragraph about WCAS that included specific attendance numbers. According to current chair Janet Neumann, WCAS didn’t have explicit

communication with the General Conference, but she thought that it “may have been through Nameless Network” that the General Conference got the information.

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists did not respond to a request for comment about how the WCAS information came to be featured in their *Executive Newsletter*. If the information was obtained via the Nameless Network, many church members might ask whether such an avenue of communication is appropriate for their leaders. At the very time that someone in the General Conference was receiving updates on the newly formed WCAS, church leaders in the Upper Columbia Conference were struggling to ascertain even the most basic details of the organization. The Nameless Network manifesto would be published later in 2017, but at the critical juncture before and after the first WCAS public meetings, UCC leadership didn’t know that the network even existed.

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Reporting this story has at times revealed evasive patterns similar to those which colored the original interactions between WCAS and UCC leaders. Soon after I began researching WCAS in December 2018, I started to look for a complete history of the WCAS newsletter dating back to just after the first public meetings. Anyone can sign up for the newsletter on affirmationsabbath.org, but to see all editions one must have been subscribed from the start. As some of the concerns local conference leaders and others have expressed about WCAS stemmed from articles published in the newsletter, a thorough examination would certainly be necessary to understanding both sides, I thought, and should be simple for WCAS leaders to provide.

But it was not so simple. I was directed to look at affirmationsabbath.org, and indeed, there is a “newsletter archive” page that lists some content from past issues. But it is far from comprehensive and shows no material before May 2018. I was given different rationale for why I couldn’t be provided past newsletters, from technical difficulties to that past content would soon be posted on the website.

As time went on, it became clear WCAS was not interested in sharing a newsletter archive or history.

Eventually I did obtain many of the past editions. Contained within was material that might concern some church members, and which has not been published on the website. In the newsletters, the organization is seen attempting to walk a thin line of influencing change by harnessing the Adventist church’s political systems, while remaining vague enough to argue that it’s not violating the clear prohibitions against organized political activity found in the official *Church Manual*.

In the November 16, 2017 issue, the lead article discussed how the conference presidents in the Pacific Union had refused to list their names in the worldwide *Adventist Yearbook* because the General Conference wouldn’t include Sandra Roberts, the elected president of the Southeastern California Conference. “Is it acceptable for leaders of non-compliant conferences and unions to promote wider non-compliance by interfering with the official publications of the church?” the article asked. It then moved to more practical implications of what should be done.

“The time has come to refuse to elect or to continue in office those who promote disregard for the world church by rejecting actions voted by the world church,” it read. “Because of actions like this by church leaders who refuse to support the decision of the world church, more of us are becoming awake and aware.” The article was signed simply “WCAS.”

An article titled “Form a WCAS!” in the March 23, 2018 edition also described the organization’s mission as tied to affecting church leadership.

Remember that one of the most crucial aspects of WCAS is to meet with your fellow constituent brothers and sisters from nearby Adventist churches in your region. As fellow believers come to know each other, they have a better sense personally about who are capable laypeople who are faithful followers of Jesus who fully support the world church, and who could serve with distinction on committees and in positions of leadership in your Conference.

An intentional effort to keep the totality of the newsletter in the right hands is also described in a disclaimer that was included in some form in most issues of the

newsletter (it has disappeared in the most recent issues beginning in April 2019).

We are glad to provide WCAS Newsletter freely to Adventist readers. We speak plainly in its pages and view it as best that non-Adventists not be engaged in these questions. We plead with readers not to post the newsletter onto the internet in any form. Readers are encouraged to email the Newsletter only to other interested Adventists. Readers are also granted permission to print-out hard copies of this Newsletter to give to interested church members who do not use email. Thank you for respecting our earnest wishes that you not post [sic] the Newsletter to the internet.

When asked about the purpose of the disclaimer, and how it might give the impression that WCAS was trying to restrict access to its newsletter, Neumann responded that it just bore out how the newsletter discusses “internal concerns” of the Adventist church and is not meant to be read by those outside the church body.

