

Unity and Authority
in the Church

Six Points on the Issue
of Ordination of Women

GO Encounters Still
Strong After a Decade

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KINGLY POWER:

*Is It Finding a Place in
the Adventist Church?*



features

COVER STORY

4 Kingly Power: Is It Finding a Place in the Adventist Church?

By Stanley E. Patterson

10 Six Points on the Issue of Ordination of Women

By Gary Patterson

14 Unity and Authority in the Church

By Raj Attiken

17 Does ADRA Have a Future? What Is It?

By Monte Sahlin

22 GODencounters

By Adventist Today News Staff

26 A Quantum Paradox of Time and Providence

By Darrel Lindensmith

DEPARTMENTS

3 Editorial

29 Alden Thompson

Making Peace With Change

30 Letters

31 Adventist Man:

Commenters Needed!



22

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GC President's Plea for Unity Was Really for Uniformity

By J. David Newman

President Ted Wilson made an impassioned plea to the delegates of the Columbia Union Conference on Sunday, July 29, 2012, that they vote down the proposed action to ordain pastors without respect to gender. He predicted dire consequences if the union conference voted the recommended motion. However, he did not specify what those consequences might be.

Wilson's main plea was for unity. He quoted from the prayer of Jesus regarding the need for unity: "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity" (John 17:21-23, NIV).

He explained that the unity of the church was at stake. However, what Wilson was appealing for was uniformity, not unity. Uniformity is "identical or consistent, without variation in detail."¹

Unity, on the other hand, is "the state of being one, a whole or totality as combining its parts in one, as of the parts of a whole."²

In the text that says they "may be one as we are one" and "brought to complete unity," we find that Jesus is not talking about uniformity, which is what Wilson was advocating. Yes, Jesus and his Father were one, but they were not uniform; they were not identical.

Jesus was a physical being. His Father was not. Jesus had physical limitations resulting from being human; the Father had no human limitations. Jesus could experience physical pain; his Father could not. Jesus could die; his Father could not. Jesus and the Father were one, but they were not uniform.

In Genesis 2:24 (GWT) we read, "That is why a man will leave his father and mother and will be united to his wife, and they become one flesh." Adam and Eve were united, but they were not uniform. They were separate people with differing characteristics, but they were united in purpose.

The General Conference and the Columbia Union Conference are united in taking the gospel to all of the world, but they are not uniform in how to do that. In the words of the great missionary, the apostle Paul: "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible

means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (1 Cor. 9:22-23, NIV).

Previously Paul had argued for adopting the local culture in order to reach that culture. When no absolute moral issues are at stake, Paul argued that we adapt to that culture.

Ellen White spoke directly to this point. "One man may be conversant with the Scriptures, and some particular portion of the Scripture may be especially appreciated by him; another sees another portion as very important, and thus one may present one point, and another, another point, and both may be of highest value. This is all in the order of God. But if a man makes a mistake in his interpretation of some portion of the Scripture, shall this cause diversity and disunion? God forbid.

"We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists of viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light. The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord, but they cannot quench it and establish perfect agreement."³

On a side note. The only power the General Conference has over a union is to remove it from the sisterhood of union conferences. But that poses a dilemma for the president. His membership resides in the Columbia Union. If the union is declared out of conformity with the will of the General Conference and removed, then Wilson would lose his membership in the Adventist Church. Since he would no longer be a member, he would have to resign as General Conference president.

So, yes, let's seek unity; but in the case of women's ordination, the issue has become uniformity, which is not a biblical principle.

¹ "Uniform," *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, second edition unabridged (New York: Random House Reference, 1987).

² "Unity," *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, second edition unabridged (New York: Random House Reference, 1987).

³ Ellen G. White, "Love, the Need of the Church," Manuscript 24, 1892, published as Manuscript Release #898 in *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 11 (Washington, D.C.: White Estate, 1981), p. 266.

"The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement."

—Ellen G. White



KINGLY POWER:

*Is It Finding a Place in
the Adventist Church?*

BY STANLEY E. PATTERSON

CURRENT HAPPENINGS IN THE NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION ARE UNEXPECTEDLY SHINING A NEW LIGHT ON REALITIES HAMMERED OUT DURING THE PASSIONATE PROCESS OF REDEFINING THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH AT THE GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION OF 1901. THE PRESENT ISSUE IS PARITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVE A PASTORAL ROLE IN THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH, BUT THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THAT CHALLENGE IS BEING PLAYED OUT IS THE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH.

The North American Division (NAD) was recently corrected by General Conference legal counsel, who reported that the division could not develop policy related to the role of women in church leadership if such policy differed from General Conference policy. Since the division is an extension of the General Conference and has no separate constituency, it has no latitude to authorize such differentiation.

But what about the next rung down on the organizational ladder: the union conferences? Since unions do have a legitimate constituency, would it be reasonable to assume that an action taken by vote of their constituency would have the right to alter policy and practice related to the place and authority of women who lead as pastors?

The answer is not as simple as one might be tempted to assume. Over the years, the latitude available for differentiated action on the part of the union conferences and local conferences has become increasingly restricted. A review of the model Constitution and Bylaws from 1980 to the present will reveal a gradual tightening of the restrictions placed upon union conferences and local conferences by mandating certain elements of the model constitution that must be implemented in order to comply with General Conference policy and procedure. Copies of the model document published in editions of the Constitution and Bylaws and the General Conference Working Policy after 1995 include required bold face type to identify the portions of the model that must be incorporated into the constitutions and bylaws of local conferences and union conferences. It should be noted that it appears that mandate has not been uniformly incorporated across the North American Division.

The prologue regarding implementation of the model

Constitution and Bylaws of 1980 referenced as C 70 05:

“This model is to be followed as nearly as possible by union conferences.”¹ In 1985 it was recorded as follows: “Model Union Conference Constitution and Bylaws for use as guidelines to be followed as closely as possible pending final consideration by the 1987 Annual Council.”² The trend becomes clear by 1995, when the same item reads:

“This model constitution shall be followed by all union conferences. The model bylaws may be modified, with the approval of the next higher organization. Those sections of the model bylaws that appear in bold print are essential to the unity of the Church worldwide, and shall be included in the bylaws as adopted by each union conference. Other sections of the model bylaws may be modified ... provided they continue to be in full harmony with the provisions of this model. Amendments to the model Union Conference Constitution and Bylaws shall be made by action of the Executive Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists at any Annual Council of that Committee.”³

The 2010 edition reflects some changes but reads essentially the same as what is put forth in the 1995 edition.

The model constitution that once was presented as guidance and recommendation has morphed into a document that carries significant mandate from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, which serves as the determining agent in regard to whether a policy initiative by a union conference or a local conference is in agreement or not. This assumes that the bold-faced items in the model constitution are supported by a vote of the delegates at a General Conference session and not simply the work of a committee at the General Conference office, apart from

a session vote authorizing the mandates.

The question that remains unanswered is how the governance process will play out if a union conference receives (or is given) a mandate by its constituency that requires women to be placed on an equal footing with men when it comes to denominational opportunities and formal affirmations in the pastoral leadership

The representatives of the Conference, as it has been carried with authority for the last 20 years, shall be no longer justified in saying, ‘The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we.’ The men in positions of trust have not been carrying the work wisely.” —Ellen G. White

role. What parameters are intended in the policy that grants authority solely to the union conferences to authorize ordination of pastors?

Since there is no formal prohibition against ordaining women to gospel ministry, then what existing policy at the General Conference would be referenced as reflecting the voice of the people (General Conference in session) regarding the ordination of women? Certainly we have guidelines for ordination, but do those guidelines explicitly prohibit the ecclesiastical affirmation of women? Or do they simply describe the process of ordination? Maybe legal experts will be able to uncover restrictive ordination policies that I have failed to discover, but

I find no policy that is being defied by those seeking to establish parity for male and female pastors.

But regardless of the posture of either organization, it must be admitted that the Seventh-day Adventist system was designed to support an upward flow of authority from the people to the leaders who serve the church at the various organizational levels. We must be reminded that such leaders exercise authority loaned in trust by the people—our leaders do not own authority.