“We’re not trying to start any kind of discussion with non-Adventists,” she told me. “And when we say share it with like-minded people, that’s not to exclude anybody. It’s just share it with someone who would be interested.”

Regardless of intent, the end result of choosing not to have a newsletter archive and encouraging subscribers to limit its distribution is that someone wanting to examine the organization’s official publication and make their own determinations about its contents will have great difficulty doing so.

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Both conflicts and attempts at resolution between WCAS and local church conferences continued into 2019. On January 7, the Texico Conference issued its statement based on a vote the previous month by its executive committee. Texico disavowed WCAS with similar language to the Upper Columbia Conference, even quoting from the UCC document.

WCAS responded to the conference bans in its newsletter. In January, Janet Neumann wrote that “the accusations

against WCAS—of being divisive, political and twenty-some other statements—are yet to be understood.” In February, Randy Bierwagen, a WCAS regional facilitator from the Upper Columbia Conference, leveled his own accusations following the Texico statement, pointing out that both statements contained similar wording and had actually been voted by their respective committees on the same day in December.

According to Bierwagen, the statements showed “unequivocally the collusion between the Texico/Southwestern Union Conference and the Upper Columbia Conference.”

Representatives for the Texico Conference did not agree to be interviewed for this story, but Texico executive treasurer and secretary, Phil Robertson, did provide written responses to several questions regarding WCAS.

While no specific WCAS political activity has been noted within the Texico Conference, the WCAS website presents their 10 Principles of Action. Principle #6 proposes to train members for increased participation in local church boards and conference constituency meetings. We then noted in one of their newsletters that they have listed an upcoming local conference constituency meeting as an important event for action.

According to Robertson, the UCC’s knowledge of WCAS and its interactions with the group helped Texico decide their approach. “In researching the mission and the activities of the WCAS,” Robertson wrote, “inquiries were made of the leadership of the Upper Columbia Conference as to their experience with this group.” The Texico Conference didn’t have any of their own meetings with WCAS leaders before voting the statement, Robertson said.

Jay Wintermeyer, assistant to the president for communication in the Upper Columbia Conference, also described how the two conferences had communicated about WCAS.

“In late November Texico conference reached out to Pastor Labrador when they learned that WCAS was based in our conference,” Wintermeyer explained to me in an email.

They sought to confirm that WCAS was based in UCC and asked what the conference was doing. Pastor Labrador forwarded a rough draft of the statement UCC was working on. Apparently, Texico chose to adopt portions of our wording. There

was no dialogue or joint planning to release a statement. Pastor Labrador and UCC leadership were not even aware Texico voted a statement on WCAS until it was publicly released.

WCAS respected the UCC and Texico bans on using church properties for the first meetings of 2019, finding alternate venues in those areas.

In January 2019, I spoke with UCC president, Minner Labrador, about WCAS and the ban that had recently been put in place. “The challenge that we had with this

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group is purely an administrative challenge,” Labrador told me, in reference to the Statement of Harmony a few months prior and the confusion and concern it created in many parts of the conference. He emphasized that the UCC didn’t take actions against WCAS because they were supporting the world church, but rather due to the “false

alarms” that the group was spreading. He also hoped to have more dialogue with WCAS leaders and members.

“We’re thankful for these folks that love the church and are beginning to see that the conference is appointed by God as much as the world church,” he said. Labrador told me that he believed all members of the Upper Columbia Conference should be confident in the integrity of its elections and leadership selection processes.

At the end of March, WCAS leaders met again with Upper Columbia Conference leaders, including President Labrador. More people were involved compared to the meetings the year prior—other WCAS members outside the planning committee and several pastors from WCAS-supporting churches also attended. In the subsequent WCAS newsletter, Randy Bierwagen wrote that “the participants in this meeting felt that there was much healing that took place and a good spirit was felt,” and that they believed “positive changes will soon be seen in regard to the December 4 restrictions that were put in place against WCAS.”