Policies were developed not by proactive legislation, but rather by recognition of what was generally or commonly practiced by the people. The Church Manual emerged in such

a fashion, and though it sometimes seems like a patchwork quilt of ecclesial policy, it has the honor of representing the voice of the people rather than expert clerics. What we see emerging in terms of practice at the local conference and union conference levels will certainly be viewed by some as rebellion and a move toward disunity. Careful reflection regarding how our systems of ecclesiology emerged, however, will reveal an exercise of authority by the people that is legitimized through the representative process of the local and union conferences and ultimately at the General Conference Session. It starts at the bottom and is processed upward.

Accountability

Let’s take a look at who answers to whom in our beloved church. First, let me express a caution. We are culturally conditioned to think in terms of top-down hierarchy when it comes to accountability. We naturally assume that we are accountable to those above us, but this assumption doesn’t apply to the church. Take a moment and recall the words of the Master spoken on Thursday evening before his death on Friday: “He who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves” (Luke 22:26, NKJV). This excerpt is part of a larger discussion in the Gospels that challenges the top-down hierarchical model (Matt. 18:1-5; 20:25-28; Mark 10:43-44; John 13:12-17) that we intuitively draw on when considering accountability. Jesus turned it upside down, and so did the delegates to the 1901 General Conference session. Those who are loaned authority for their term of service by the people should be honored by those over whom they are given authority (Heb. 13:17), but it remains the God-given responsibility of the corporate body of believers to delegate the authority by which each level of the organization functions.

The intuitive assumption is that the “lower” organizations are accountable to the higher organization. This assumption is intuitive but wrong. Accountability in the Seventh-day Adventist system always takes us back to the people, for it is the church members who hold the divine gift of authority, and it is to them that all levels of the church ultimately answer. All positional authority is granted by the people on a basis that is limited by both time and scope—whether the position is General Conference president or local pastor.

The Consolidation Tendency

The tendency of human organizations is to move from a model of distributed authority toward a consolidation of authority—from authority exercised by many to authority exercised by a few (or, in

extreme cases, one). Consider Israel's persistence in pressing for a king (Judges 8; 1 Samuel 9), wherein God proclaims himself to be rejected in the process. Consider the dramatic consolidation of the radically distributed authority in the New Testament church as it raced toward a papal system that proclaimed the people to be the subjects of authority rather than the possessors of it. Multiple examples of this tendency can be cited throughout biblical history. God distributes authority; people tend to consolidate it.

What about our church? If you review the background leading up to the reorganization of the church in 1901, it will show that the reorganization was a solution designed in reaction to a process of consolidation of power that resulted in what Ellen White referred to repeatedly as "kingly authority." The following quote was penned in 1903, and it provides a sense of time during which the leadership behavior problem was maturing:

"In the work of God no kingly authority is to be exercised by any human being, or by two or three. The representatives of the Conference, as it has been carried with authority for the last 20 years, shall be no longer justified in saying, 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we.' The men in positions of trust have not been carrying the work wisely."⁴

Except As We Shall Forget

It has been a little over a hundred years since our ecclesial ancestors struggled with the issues of organization and leadership and

came up with the church structure and the leadership guidelines that define our representative system of church governance. Up until that time, the organizational structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church seems to have unfolded in response to practical needs. At first our spiritual forbears resisted organization; then in the mid-19th century they recognized a need for more order as our numbers and the complexity of the body increased. Finally, late in the 19th century, the church discovered that careful organization was absolutely essential.

The move to organize was not prompted solely by the issue of complexity brought on by growing churches and mission expansion; it was also a response to the leadership behavior of church officials at the highest levels. As far back as the time of the Greek philosopher Plato, humans have recognized the predictable and progressive change in leadership behavior that edged toward authoritarian and dictatorial patterns. In his discussion of rulership and tyranny, Plato wrote, "When he [tyrant] first appears above ground he is a protector."⁵ The move from protector to tyrant is a common transition in human leadership behavior—one to which the church has no automatic immunity. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 both describe Lucifer's journey of self-ascendancy in similar terms but with tragic results.

Ellen White was engaged with the issue of leadership, authority, and power issues much of the time after her return from Australia in September 1900 until her death in 1915. Many

Columbia Union Vote on Ordination

The vote on July 29, 2012, by the constituency of the Columbia Union Conference to authorize ordination for pastors regardless of gender came because the Columbia Union had never adopted the model constitution. Article III of the model constitution says in part: "and all purposes, policies, and procedures of this union conference shall be in harmony with the working policies and procedures of the _____ Division and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This union conference shall pursue the mission of the Church in harmony with the doctrines, programs, and initiatives adopted and approved by the General Conference in its quinquennial sessions."

In contrast, the following language appears in Article III of the Columbia Union Conference's constitution: "In general, the purposes, policies,

and procedures of the Union shall be in harmony with the working policies and procedures of the North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *to the extent that these are consistent with the articles of the Union's Constitution and Bylaws*. The Union shall pursue the mission of the Church within the doctrinal guidelines adopted and approved by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in its quinquennial sessions" (emphasis added).

The language in Article III of the union conference's constitution, with the insertion of the phrase "in general," is permissive in nature and allows the Columbia Union to make exceptions to policies and procedures of the North American Division and the General Conference. Notice that this phrase does not include officially voted doctrine.

The constitution makes it clear that the Columbia Union Conference will pursue its mission within the doctrinal structure of the Church.

Ironically, the Columbia Union now faces a bit of a conundrum. Although this union conference has voted to allow ordination regardless of gender, several local conferences *within* the Columbia Union have already adopted the model constitution. This means that these conferences cannot ask for their women pastors to be ordained, because the model constitution says they must follow policies as voted by the General Conference. So the *big* question remains: Is a local conference that has adopted the model constitution forever prevented from having their women pastors ordained, even though the Columbia Union now allows it?

of the statements made and recorded in the book *Christian Leadership* reveal her positions on leadership and organizational behavior in reaction to what was happening during this period. Here is an example of the tone of her counsel:

“No man has been made a master, to rule the mind and conscience of a fellow-being. Let us be very careful how we deal with God’s blood-bought heritage. To no man has been appointed the work of being a ruler over his fellow men. Every man is to bear his own burden. He may speak words of encouragement, faith, and hope to his fellow-workers; he may help them to bear their special burdens . . . ”⁶

There are many such comments in her writings, to be found in context in the manuscripts of her work. She was clearly engaged in turning the church away from both behavior and policies that consolidated authority in one or a few, rather than distributing governance and leadership authority broadly throughout the body of Christ.

Reorganization

Ellen White was also engaged vigorously in the preparation and conduct of the General Conference Session of 1901. She was present in spite of her poor health and made the following statement in a closed meeting just prior to the session, which was quoted by A.T. Jones:

“But when we see that message after message given by God has been received and accepted, yet no change has been made, we know that new power must be brought into the regular lines. The management of the regular lines must be entirely changed, newly organized.”⁷

She was frustrated by the fact that organizational and leadership behavior issues had been addressed by her to church leaders for more than a decade but with no change realized. Consequently, the issue of change in this arena became part of the work of the 1901 General Conference Session.

The trend leading up to the 1901 Session was a move away from the distributed model and toward a hierarchical model in both leadership behavior and organization. Authority was progressively collecting at the top, to the end that both members and church employees were being made subject to the authority of those residing “above” them. The 1901 Session made a radical shift away from the hierarchical model, wherein power and authority flows down to those who are subject thereto, and instead focused upon the freedom and inherent capacity of the individual member and employee.

Again E.G. White speaks in favor of the distributed model: “Each is to have an individual experience in being taught by the

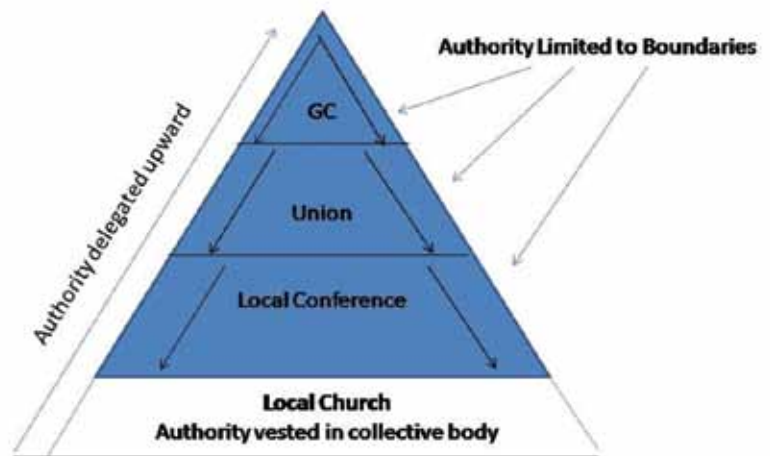


FIGURE 1: SDA AUTHORITY STRUCTURE

Great Teacher, and individual communion with God.”⁸

Representative Model

The delegates to the session and those immediately following 1901 brought forth a model of organization that tipped the hierarchy of power on its head. Instead of authority being vested in ecclesiastical leaders, it was laid upon those at the base—the members of the church. Authority flowed up through a process of delegation (see Figure 1). It was loaned to leaders at the various levels on a limited basis. No leader owned authority, but rather functioned as a steward of authority until the end of his/her term—and only within the organizational and geographical scope of the defined assignment.

The 1901 reorganization began a process that placed a barrier between each level of the church. This severely limited the personal authority of leaders beyond their immediate placement. The General Conference was limited in its authority over union conferences. Unions were designed as semiautonomous entities with limited ability to dictate to local conferences, and up until 1980 they were held accountable at their sessions by a constituency that included every ordained pastor in the union conference as a voting delegate. Conferences in turn had boundaries that limited their authority in the local churches. Leaders at each level, including the local church, answered to a representative constituency.

Again Ellen White affirms this model: “It has been a necessity to organize union conferences, that the General Conference shall not exercise dictation over all the separate conferences. The

power vested in the Conference is not to be centered in one man, or two men, or six men; there is to be a council of men over the separate divisions.”⁹

This model is in stark contrast to the papal and the episcopal models, wherein authority is vested in an individual clergyman (papal) or group of clergymen (episcopal), who exercise it downward to a submissive constituency. The Seventh-day Adventist hierarchy of power was displaced in 1901 by a hierarchy of order that served the organizational needs of the church without consolidating power in any one individual. In so doing, the 1901 Session turned back the process that 1800 years before had led the early church down the path toward papacy.

The Representative System Today

God gave us an exceptional system of organization. It is the result of committed, God-fearing people who struggled with issues of organization and leadership in honest, open debate and produced a model that is “smarter” than any one of us. It’s a system that takes us back beyond the kings of Israel to a time wherein each son and daughter of God related directly to him as ruler. Gideon referenced this relationship with God in his answer to the elders of Israel when they requested that he become king: “I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you” (Judges 8:23, NKJV). Each person carried the responsibility of service before God. So it is that the 1901 reorganization challenged the concept of kingly power and won.

1903 GC Session Challenge

Proponents of the centralized model of authority challenged the newly adopted representative model at the 1903 General Conference Session. The delegates defended the idea that it was the people’s church and held to the distributed model of governance and rejected what was referred by some as “kingly authority.”¹⁰ It should not be ignored, however, that the tendency to control rather than to trust the voice of the body remains a temptation that has an insidious and persistent pull upon those called to lead. Remember Plato’s tyrant; he started out as a protector! We must ask ourselves and, yes, even assess our organization to determine whether controlling behavior is impacting the church in a systemic manner. Are we still honoring the spirit of the 1901 reorganization? There is evidence that the church is functionally moving toward an episcopal model as the representative structure crumbles from lack of maintenance.

Much will be revealed in the coming months relative to how the organized church will respond to the initiative by some union conferences in North America to take constituent action

to address parity between male and female pastors regarding formal acts of affirmation. Is such action a legitimate move by the people to address issues that impact their sense of corporate and individual integrity? Or is such action a challenge to the General Conference, which is commissioned to implement the collective voice of the people on a global scale, and thus assure unity and in some sense ecclesiastic uniformity? Looking from the bottom up, it seems to make sense to move forward to address a problem with action affirmed by the constituency. Looking down from the top, it is understandable that anxieties might rise as the certainty of uniform beliefs and corporate behavior becomes less certain.

In the process of solving this problem, the church must renew its commitment to its root structure, wherein authority flows up from the people. In the end we must honor that collective voice, which over the years has grown faint. The denomination must refresh the concept of representative governance and build trust between the organized church and the body of believers by implementing concrete efforts to hear and value the collective voice of the body. The Master intentionally called his disciples friends rather than servants, and in that spirit the organized church must establish a relationship with the people they serve. God’s church is after all, the people’s church. 🏠

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¹ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *NAD Constitution, Bylaws and Working Policy* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1980), C 70 05.

² General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *NAD Constitution, Bylaws and Working Policy* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1985), p. 191.

³ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Constitution, Bylaws and Working Policy* (Silver Spring, Maryland: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1995), pp. 165-166.

⁴ Ellen G. White, “No Kingly Authority to Be Exercised,” from Manuscript 26, 1903, quoted in *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 14 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), p. 280; see also *Christian Leadership* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1985), p. 26.

⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, quoted by J. Thomas Wren, ed., *The Leader’s Companion: Insights on Leadership Through the Ages* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 62.

⁶ Ellen G. White, “Individual Responsibility & Christian Unity,” from Manuscript 29, 1907, pp. 9-10, quoted in *Christian Leadership* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1985), p. 27.

⁷ *General Conference Bulletin*, Twenty-fifth Session, Vol. 5, April 10, 1903, p. 152.

⁸ White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1923), p. 486.

⁹ White, “No Kingly Authority to Be Exercised,” from Manuscript 26, 1903, quoted in *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 14 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), p. 279.

¹⁰ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *General Conference Bulletin*, in General Conference Session (Oakland, California: GC Secretariat, 1903), pp. 149-166.

SIX POINTS ON THE ISSUE OF ORD

By Gary Patterson

In order to understand the handling of the issue of women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it is important to know how the structure of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination functions and from whence its institutional authority is derived. Not many people have the opportunity to be part of the various levels of church function, so most church members do not have either experience in or access to the many policies that govern these levels. In an attempt to clarify this complex operation and its impact on the issue of the ordination in a short and limited way, the following six points are offered.

1. Understanding Church Structure

There are four principal documents governing the church, and there are four constituent groups in its structure. The four documents are the 28 fundamental beliefs, the Constitution and Bylaws, the Church Manual, and the General Conference Working Policy. The four constituent groups are the local church, the local conference, the union conference, and the General Conference. Divisions are not constituent organizations, but rather are divisions of the General Conference, providing leadership and direction in defined geographic territories.

The 28 fundamental beliefs, the Constitution and Bylaws, and the Church Manual are determined and modified only by a vote of the General Conference in session. The General Conference Working Policy is determined and modified by vote of the Annual Council of the General Conference Committee.

The four constituent groups have authority over specific functions of the church that belong only to them and may not be taken or countered by the other constituent groups. The local church is the only constituent level that can take action regarding membership issues, church officer election, appointment and ordination of elders, deacons and deaconesses, local church budgets and finance, and other such local church functions. The local conference is the only constituent level that can take action regarding the sisterhood of churches, its employees, institutions, and finance. It also votes to recommend to the union conference individuals for ordination to the gospel ministry. But it does not have the power to authorize such ordination. This authority rests with the union conference. The division and the General Conference may authorize ordination of their employees, but they have no authority over those voted by the union conference.



INATION OF WOMEN

2. The Permission Issue

Ordination is, by General Conference policy, the purview of the union level of governance. This being the case, the General Conference has overstepped its bounds in seeking to tell the union conferences that they may or may not ordain women to the gospel ministry. It is not within the authority of the General Conference to take such action, in the same way that it is not the purview of the General Conference to take action regarding individual membership, the election of personnel for church offices, or issues involving the sisterhood of churches. These actions belong to the constituent level, to which they are assigned by policy and may not be determined or overruled by higher levels of the church structure.

An additional example of this overreach is the General Conference granting permission for churches to ordain women to the position of local church elder. There was no existing action prohibiting such election or ordination of elders or any other church office on the basis of gender. Therefore, there was no cause for granting such permission from the General Conference. Church officer election is under the authority of the local church constituency, and by policy, higher organizations are not allowed to interfere in this process.

The General Conference, union conference, or local conference may not, for example, tell the local church whether or not it can elect women as treasurer or clerk of the church. Likewise, these entities have no authority either to deny or to give permission for women to be elected and ordained as elders. They may give advice on such matters, but it is not in their purview to dictate who may or may not be elected. With no action forbidding such gender choices, the church does not need permission to do as it sees fit.