In April, the results of the meeting were presented to the UCC Executive Committee, but the committee decided to leave the ban in place for the time being.

Despite the bans, WCAS has only continued to grow and expand. The second WCAS public meetings of 2019 were advertised to take place in fourteen locations in the United States and Canada, twelve advertised publicly and two meeting without public invitation.

Throughout its history, World Church Affirmation Sabbath has existed in the gray areas. Is it against church policy to talk about needing to elect different leaders and helping to give church members the tools to do so? The official church manual states that “everything of a political nature should be avoided” in the selection of leaders, but where does educating members how to use the existing political systems count in the equation? How about when that education is only provided to individuals who swear loyalty to a certain set of principles?

To some, affirming the world church has become a dog whistle for opposing women pastors. Leaders past and present in the Upper Columbia Conference emphasize they have always supported the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. The conference never tried to ordain women pastors in opposition to the 2015 General Conference vote; rather it only reinforced the role of women

pastors under the pre-existing commissioned credential. To some church members, though, even this warranted drastic actions. And while WCAS leaders are quick to point out that the organization is not only about women's ordination and opposing women pastors, its history, rhetoric, and statements show that these issues have always been central to its existence.

From its founding, WCAS has seemed to want the benefits of being a public organization without embracing the accompanying responsibilities. It wished to use church properties for events and have local conferences help with advertising yet refused to explain its leadership structure or be transparent about all its motives.

While there is no evidence of WCAS conducting overt political campaigns or conspiring to affect specific leadership votes, the Nameless Network has set up a system where such actions could be taken with impunity.

Transparency is the antithesis to impropriety, and the Nameless Network has been constructed to avoid transparency at all costs.

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I asked Janet Neumann about her overarching vision for WCAS as she approached the end of her first year as its chairwoman—why it is worth the struggle and work that has been poured in over the last several years.

“We want to see the Lord come,” she said.

We want to be ready for the Lord to come. And we believe that to [do] that we need to uphold the fundamental[s] and the structure of the Lord's church. I believe we're seeing prophecy fulfilled with these fissures and cracks that are occurring. But we're told to hold together. We're told to press together—that we're to be in unity. And the latter rain will not fall until there is unity.

The emotion was evident in Neumann's voice as she gave an impassioned plea.

“We are trying to stand up and say, ‘We need to support the world church,’ because the world church when it votes, according to Mrs. White, is God's authority on earth for today. And if we choose not to support that world

church, then we are going away from what the prophet has said and what scripture has said.”

There is no doubt that WCAS members and leaders are dedicated and care deeply about their church communities. Surely, they are people who give with generosity to their churches, both in time and resources. But, for as long as WCAS and the Nameless Network continue to work together with impunity, Adventist church members cannot have complete confidence that the political systems of the church and the selection of leaders are not being manipulated.

WCAS and the Nameless Network raise important issues. Should conduct be judged differently if it happens online versus in the physical world? Should church leaders and pastors be engaged in a venue where not every church member is welcome? Perhaps the discussion around these issues can one day foster more unity.

Or will wedges of division only be driven deeper?

The fall meetings of WCAS will be held September 21, 2019 at the following locations: Clinton, Arkansas; Magalia, Red Bluff, Granite Bay in Rocklin, Sacramento Central in California; Shellbrook SK, Canada; Washington, North Carolina; the laity of Stateline Church and the laity of Newport SDA Church in Washington.

Endnotes

1. <https://gleanernow.com/news/2015/08/npuc-executive-committee-decides-against-special-constituency-session>.
2. <http://affirmationsabbath.org/blog/why-does-wcas-exist>.
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6. <https://spectrummagazine.org/news/2018/we-will-not-be-deterred-nad-year-end-meetings-day-1>.
7. <https://www.affirmationsabbath.org/statement-harmony>.
8. <https://spectrummagazine.org/news/2018/upper-columbia-conference-issues-statement-group-world-church-affirmation-sabbath>.