3. How We Got to This Place

The issue of ordination of women was discussed by the General Conference officers as far back as 1950, at which time it was decided to appoint a committee to study the matter and to report back to the officers. Again in 1970, a committee was appointed to study the issue and to report to the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee later that year. In 1973, the report of the Mohaven Committee on women in ministry was accepted by the Annual Council, authorizing continued study. In 1974, the Annual

Council voted to continue studying the issue. In 1985, the General Conference Session voted to study it further. In 1988, North American Division leaders voted to end the discriminatory policies affecting women in ministry.

It was in the General Conference officer group, known as ADCOM in the late 1980s, that this issue was discussed with a view to place the matter on the General Conference agenda for the 1990 General Conference session in Indianapolis. Some members of the committee objected to putting this issue on the agenda, on the basis that this was a matter defined by General Conference policy to belong to the union level of authority. There existed no action or policy of the church defining ordination as gender exclusive. Therefore, the General Conference had no authority to tell the union conferences whom they may or may not ordain. ADCOM and the Annual Council did, however, place this matter on the General Conference session agenda. The General Conference would have been within its right to give counsel to the union conferences, but not to usurp the decision process, which belongs to the union level of governance.

It is important to understand the action taken in this matter at the Indianapolis meeting. It was not, as has been often represented, a vote forbidding such ordination, but rather the failure of an action to proceed with ordination. Thus the effect of this vote was simply that the proposed action went away. In fact, another action was taken to grant performance of the functions of ministry to women pastors. This was done under the authority of a “Commissioned Minister” credential, which for women pastors paralleled the “Ordained Minister” credential.

The matter continued to be under discussion for the following five years and was again placed on the agenda of the 1995 General Conference Session in Utrecht, at the request of the North American Division. At this meeting it was officially recognized that there was no biblical or theological evidence to support a position of forbidding such ordination, and the vote again did not forbid it, but rather stated that to avoid division in the world church, the request was denied “at this time.”

At present, the matter is under continuing study. The General Conference officers have outlined a plan whereby: “Biblical Research Committees in all divisions have been asked to conduct a study on the theology of ordination and its implications. In addition, during 2012, the General Conference Administrative

Ordaining Presidents and the Law of Unintended Consequences

By Gary Patterson

Following the 1995 General Conference Session vote on the ordination of women, there was ongoing discussion at the General Conference headquarters regarding what positions in the denominational structure required ordination. During one of these discussions, a member of the Administrative Committee (ADCOM) pointed out that in the qualification requirements for conference presidents, ordination was recommended but not required. The Church Manual states that “The conference president should be an ordained pastor of experience,” but “should” does not make it a requirement.

This observation set in motion an effort by some from Secretariat to develop a policy requiring that presidents be ordained. The purpose for this new policy was to block any women from becoming conference presidents. Though cloaked in language designed to sound as if this were protecting the position by fielding only candidates who possessed the spiritual and pastoral experience necessary for the office, its true basis was the discussion regarding which positions required ordination.

Never mind the fact that the church had operated for 100 years without this policy and had not faced problems. Given that women were, in a few instances, in the position of conference secretary (a common

source of candidates for conference president), this policy was developed to block potential promotion. Over the years conference presidents have, for the most part, come from the ranks of those who earlier in their careers had served as pastors. However, on occasion they have been drawn from other positions, most frequently from those serving as treasurers.

As this change to the General Conference Working Policy moved through various stages and committees, its wording was finally presented to Annual Council and voted as a world church requirement in the General Conference Working Policy, but not in the Church Manual. Policy E 60 states: “Inasmuch as the conference/mission/field president stands at the head of the gospel ministry in the conference/mission/field and is the chief elder or overseer of all the churches, a conference/mission/field president shall be an ordained minister.”

The intent of the policy was to prevent anyone not ordained (read *women*) from being elected as a conference president. The wording, however, does not address that intent. Rather, it states that anyone elected to serve in this position “shall be ordained.” Thus the policy, which was designed to prevent women from being elected as presidents, in effect ends up requiring that those who are elected shall

be ordained. Therefore the General Conference policy requires the ordination of women who are so elected. It may be argued that this was not the intent of the policy, which is true. Nevertheless, this argument makes plain just what the intent of the policy was.

In a related issue, policy L 35 45 states: “There are certain lines of work in the denomination that are not regarded as strictly ministerial but which provide experience for some ministerial development. For example, a college president or an academy principal with young people under his care bears responsibility not only of their academic training but also of their spiritual welfare. No man’s position per se should influence a committee to set him apart to the holy work of the ministry unless and until he gives definite proof of his aptitude and spiritual maturity and has in his own soul the conviction that God has called him to the ministry as a lifework.”

Given that women also hold such positions, and given that their work is the same as that of men in these positions, the logical conclusion is that this policy should apply equally to both men and women, creating a situation in which General Conference policy requires the ordination of women. Failure to do so adds further credence to the established policy of officially condoned discrimination, as stated in BA 60 10.

Committee will appoint a Theology of Ordination Study Committee, with representation from all divisions, to oversee and facilitate the global discussion process and to prepare reports for presentation to the General Conference Executive Committee. The Annual Council 2014 will determine what action, if any, should be recommended to the 2015 General Conference Session.”

4. Policy Issues

Authority for ordination is assigned to the union level of church governance, as indicated by General Conference Working Policy L 45 05. It states: “After favorable consideration the local conference committee will submit the name of the candidate with its findings and convictions to the union for counsel and approval.” There is no gender reference in this policy whatsoever. The policy does allow that the division and General Conference levels may handle their own ordination matters separately from the union conferences by

submitting for processing the consideration of selected individuals in their employ for ordination to their respective executive committees for authorization. However, it does not allow for interference by either the division or General Conference levels in the action of the union conferences.

Regarding discrimination in ordination, General Conference Working Policy B 60 10 states: “The world church supports nondiscrimination in employee practices and policies and upholds the principle that both men and women, without regard to race and color, shall be given full and equal opportunity within the church to develop the knowledge and skills needed for the building up of the Church. Positions of service and responsibility (except those requiring ordination to the gospel ministry*) on all levels of church activity shall be open to all on the basis of the individual’s qualifications.”

The asterisk refers to a note at the bottom of the page, which

reads, “The exception clause, and any other statement above, shall not be used to reinterpret the action already taken by the world Church authorizing the ordination of women as local church elders in divisions where the division executive committees have given their approval.”

This policy establishes two matters that bear on the issue of the current discussion of the ordination of women. First, the policy establishes that the position it takes is discriminatory. The issues of gender, race, and color are delineated as being covered by this policy, but it then selects one of these—gender, to be specific—as an exception to the policy, thus indicating that discrimination is acceptable in this instance. One can imagine the justifiable outcry if either race or color were selected as a valid reason for discrimination, which brings up the question as to why gender discrimination is acceptable and the others are not.

The footnote establishes the second issue relevant to the discussion. A major point in the argument against union conferences moving ahead with what is, by policy, their official domain of decision is the need for unity in the world church. However, this policy indicates that the desired unity has already been officially breached among the divisions in the matter of the ordination of women as elders. As it states, this issue is to be decided by “where the division executive committees have given their approval.” Thus, in the context of the ordination of women, the divisions have *already* gone their separate ways by authority of the General Conference Committee action. The need for perfect unity in the world church thus becomes an invalid argument, given that such unity already does not exist, by official sanction, in the very area of the ordination of women as elders.

5. What Is Unity?

The very sound of the word “unity” invites an automatic acceptance of the idea. How would anyone dare be opposed to unity? So, for the sake of discussion, let us assume that we all are for unity in the church. But having made that assumption, the difficult task has merely begun, as we must address what we mean by unity. Some assert that if we just abandon the pursuit of the ordination of women to the gospel ministry, unity will be achieved. But why would this be a one-way street? Why would it not be just as true that if we approve it, unity will be achieved?

The reality is that unity is achieved not by everyone thinking and doing the same thing around the world, but rather by getting along with one another while we do many markedly different things, as needed in our varied cultures and the diverse world. If the General Conference had not sought to enter areas that were out of its jurisdiction, we would be able to move ahead as needed

in our respective areas, even as we have in the ordination of women as elders.