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Adventists Reflect
ON THE Life AND Ministry OF
Rachel Held Evans



Portrait of Rachel Held Evans by Gillian Gamble for the forthcoming book, *Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints* by Daneen Akers.

BY DANEEN AKERS, MELODIE ROSCHMAN, SARI FORDHAM, ELIEL CRUZ, LILLY ARCHER,
JASON HINES, SETH PIERCE, TRUDY J. MORGAN-COLE, MICHAEL NIXON, AND ALICIA JOHNSTON

KEYWORDS: Rachel Held Evans, woman of valor, wrestling with God, justice and inclusion

Editor's Note: When Christian author Rachel Held Evans passed away on Saturday, May 4, 2019, at the age of 37, fellow Christians around the world mourned her unexpected death. Here, we gather some of the responses from Adventists, who were touched by her life and work, that came through over the first week after her death.



Rachel Held Evans died today. I don't know what to do with that information. It doesn't make any sense.

Most people haven't heard of her; she likely won't be memorialized on the cover of *Time* magazine or given an obituary in the *New York Times*. But she changed my life. When I read her memoir, *Searching for Sunday*, three years ago, it was the first time I had ever encountered someone feeling the same doubts I felt, clinging to the same loves I loved. From Rachel I found Nadia Bolz-Weber, Sarah Bessey, and Emmy Kegler, and all the women who I'm writing about for my dissertation.

I had the privilege of meeting her briefly last year at Why Christian, in the shadow of Duke Chapel. She had been signing books for an hour—she must have been tired—but she greeted me so warmly, gave me her full attention. She said she liked my new dress. When I told her about my research, she asked me to send it to her when I was done.

It's always strange, having a one-way relationship with someone, whether they're a writer or an actor or a politician. I laughed along with Rachel's escapades when she tried sewing or camping in her backyard during her Year of Biblical Womanhood. I read her blog about communion and breastfeeding her son, and it changed the way I thought about motherhood. I bought her books for friend after friend. When the Adventist Church refused to ordain women, Rachel sent us all messages of hope and support.

She gave me the sacraments, and the creed, and the liturgy.

She has a husband and a little boy and a baby girl who just had their life torn apart, and I don't know how to wrap my head around that. She went in for a minor infection two weeks ago. She was tweeting about *Game of Thrones*. Then she was having seizures. Then she was in a coma. And now she's gone.

She was 37.

How is any of this fair?

I don't know how to grieve someone I never knew. I don't know how to grieve someone who nevertheless changed the course of my life spiritually and academically. I don't know how to deal with the loss, and the gratitude, and the stupid waste of it.

Thank you, Rachel, for everything you gave us. *Eshet chayil*. Woman of valor.

—Melodie Roschman is a PhD in English student at University of Colorado, Boulder, entering her third year.

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When I learned that Rachel Held Evans was in a coma, I hijacked my husband Bryan who was walking through the living room. "Oh, no," I said. "Listen to this." Ever since we have been married,

he has seen me wrestle with staying in a denomination that will not ordain women ministers. Bryan isn't Adventist, but together we take our daughter to Sabbath School. I know he watches my church's politics and stays quiet, trusting me. And now, I realize that one of the reasons I have stayed is Rachel Held Evans, which is ironic because she left her evangelical church. But I have stayed, partly because her work made all of Christianity more welcoming. To everyone. She showed how you can walk in your faith authentically, ethically, honestly. That it's the only way. She was a voice of clarity and she will be missed.

—Sari Fordham is associate professor of English at La Sierra University.



I talked with Rachel Held Evans, a few days before she got ill, for her profile in the *Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints* book. (She had a list a mile long of people she thought should be profiled too, of course, because Rachel was the most generous and humble person.) She told me about a formative moment for her faith when she was nine or ten years old.