6. Biblical Example

In the early days of the church, the Apostle Peter, quoting from the book of Joel, stated: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days” (Acts 2:17-18, NIV). And on the matter of Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit, he asks, “So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, . . . who was I to think that I could oppose God?” (Acts 11:17, NIV). As in the day of Peter, refusal to recognize the calling to ministry of women today is the same as telling them that their calling is not of God. Do we tell the hundreds or even thousands of women who have clearly blessed ministry in North America—or for that matter in China, where the work of the church is being advanced primarily by women—that their call is not from God, or at least in some way inferior to the call men receive?

Where Do We Go From Here?

First, we need to recognize that union conferences deciding whom to ordain without respect to gender is not a violation of policy, but the General Conference making that decision for the union conferences does violate the General Conference Working Policy. The General Conference needs to recognize its violation of policy and remove itself from usurping action from the union level.

Second, we must admit that discrimination, as recognized and approved in General Conference Working Policy B 60 10, is unacceptable, and we must face two embarrassing questions: (1) Why is it *disunity* to reject such discrimination in ordination practice? and (2) Why is it *unity* to allow divisions to discriminate against ordaining women elders?

Third, how long must we continue to study this issue? Given that this matter has been under study for more than 60 years, some see the current action as further stalling tactics by a body that has authority to advise on the issue but does not have the constituted authority to make the decision for implementation. While the General Conference in session is recognized as the highest authority in the world church, it is not entitled to impose its actions on other levels of the church, in which it does not have constituted authority. 🇺🇸

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UNITY AND AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is a presentation made to the July 29 Columbia Union Constituency by the president of the Ohio Conference. It retains some of the oral style. Also, read the editorial, *GC President's Plea for Unity Was Really for Uniformity* for background information.

BY RAJ ATTIKEN

Because we are a part of a global community of believers, we must ask ourselves: Will the action we are contemplating (to ordain pastors regardless of gender) in any way jeopardize or compromise the unity of our church?

The unity we claim is primarily *our unity in Christ*, who is the head of the church. We are united in one Lord, one faith, one blessed hope, and one mission. That's the essence of our unity. As a church, we have a sacred covenant to be united around a common *set of beliefs* and a common *purpose and mission*.

An essential nature of this unity is that it *always exists in diversity*. We see that in the story of Creation, in the story of redemption, in the birth story of the church on the Day of Pentecost, and in the final Restoration. Diversity is intrinsic to authentic unity.

While we desire unity, it seems to us that we make extraordinary efforts to achieve *uniformity*. We do that largely by enacting policies. We are a highly policy-driven church, and many of those policies are directed at achieving uniformity within our body.

We are also a church that is invested

in the practice of collective decision-making. There is some unifying potential in this practice, but the practice in and of itself *does not necessarily result in unified decisions*. We bring to the decision-making process our widely varying and sometimes unyielding perspectives that are shaped by our culture, traditions, our heritage, etc. In fact, we bring these perspectives even to our reading of the Bible. It is understandable, then, why as a world church we are divided in our convictions about the issue we are discussing today. In many matters, culture trumps all other practical considerations!

Despite the unity we want to maintain and the uniformity that we often strive for, the fact is that the Adventist church around the world is a very diverse community—diverse in practices, traditions, rituals, form, function, and processes. The examples are numerous. The action we are considering today will no more divide the church than the scores of other actions we have taken at various levels of the church over the years that have contributed to the rich diversity that we celebrate as a world community. Over the decades, the church has demonstrated extraordinary resilience in keeping in balance its unity, its desired uniformity, and its vast diversity.

A Shift of Authority

Now, besides the question of unity, we must also examine the matter of authority: Does the Columbia Union have the authority, under our governance system, to authorize the ordination of persons to the gospel ministry without regard to their gender?

We, as a denomination, have had a rather winding journey in defining how authority should be exercised within our church. In the formative years of Adventism, our forbears leaned toward a hierarchical use of authority. So much so, that by the turn of the 19th century,

we realized the growing danger of concentrating power and authority at the top levels of the organization. In our *representative* form of governance, authority was to rest with the people and flow up through a process of delegation. We adopted the practice of *delegated and distributed authority*. In the major reorganization that occurred at the General Conference session in 1901, we created union conferences as intermediary units between the General Conference and the local conferences in order to delegate some of the responsibility and authority that previously belonged to the General Conference. We said that the local church has authority over certain things; the local conference has authority over certain other things; the union conference has delegated authority for certain matters; and the General Conference has authority for certain other matters. Such boundaries were intended to keep each level of the organization functioning *within its own sphere of authority*. Whenever one level extends its reach to exert its authority over another, or usurps the authority that belongs to another, it leads to dysfunction in the organization and confusion among its people. Or, when a level in the organization *abdicates* its responsibility to act in those matters over which it has authority, this too contributes to dysfunction in the system. It turns out that in our model of distributed authority, *union conferences* have been entrusted with the authority to make decisions regarding ordaining persons for the gospel ministry.

Setting the Precedent

The 1881 General Conference Session minutes included this statement: “RESOLVED, That females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian

ministry.”¹ It was then discussed by eight individuals and afterward referred to the General Conference Committee.² There is no record of Ellen White counseling against this, either before, during, or after the discussion. That proposal was made *before union conferences existed*. Why, some 90 years later, after having delegated authority to the unions, this matter was taken up by the General Conference in the 1970s could be an intriguing story. Someone took it from the plate of the union conferences and placed it on the plate of the General Conference. Regardless of how that happened, *that single decision has shaped the trajectory of this conversation for the past 40 years*.

In our research we did not find any General Conference or North American Division *actions* that revoke or limit the authority of the union conferences to ultimately make decisions regarding ordination. There are no *policies* that limit ministerial ordination to a certain gender or prohibit ordination of a certain gender. Will the Columbia Union be violating any North American Division or General Conference policy by voting to authorize ordination without regard to gender? The answer is “no.”

Does the union conference’s authority to act in the matter before us *disregard*, in any way, a well-known statement Ellen White made to a Brother A in 1875 concerning the General Conference in session? “When the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered.”³ Does this declaration, made to a specific individual manifesting certain specific attitudes and behaviors, effectively strip the union conferences, local conferences, and local churches from exercising their authority to make decisions that have been

delegated to their sphere of responsibility?

Whatever Ellen White meant by what she said in 1875, it is instructive to note that in 1896, she declared: “The voice from Battle Creek, which has been regarded as authority in counseling how the work should be done, is no longer the voice of God.”⁴ Two years later she wrote that “it has been some years since I have considered the General Conference as the voice of God.”⁵ On April 1, 1901, the day before the General Conference session opened, she announced: “The voice of the [General] conference ought to be the voice of God, but it is not.”⁶

After some changes were made to our organization in 1901—including the creation of union conferences and delegating authority to them—Ellen White seemed to moderate her pre-1901 positions. In 1909 she wrote, “God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference [session], shall have authority.”⁷ Perhaps it is significant that she chose to leave out the notion of “highest authority” and the analogy of the “voice of God.” Whatever these comments were about, they were not about stripping the authority of unions, local conferences, or congregations from the responsibilities delegated to them in our governance system.

Ordination in Mainland China

The story of God’s activity in mainland China is receiving a lot of attention these days. Our committee could not help but think about China. While there are many differences in the social, political, religious, and cultural environment between China and the global West, we cannot dismiss the significance of what God is doing there. There are more than 400,000 Chinese who consider themselves Seventh-day Adventist Christians in every sense of the term. I was personally blessed recently to

visit seven cities in China and to listen to the stories of how God is working in their land. Without any organizational link to the rest of the Adventist church since 1949, without any of the denomination's policies and administrative protocols to shape them or guide them, they have nurtured the Adventist faith and its mission and are pursuing it vigorously. It is common knowledge now that in China, *ministerial*

Will the Columbia Union be violating any North American Division or General Conference policy by voting to authorize ordination without regard to gender? The answer is "no."

ordination is extended to both men and women. In my conversations with some of these ordained pastors, I was impressed that these brothers and sisters are convicted that God has led them to this practice to advance his mission there. Elder Jan Paulsen, after his 2009 visit to mainland China, said, "It is clear the Holy Spirit is at work in China."⁸ Paulsen also said: "The fact is we have at least half a dozen women pastors who are ordained as ministers in China. We recognize them as ordained ministers."⁹ There are even more now. Some of them are pastoring congregations or groups of congregations with thousands or tens of thousands of members.