She said she had severe eczema as a child. She often couldn't do PE at school, and her painful sores often bled onto her bedsheets. She said that while she knew now this was a relatively mild trauma in comparison to what other children suffer, it was the first thing that made her question God's goodness.

One especially bad night, her dad came into her room to check on her. He held her while she cried and asked in anger, "Why would God let this happen to me?" (Her dad was a theologian, a seminary professor, and an elder in their church—to young Rachel, he knew everything about God.)

Her dad said he didn't know, but he did know that God loved her. This became a formative moment for her faith journey. Her father's answer both gave her permission to question God—even to be angry—and also the foundation that she was forever a beloved of God.

She said Jacob wrestling with God became a favorite metaphor for our interaction with the Divine. She let us all in on her wrestling. Reading the #BecauseofRHE and

#SaintRachel hashtags on Twitter keeps reminding me how she gave us the gift her father gave her as a young child—the permission to wrestle with God and even to be angry. All the while, she also kept reassuring us of the complete Divine love we are always with, no matter where our journey takes us.

She also said she loved the mothering metaphors for God. She especially loved the metaphor of God the Mother Hen, gathering Her chicks under Her wings. I keep imagining Rachel in the great mystery of the beyond, somehow gathered next to God's soft, warm wings.

I hope she knows just how much her life, words, space-making, and fierce love protected us. I feel so grateful that my time on this planet intersected with hers. And I am so devastated that her time was cut short—for her family's sake (those sweet babies missing their mama!) and for us all. I hope we can be the kind of people she always believed we were.

—Daneen Akers is a writer, producer, teacher, mother, and author of the upcoming book, *Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints*.



Rachel supported me through some of the hardest years I experienced while attending a Christian college. She gave me a platform to a Christian community when no one knew me, she invited me into her home, and it is because of her work that I have a shred of my faith left. It was an honor to call her a friend.

—Eliel Cruz is the director of communications at New York City Anti-Violence Project and an alumnus of Andrews University.



It was the golden age of Twitter, when the universe was smaller, and you did more learning than arguing. It was 2009. We found Rachel Held Evans and were immediately impressed. Someone our age (actually a little younger), intelligently wrestling with her conservative Christian background and this God that she loved but

She also said she loved the mothering metaphors for God. She especially loved the metaphor of God the Mother Hen, gathering Her chicks under Her wings. I keep imagining Rachel in the great mystery of the beyond, somehow gathered next to God’s soft, warm wings.

sometimes didn’t fully understand. Her ability to come to an understanding that worked for her in the spaces where she found herself resonated with us as Adventists. We felt connected to her journey because it tracked our own. The balance that she was able to strike between broad swaths of American Christianity—her love for the dedication and charisma of her evangelical background and the intellectualism calling to her from main-line Christianity. We felt the same tugging. Her curiosity stayed with us and bolstered our own.

Her effect ripples in our lives even though she’s gone: not just through her work that will always be with us, but through the Christian thinkers we admire who she introduced to us—names that pepper our conversation to this day as fellow travelers on the walk of faith—Jonathan Martin, Wil Gafney, Jen Hatmaker, Kristin Howerton, just to name a few. We remember her “Ask a...” series fondly. Not only because it included an Adventist, but because of how it brought us into connection with people we never see, and the way it helped to open our eyes to the LGBTQIA Christians in our midst (particularly the Transgender community) and it affects us to this day.

It’s hard to put into words what her sudden passing means to us. For someone we’ve barely met she had an indelible effect on our spirituality. We can only hope to help fill the space she leaves in our sphere of influence by helping create an environment where people can truly seek God—with all the questioning, wondering, and wandering a true search entails.

—Lilly Archer and Jason Hines. Lilly is an attorney in Orlando, Florida. Her husband Jason is an ethics professor at

AdventHealth University, board member of Adventist Forum, and columnist for Spectrum.



interacted with RHE and her work on Twitter and only just finished reading her latest book. She was an insightful, gracious, kind, humorous, and challenging voice for Jesus. She helped many who grew up in toxic fundamentalist faiths to discover a loving Jesus and to stay connected to Christianity. She leaves behind two babies and a husband as well as countless people who were helped by her work. Lift her family up in prayer and/or contribute to the GoFundMe set up to help her family cover medical expenses and other challenges that come with losing a parent/spouse. May God grant peace, healing, and hope to those who have been heartbroken by this loss.

—Seth Pierce is an author and speaker, and served as a pastor for sixteen years before accepting his current position as assistant professor of Communication at Union College.



In her first book, *Evolving in Monkeytown* (later re-released as *Faith Unraveled*), Rachel wrote about winning the Best Christian Attitude award as a schoolgirl, about winning Bible contests, about always being the girl with all the answers until too many questions crashed in upon her faith and changed it forever. When I discovered her first

book and her blog around 2010, I felt such a kinship with that little girl and the woman she became. Rachel was about fifteen years younger than I am, and her fundamentalist background differed from my Seventh-day Adventist upbringing—but we were similar in important ways. We both came from traditions that taught the importance of certainty—of always having the right answers. Her books helped give me permission to ask questions, to say “I don’t know,” to let my faith change and grow. I was always eager to see what subject Rachel would tackle next and what she would teach us about it. While I have faith that she will rise in glory, I’m sad and angry that her journey of discovery with us in this life has been cut cruelly short.

—*Trudy J. Morgan-Cole is author of numerous books, including many about women in the Bible. Her newest novel, Prone to Wander, follows five friends as they attend an Adventist high school and then scatter to very different places.*



Rachel Held Evans is a name that I had heard from time to time over the years, but I didn’t really dive into her work until late last year when my wife bought her book *Inspired*. I was instantly struck by her authenticity and boldness. Two quotes from that book that have stuck with me are as follows: “The apostles remembered what many modern Christians tend to forget—that what makes the gospel offensive isn’t who it keeps out, but who it lets in,” and “The church is not a group of people who believe all the same things; the church is a group of people caught up in the same story, with Jesus at the center.”

Those words resonated deeply within me as I was wrestling through a difficult season in my work at Andrews. It reminded me that the work of inclusion will continue to cost me a great deal, but it is the work of Christ’s cross. I will likely grieve her loss the most due to the fact that she was one of the few white Evangelical Christians who were intentional about advocating for historically marginalized and perpetually silenced

voices. Her work in centering the voices of black women, in particular, was particularly inspiring and heartwarming to me. As I expressed on Twitter in the wake of her death, it saddens me that most Adventists were completely unaware of her work, and the legacy she was crafting—particularly around being an advocate for justice and inclusion (an example that our denomination needs so desperately). Her grace and humility were the perfect model for the yet-to-be-addressed work of racial healing and truth-telling to which I dream one day our denomination will commit.

I thank God for all He did in and through Rachel and the way she allowed God to use her voice. She will be deeply missed. My sincerest prayers go out to her close friends and family. May others be inspired to pick up the torch and carry on the legacy that she was just starting to create, but was already able to impact so many.

—*Michael Nixon is vice president for diversity and inclusion at Andrews University.*



Rachel Held Evans is lost to us. We have lost her voice, her courage, her tenacity, and her incisive and raw appraisals of the realities and questions with which so many of us struggle. We will never be the same. I’m grateful for the words she left us and saddened that they are all we will get. I can’t imagine the pain of her family who has lost so much more than we can imagine. I’ve cried many times today. I’ve wrestled with the brazen and sudden way death can steal the most precious from our midst. I want to honor her memory, allow her courage and candor to inspire me, and love my people as well as I can for whatever time I have. She will always be missed.