The importance of the China story to our committee is that *despite this very*

significant deviation in practice regarding ordination, we—the world church—embrace our Chinese Adventists as brothers and sisters in the faith. Although we do not have organizational reach into mainland China, we recognize them by including them in the *SDA Yearbook*. We include their numbers in our membership statistics for the China Union Mission, the Northern Asia Pacific Division, and for the General Conference. In his visit to China earlier this year, Elder Ted Wilson assured the assembled Chinese Adventists, "You are a vital part of God's worldwide people who are moving towards the Second Coming of Christ, a destiny that Christ himself has provided."¹⁰

The question, to which the answer is obvious, is this: If the practice of ordaining women is a violation of a biblical teaching, or of a theological principle, or of a fundamental tenet of the Adventist faith, or is in any way immoral, illegal, divisive, or unchristian, would we so heartily and unconditionally embrace Chinese Adventists as Adventists when they unapologetically ordain women pastors? What if, one day soon, we gained administrative access to mainland China and were able to extend our policies and regulations to them? Would we promptly revoke all of these ordinations in order to bring them in line with the rest of the world body, or would we celebrate the diversity that God has brought about?

Doing What's Right

In light of all of these factors,

- we conclude that the action today by this body, to approve the ordination of persons to the gospel ministry without regard to gender, is within the rightful purview of this body and that to wait for another level of the organization to address it would be to abdicate our


responsibility and privilege;

- we conclude that the world church, at multiple General Conference sessions and Annual Council sessions, has amply demonstrated its inability to act decisively in this matter. We have no evidence that the regional and cultural biases have changed on this subject;

- we conclude that our action does not intrude upon or usurp the authority of any other level of the organization, but respects our collective commitment to delegated and distributed authority;

- we conclude that the proposed action is not a violation of any biblical teaching or theological principle;

- we conclude that gender-based discrimination in ministerial ordination is a practice that we must not condone any longer in the Columbia Union Conference;

- we conclude that the action we are proposing is morally and ethically the right thing to do—and that the right time to do the right thing is right now. 

Raj Attiken is president of the Ohio Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

¹ Minutes of the 20th annual General Conference Session, fifth meeting, Dec. 5, 1881. See p. 198 at <http://www.adventistarchives.org/docs/GCB/GCB1863-88.pdf>

² *ibid.*

³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1875), p. 492.

⁴ White, Letter 4, 1896, cited in *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 17 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), p. 185.

⁵ White, Letter 77, 1898, cited in *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 17 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), p. 216.

⁶ White, Manuscript 37, 1901, cited in *Sermons and Talks*, Vol. 2 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1994), p. 159.

⁷ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 9 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1909), p. 260.

⁸ Bill Knott, "Finding Faith in China," *Adventist World*, August 1, 2009, p. 19.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁰ Andre Brink, "In China, Adventist Believers Display Spirit of Service, Sacrifice," *Adventist World*, June 1, 2012, p. 7.

DOES ADRA HAVE A FUTURE?

What Is It? BY MONTE SAHLIN

In June the *Adventist Today* online news team reported internal conflict in the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). *Spectrum* had been nit-picking at the topic for some time in its web edition. *Adventist Today* discovered that Dr. Rudi Maier, the president of ADRA, had been asked by Elder Ted Wilson, General Conference (GC) president, and Elder Geoffrey Mbwana, chairman of the ADRA board, to resign. He felt they were unfairly taking sides in some staff tensions he could manage and did not appreciate the fact that at least one other GC officer who serves on the ADRA board had met with some employees of the agency to hear complaints.

A special meeting of the ADRA board was hurriedly convened on June 24 and, after hearing from Maier, it voted to fire him. The *Adventist Review* has reported that the internal conflicts went back to early 2011, when there was a reduction-in-force of “16 employees out of a workforce of 88.” Maier, with a PhD in international development from American University and 20 years as a faculty member at Andrews University, as well as long service in ADRA at several levels, was particularly incensed that one of the reasons given for why he should resign was that he was “too German.” That seems an ethnic slight, clearly not acceptable

in the multicultural diversity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He points out that weeks before, Wilson affirmed his “good, creative thinking” in an email and expressed support for plans for the future. I should also state clearly that no one has alleged anything negative about Maier’s integrity.

What is going on here? Is this any way for an organization to behave that manages \$75 million in grants and donations? Is this any way for an Adventist organization to function? A number of former employees have told me that for years ADRA has had a relational problem among its staff housed at the GC headquarters in Silver Spring. It is also true that the agency is facing significant turbulence in its strategic environment, including issues that will likely force major changes in the way it operates. Internal conflict in an organization is often a symptom of larger pressures from outside, and that is the most probable explanation for this incident.

What Is ADRA, and Why Does It Exist?

ADRA is listed in the *SDA Yearbook* as the only “agency” in the denomination, a category different from local churches, institutions, and other organizations. Legally it is a public charity, separately incorporated from the GC Corporation, with its own



tax-exempt status. It raises money from the general public and receives millions of dollars in government grants. Its mission is to combat famine, poverty, disease, and illiteracy around the globe. It is an agency of the Adventist movement working in the larger, secular context of humanitarian activities. It is one of the Adventist faith's major contributions to the wider world.

What is also true—and this is where the story gets complicated—is that ADRA is not one organization. The latest annual report lists 134 countries with an ADRA organization, each of which is legally constituted under local law and separate from the American organization. Of these, 25 are focused on getting grants and raising funds to export overseas, and 109 are focused on implementing projects and delivering services to those in need. ADRA is about the transfer of wealth and technology from the “have” countries to the “have-not” countries, although a growing number of countries involve both kinds of activities.

ADRA is a network of organizations with no legal ownership connections or central authority, held together only by faith-based commitments to humanitarian action and a myriad of specific agreements of various types related to specific programs. In the last year of record, there were 1,095 such programs scattered around the world, with more than 20 million of the poor looking to them for food, shelter, medical care, education, and other assistance. The projects involved about \$130 million in donations and gifts-in-kind and connected 6,442 employees as well as uncounted volunteers and informal workers.

This is no longer your grandma's Dorcas Society, with a few of the church ladies on Tuesday morning stitching quilts and operating a community food pantry. But it has the same roots—going back more than 150 years—and the same instincts. Here is where another complication surfaces. Many of the clergy, who are asked to chair ADRA's boards, have no education in social work or community development or even nonprofit management.

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Many tend to think about “the mission of the remnant church” narrowly, as primarily about membership recruitment, and maybe communication. They don't really see what teaching women in Bangladesh how to create informal credit unions and start small businesses has to do with “winning souls,” especially when the GC has committed to not mix humanitarian work with proselytism.¹

Ellen White makes a paradigmatic statement that “Christ's method” starts with “mingling” in the world outside the church “as one who desired their good” and moves on to showing compassion and meeting human need before gaining trust, and only “then” extending an invitation to follow Jesus.² Despite this, and in addition to her repeated instruction on “disinterested benevolence,” there are still Adventists who don't get it. The *Adventist Today* website received response to its June news reports about ADRA from people who asked, “Why are we involved in this at all?” Clearly, some have failed to learn this important aspect of the Adventist message.

Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan teaches that God expects us to be part of humanity and to respond with compassion to human predicaments, not just to “take care of our own.” Perhaps more sermons need to point out that in Matthew 25, Jesus pictures the final judgment as turning on how we respond to poverty, disease, and social injustice. He identifies himself with the alien, the prisoner, the sick, and the hungry. And this is a passage that starts with the disciples asking (at the beginning of the previous chapter), “What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?” This passage is not some generic, Christian sentiment. It is aimed squarely at Adventists.

New Realities for ADRA

The context within which ADRA works in the United States has changed in recent years, due to politics and the economy. The government has less money to invest in foreign aid, and it has more pressures to use its foreign aid money to support political goals instead of humanitarian needs. There is also a reduced number of government workers involved. Consequently, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and others involved in funding the kind of projects that ADRA does are pushing for organizations like ADRA to work more collaboratively and more efficiently. Today more grants are being given in larger amounts to coalitions of agencies than in the past, when smaller grants were given to a number of organizations. In other words, it is not as easy as it once was for ADRA to chip in to a current trend and ask for a relatively modest grant to do one of what will be dozens or scores of projects all similar in nature. This means greater competition among the agencies seeking grants, and the government's “solution” is to tell

the competing agencies to work together.