—*Alicia Johnston is an advocate for full inclusion and affirmation of LGBTQ people, with particular focus on the Adventist Church. She is currently working on a book on the subject and preparing to launch a podcast.*

I'm still completely heartbroken over the death of Rachel Held Evans, and one way I want to honor her this Friday evening is to re-read her well-loved teaching about the Proverbs 31 woman, who is described as a woman of valor (in Hebrew, *eshet chayil*). Often, in Christian circles, she's been held up as an ideal all women are supposed to measure up to. Rachel wrote:

The bad news for the domestically-challenged among us is that the life of the Proverbs 31 woman is like a Pinterest board come to life: She rises before dawn each day, provides exotic food for her children, runs a profitable textile business, invests in real estate, cares for the poor, spends hours at the loom making clothes and coverings for her bed, and crafts holiday wreaths out of coffee filters. (Okay, so that last one was straight from Pinterest, but you get the idea.)

It was Rachel's friend, Ahava, an Orthodox Jewish woman from Israel, who had taught Rachel how to make challah for her *Year of Biblical Womanhood* book project, who gave Rachel the wisdom of Proverbs 31 from a Jewish perspective. Again, from Rachel:

"So do Jewish women struggle with this passage as much as Christian women?" I asked.

Ahava seemed a bit bewildered.

"Not at all!" she said. "In my culture, Proverbs 31 is a blessing."

Ahava repeated what I'd discovered in my research, that the first line of the Proverbs 31 poem—"a virtuous woman who can find?—is best translated, "a woman of valor who can find?" And in fact, the structure and diction employed in the poem more closely resembles that of a heroic poem celebrating the exploits of a warrior than a domestic to-do list. Like all good poems, it was intended to highlight the glory of the everyday; it was never meant to be used prescriptively as a to-do list or a command.

"Every week at the Sabbath table, my husband sings the Proverbs 31 poem to me," Ahava explained. "It's special because I know that no matter what I do or don't do, he praises me for

blessing the family with my energy and creativity. All women can do that in their own way. I bet you do as well."

In addition, she said, "eshet chayil"—woman of valor!—is invoked as a sort of spontaneous blessing in Jewish culture, Ahava said. Think of it as the Hebrew equivalent of "you go girl," or perhaps even better, "Carry on, Warrior."

And so, on this Friday night, the first since Rachel passed into the beyond, we will light a candle for her and say a blessing over her and our daughters, who enter a better world because Rachel and other women of valor have gone before.

A full essay from Rachel about women of valor as a blessing, not a prescriptive to-do list, is on Glennon Doyle's blog.¹

Endnote

1. <https://momastery.com/blog/2013/04/08/eshet-chayil-woman-of-valor-or-how-i-learned-the-hebrew-equivalent-of-carry-on-warrior/>

—Daneen Akers

A note on the artwork

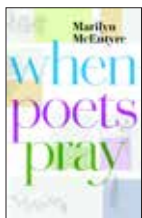


The portrait of Rachel Held Evans featured in this article is for the upcoming *Holy Troublemakers & Unconventional Saints* book by Daneen Akers, and is used with permission. Daneen writes,

the artist is Gillian Gamble, a woman of valor who made time in the wee hours of the night this week to lovingly create this beautiful tribute art through her own tears. I love how she captured Rachel's warmth and radiance. And I love the nod to the Tree of Life on Rachel's necklace as the many tributes that have poured in on the #BecauseofRHE hashtag have shown just how life-giving Rachel's work and witness was. *Eshet Chayil*.

When Poets Pray

BY ALISA WILLIAMS



Poets slow us down. They teach us to stop and go in before we go on. They play at the edges of mystery, holding a tension between line and sentence, between sense and reason, between the transcendent and the deeply, comfortingly familiar. —Marilyn McEntyre

Ever since I read Marilyn McEntyre’s *Word by Word* (2016), she has become a favorite author of mine, and I look forward to each new book with great anticipation. All are slim volumes whose brevity does not diminish their depth of thought and purpose, and each has given me a new-found appreciation of God and faith through their explorations of language, the known and the unknown, the finite and the infinite.

Her latest, *When Poets Pray* (2019), is no exception. In it, McEntyre contemplates the relationship between poetry and prayer. “We often look to poets to give language to our deepest hopes, fears, losses—and prayers,” she writes. By sharing the poems that have held special significance for her over the years, McEntyre offers us the gift of journeying with her on the path of prayer, that often lonely road. “Poets have enriched my prayer life by giving me lines that lift up my heart, or words for lament, or images that widen my awareness...” she writes, then continues:

Poetry and prayer are closely related. Even poems that make no pretense of broaching the sacred invite us to look closely and listen to words, to notice how they trigger associations and invite the mind to play with meaning, how they summon feelings that take us by surprise....Not every poem is a prayer, but I have come to believe that poetry, even for the angry and the disenchanted, takes its inspiration and energy from the Spirit who teaches us to pray (1–2).

Twenty four poems by the same number of poets are included, some familiar and others less so, such as: Lucille Clifton, “spring song”; Walter Chalmers Smith, “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise”; Wendell Berry, “Prayer after Eating”; Galway Kinnell, “Prayer”; and Mary Oliver, “Praying.”

The book is divided into sections titled “Nature’s God,” “Wrestling,” “Praying,” “Witnessing,” and “Known and Knowing.” Each poem is followed by a brief discussion by McEntyre, who in addition to being a prolific author is also a professor of English, and as with all great teachers, her voice here is inquisitive, expansive, and inviting.

Some of the poems McEntyre has chosen are arresting in their beauty, such as “Eagle Poem” by Joy Harjo, a contemporary poet from the Muskogee (Creek) nation. McEntyre writes, “‘Eagle Poem’ reminds us that prayer is something heard, received, and lived before it is distilled into words” (31). Some of the poems are humorous, others uplifting. Still others hit like punches to the gut, like “L.A. Prayer” by Francisco X. Alarcón, a Mexican-American poet and educator, who penned it in the wake of the Rodney King riots. McEntyre says of this poem:

Prayers erupt in moments of raw terror or fury—first comes the visceral reaction to danger or horror, and then, often before much thought intervenes, a prayer rises deep in the belly to drown the waking best of fear. The more I read this poem, the more I recognize how powerfully it reminds me what it costs to be a ‘peacemaker’. . . . To pray for peace is to pray for the courage to show up and bring peace to where there is no peace. . . . It’s not an invitation to take lightly. It is. . . a calling (108).

I appreciated the diverse selection of poets included in *When Poets Pray*, each a distinct voice uplifted, bearing out our human emotions, vices, and virtues—of devotion, suffering, selfishness, love, greed, praise, and joy. Each poem is a raw appeal to God, all pretense stripped away, to hear us, to know us, to bear with us in our humanity. Put simply, each is a prayer.



ALISA WILLIAMS is managing editor of www.spectrummagazine.org

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From *Cycle* series by Amy Cronk, mixed-media/encaustic on wood panel (2017).

ForeOrdained

It's strange, I admit. I am the one who must speak for the true God.
How can the wisdom from eons of time become words in a woman?
How can the power of light and the atom be said in a soft tone?
How can I speak of the mysteries? I am a questioning soul. I
feel. I hurt in my heart as I seek for the answers that hide. You
come to me, wondering, longing in faith for your destiny. You pray.
You ask. Believing all things can come together in beauty.
You hope. Eagerly waiting for words—good words—from the great God.
And now, now it is my turn. I speak—and I hope—for your good.
I speak your words, your future. (God, how can it be?) Now, “Go!”

-Michael J. Orlich



MICHAEL ORLICH is a physician and researcher at Loma Linda University. He is married to Raewyn Orlich, senior pastor of the Victorville Seventh-day Adventist Church. Michael drew inspiration for this poem from the virgin Mary, the oracle at Delphi, and his pastor wife. Michael and Raewyn visited Delphi on their honeymoon to Greece. Michael attempted to write the poem in dactylic hexameter (Homeric meter), common in ancient Greek epic poetry, but unusual in English poetry. Michael and Raewyn have the joy of a 10-month-old, baby daughter, Eleanor.