ADRA has rarely had a “lead agency” role in a larger program involving the collaboration of several agencies. In fact, Adventists are not naturally inclined to work this way. We usually want to have our own show and make our own decisions and not be beholden to outsiders. I sometimes think it is because we don’t learn to dance as earlites; we are not good at operating in close quarters with others without stepping on toes. Yet, that is precisely the skill that current conditions demand of ADRA.

USAID wants the organizations working on the same issue in the same country—for example, clean water in Somalia—to work together. This may mean that ADRA needs to collaborate in a joint program with World Vision, Save the Children, and Catholic Relief and Development. Church leaders in some countries are horrified to see this happen. We want to be good neighbors but not get too close, and the world works that way less and less.

Another kind of problem that USAID’s new approach creates is that it may bring together an alliance of agencies across a broad geography that crosses the internal division and union lines within the denomination. If ADRA is to participate in this kind of funding and activity, it may have to work across territorial lines within the denomination in a way in which church leaders are not accustomed.

Since World War II, the U.S. government has favored a strategy of putting foreign relief funds into the hands of U.S.-based organizations that work internationally. That is changing now. USAID wants to fund grassroots organizations in the countries where the needs are. It wants to make investments that help to build civic infrastructure in developing nations. For example, ADRA is training leaders for community organizations in Yemen these days. However, ADRA offices in many of the developing countries often do not qualify for grants of this type because they do not have a “deep” enough structure into local communities.

ADRA may actually get contracts to help build civic organizations that have no connection with the Adventist Church. Again, church leaders in that country do not understand. Yet this situation may exist, in part, because the Adventist Church is behind in training local leaders to understand how to work with civic organizations in their communities and how to understand this as part of God’s intention.

Internal coalition-building is just as important to ADRA as developing collaborations with other agencies. ADRA offices in some countries were “too small” to win grants until they learned to work together and use partnerships with other ADRA organizations. ADRA is now being forced to use its “worldwide network” in order

to survive. It has been something more like window decoration in the past, and now it is a life-and-death reality.

Some of ADRA’s own strategic planning documents show that the reduction-in-force last year, which became so controversial, occurred in part because the *kinds* of specialists that ADRA needs in order to collaborate successfully and win grants has changed. Emergency food programs are giving way to environmental, civil society, and appropriate technology projects. Collaboration also increases the demand for what staff can bring to table in terms of both grassroots experience and professional education. A missionary who never went to dental school but learned to pull teeth out of necessity is no longer an approach to healthcare that donor organizations will touch. Neither are they willing to work with “development tourists” who have spent a few weeks here and there in the aftermath of a disaster. They will work only with people who have years of residence in developing countries, a knowledge of local systems, and established relationships with local players, as well as relevant graduate degrees.

Please do not get me wrong; ADRA has good people with much to contribute. In fact, a startling number have been hired away by other international development agencies. But it is difficult to quickly come by very experienced and capable workers at just the right moment. “We lack a strong bench,” one veteran explained to me. “We need to nurture a larger number of Adventists who make a career in development and feel good about working for ADRA, at least part of their careers.” I still often hear someone explaining that Adventists are encouraged to become preachers, doctors, and teachers. I almost never hear social worker, development specialist, or community organizer included in the traditional list. If ADRA is to have a strong future, more of our young people must hear roles of this kind included in the list. And that includes business developer, agriculturalist, and public health specialist.

The Changing World of International Philanthropy

ADRA has been raising money for “disaster and famine relief” since the 1950s. In fact, the annual offering in May each year is the largest single offering among Adventists in North America. That alone should tell the denomination’s leaders something about priorities in the pews. A 1989 survey of church members, conducted by the Pacific Union Conference, found that 86 percent agreed with the statement: “My church should do something about the social problems in our community.” A 2010 survey in a Midwest conference found that 97 percent agreed with the statement: “The Adventist Church ought to do more about poverty and unemployment.”

According to a strategic planning document, ADRA has developed about 30,000 regular donors. Most of the agency's workers think these are largely Adventists. There are an estimated 350,000 Adventist households in the United States. That means that about 9 percent of church members are regular supporters of ADRA, not counting those who give through the offering envelope in their local church. Some think this should be a higher percentage, but I have been told by executives in

Are we smothering ourselves in red tape? Are we creating a corporate culture that values conformity over risk-taking and tradition over experimentation? What will that do to our cause?

other international organizations that they would gladly rent ADRA's list if they were permitted to do so. They see that as an exceptional response rate.

ADRA must keep a strong support base in the pews if it is to survive. These funds provide the required "matching" percentages to leverage larger grants. The process of informing and keeping

in touch with donors also helps to educate church members about the issues and needs that ADRA is dealing with. Prayer support can be more powerful than checks.

The track record with grants from foundations and corporation giving programs is much weaker for ADRA. Maier told me that one of the areas of internal conflict during the last couple of years revolved around people brought in because they had experience obtaining funds from this sector. Others felt threatened. The new potential donor organizations are interested in different kinds of projects than ADRA staff members have experience with.

USAID has also switched some of its funding from grants to contracts. What this means is that ADRA is hired to implement a USAID program. It is no longer an ADRA program, and sometimes the agency cannot even use its own name, such as in a project in South Sudan. When the ADRA board was informed of these new requirements, it was reluctant and approved only small steps in this new direction.

The sources of money outside the denomination that ADRA has learned to tap are moving away or drying up. ADRA needs to learn to get money from new sources, or it will find itself with

only its individual donor base, which provides roughly a fifth of its income. And a tight economy is not a good season in which to learn to find and open up new sources of income.

Change Is Not Easy

The Adventist movement has a rich heritage of innovation. Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, the founding leader of Adventist healthcare in the 19th century, had a profound impact on the diet of average persons in America, Australia, and other places. He shaped many aspects of medicine today. H.M.S. Richards led in innovations in Adventist evangelism, starting in the 1920s. The television ministry started by William and Virginia Fagal in the 1950s still has a larger impact on secular audiences than almost any other Christian broadcast. Ellen White's crucial role as a young woman claiming a ministry of leadership in the infant Adventist movement, the prophetic office, was surely innovative. Throughout her long career, she was the mother of innovation again and again. Even near the end of her life, when "the Brethren" voted not to start another sanitarium in southern California, she gave John Burden some money she had borrowed privately and told him to go ahead and start Loma Linda anyhow.

Has the Adventist Church lost the capacity to innovate? I have watched the Working Policy book grow to about twice the number of pages it had when I first became aware of it in the 1970s. Are we smothering ourselves in red tape? Are we creating a corporate culture that values conformity over risk-taking and tradition over experimentation? What will that do to our cause?

ADRA has been thrust into a time of great change in the context in which it works. These are not changes that ADRA sought. They are changes that are now forced upon the organization. Some have told me that they would rather see ADRA go out of business than to change. Is its role in Christ's mission so unimportant that we should sacrifice it simply in order to avoid the discomfort of learning new ways? I think not. I believe that God does not approve such thinking.

The ADRA board was told over a year ago in a report from its president: "(1) If we want to maintain our role as a development and relief agency, we have to learn to understand the reality and the changing world in which we operate. (2) In order to ensure that ADRA will remain a vital force in the mission and ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we have to respond to the changes in a timely and prudent way. (3) We have to develop a strategy which will help us to become stronger as well as more adapted to these changes."

A 12-page document titled "Advancing Excellence in Development: Positioning ADRA for the Future" details the

elements of a strategic plan. It was presented to the board in October 2011. I have not been told by any of the many individuals I have talked to in preparation for writing this article that there was significant opposition to the document. Most told me that they believe the board accepted it. I have not seen the official minutes.

The plan outlines eight steps for change at ADRA, with detailed action points listed for each step. Step one addresses ADRA's need for missional clarity, rooted in Scripture and focused on Christian values. Action points included holding "a number of conferences and study groups to develop a set of clear biblical concept papers" and asking some of the denomination's best preachers to preach "biblical truths about social responsibility."

Step two "is to create an environment of collaboration" in ADRA. One action point has already been put in place: a vice president for "network relations." Another action point was to establish a "coordination committee" with the division and regional ADRA directors. ADRA directors from the 134 national ADRA organizations need more opportunities to meet, share, and find projects to collaborate on. That does not happen often enough now, in part because outside donors will usually not pay for this kind of meeting. The denomination has to pay for this if it is important.

Step three is "to develop a strategy ... to deal with global emergency issues." ADRA must be able to act more quickly as conditions change and opportunities arise. It cannot wait for proposals to filter in from the front lines and then go through a variety of processes. It needs to be able to "flatten" the network and immediately bring together essential players.

Step four is to build the human resources capacity of the agency. ADRA has done much to provide educational opportunities for its workers. In fact, one ADRA worker told me: "Maybe we've been too successful. Maybe that is why some of our staff have taken jobs elsewhere." Yet, it must continue to enrich and upgrade the knowledge and skills of its workers around the globe.

Step five is to "develop relevant programming." This includes regular assessment to find new kinds of programs that are needed, theological reflection on the kind of programming that should be part of ADRA, and particular attention to how to build "civil society" or grassroots organizations in developing countries. This must involve more than just what ADRA does; it must involve training church leaders, or ADRA will drift further away from the denomination.

Step six is to invest more staff time in dialogue with other development organizations and professionals to keep track of

best practices and emerging issues. Step seven is to increase staff accountability and career planning, and step eight is to increase training for ADRA workers. These last three all relate to rolling out a change process within the organization.


Did the Plan Go Far Enough?

It is impossible to know if it was the process of change that stirred things up among the ADRA staff or if it was entirely some out-of-control personality clash. I have listened to individuals strongly advocate both explanations. I do know that change is upsetting in any organization, and especially among Adventists. When outside pressures are creating the need for change and the picture is complicated, that tends to create even more anxiety in a group. Anxiety, even among adults, plays out in strange ways.

At the risk of creating even more anxiety among my friends at ADRA, I must be honest and say that I don't see in this plan a need to go to the lengths that things went in June. (If you disagree with me, I would love to hear from you.) It appears to me that ADRA needs a new leader who will stir things up even more than this document suggests. All of the board members and the entire staff need to spend two solid weeks in small groups brainstorming: What are the issues? What do we need to do?

They need to listen to some hard-to-hear input from people capable of providing a fresh, outside assessment. They need to spend some quality time together in prayer.

I have a lot of respect for Elder Robert Rawson, the interim administrator. He is a man of wisdom, a good listener, and one who brings calm to a meeting. He also has "no dog in this fight" except his fundamental commitment to the church and Christ's mission. He will give ADRA a solid chance to regroup and reclaim its future.

Nonetheless, the issues will not simply go away. They must be faced and responded to creatively. I believe that God wants ADRA to succeed and that he wants many more young professionals around the world to devote themselves to the ministry of compassion and community transformation. 

Monte Sahlin served as the ADRA director for the North American Division from 1987 to 1998. He is a minister in the Ohio Conference and an adjunct faculty member in the MA program in urban studies at the Tony Campolo Graduate School at Eastern University, teaching courses in community development and community organizing.

¹ See the statement on "Proselytism" at www.adventist.org.

² Ellen White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

GOD ENCOUNTERS

An Initiative to Engage Young Adults Is Still Going Strong After a Decade

ADVENTIST TODAY NEWS STAFF

Studies show that most Americans go to religious services of some kind during childhood and then drop out of church during their young adult years—after they leave high school and up through the time they become parents. This is just as true among Seventh-day Adventists as it is for the rest of the population. Over the past decade, a small number of Adventist ministers have been quietly developing a ministry that has helped thousands of young people establish a strong connection with God, even when they may be disconnected from organized religion.

This initiative is significant because it has sustained its efforts for more than 10 years without becoming an official denominational program. *Adventist Today* interviewed Pastor A. Allan Martin, one of the co-founders. He helped plant the Adventist congregation in Celebration, Florida, the planned city developed by the Disney Corporation. He then taught at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, and more recently he returned to local church ministry as a pastor at the Arlington Adventist Church in the Dallas metropolitan area.

How did GODencounters get started?

In 2000, Pastor Jeff Gang was asked to plan activities for the young adult division of camp meeting in the local conference where we were both serving at the time. The venue could seat about 700 people, but only about 20 or 30 young adults came during the week, mostly because they didn't want to go to the main camp meeting. Jeff asked if I would join him in rethinking what had become routine and irrelevant. We knew we didn't want to perpetuate a faltering program. We wanted to deepen the devotion of new generations to Jesus through worship, so in preparation we spent almost a year gathering with a group of young adults and pastors, praying and dreaming what it might look like.

During that process, we discovered that many of our young

adults had a very myopic view of what worship was. "Worship" was something that happened Saturday mornings for an hour or so; it was something you went to because your parents always did. Reflecting on these perceptions, we found ourselves asking the questions: What if we didn't simply go to worship, but rather made worship a way of life? What if we sought *an encounter with God*, beyond one day a week?

That's how GODencounters was born; now it is an international movement with thousands of young adults involved in spiritual gatherings, private faith practices, and affirming communities in real time and online.

The name itself really presents the core of what we've been trying to do over this past decade: helping young adults encounter God. The heart of our efforts is to see Jeremiah 24:7 come to life for new generations. My loose paraphrase of that text is that God has placed it in our hearts to return to him. It's God's intention to call us his people, and by his initiative we're invited to call him our God.

So GODencounters is not simply a program, or events you attend, or a religious fad you buy into; it's about *heart-hunger*—new generations seeking out God to discover who he really is.

What are the goals of this ministry?

GODencounters is a movement among new generations wholeheartedly pursuing an intimate, 24/7 experience of the living God, recklessly living for his renown. It seeks to deepen devotion to Jesus by developing disciples who walk assuredly in his footsteps. Our desire is to: Live lives of **worship**. Be agents of present **gospel**. **Gracefully** express compassion. **Pray** without ceasing. Embrace **Sabbath** as soul CPR. **Morph** into God's likeness. Celebrate in **Jubilee**.

When we started, we emphasized one of these themes each year. Others, who have started GODencounters where they are, don't necessarily do it this way, but we felt that given the

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mobility of new generations, it was important to try for depth with a theme in the span of a year. Our hope was that by the end of the year, exploring the theme from various angles, individual “GODfollowers” would have gone deeper in their faith practice and understanding of that biblical concept and incorporating it into their lifestyle and values.

We try to express the theme through more than just preaching and teaching at our GODencounters gatherings. We use the visual arts, architecture, design, media, hands-on activities, environmental ambiance, music, and discussion groups. We want participants to comprehend the theme in “languages” they resonate with. We are trying our very best to purposefully introduce young adults to God in “languages” that they speak every day and to inspire them to live intentionally for the sake of God.

Your website says that GODencounters is “not an act or a program, but an every day, every moment way of living.” What does this mean?

Although we relish the spiritual high points afforded in a special gathering, a powerful worship service, or a meaningful event, we’ve challenged ourselves to ask, “So now what?” after the event. We want those who participate to go away thinking, “What does God have to do, if anything, with my mundane Monday?”

Through the GODencounter themes, we are hoping to reveal to each other how God is “in the midst” of every moment and how God is attentive to our every need, desire, and hope. We’re encouraging new generations to become aware of God’s presence in their everyday ordinary lives, to see where God is working in our world, and to join him in what he’s doing.

Beyond “doing,” GODencounters is also interested in “becoming.” Being intentional in deepening our devotion to God emerges from a journey, a process. GODencounters intends to cheer one on as he or she continues the trek to the center of God’s heart.



How many young adults have been affected by this ministry over the past decade?

It’s hard to say precisely, but easily several thousand have been touched by GODencounters since we started. GODencounters gatherings have been held across North America, and we have seen it spring up in other countries. At the last General Conference Session in Atlanta in 2010, more than 3,000 young people attended a GODencounters event on the final weekend.

A book entitled *GODencounters: Pursuing a 24/7 Experience of Jesus* has been published by Pacific Press. With the advent of social media platforms like Facebook and online broadcasting, there are literally thousands more who are joining the movement electronically.

GODencounters are basically retreats for young adults. Can you sketch what actually happens in a weekend?

When GODencounters started, it took the form of a nine-day



camp meeting gathering. It's also been held as a weekend event in a retreat setting and as a conference on a public university campus and in local churches. It really takes the shape that the young adult planners deem best to reach their peers in a given situation. In the Northwest, one church plant has actually incorporated GODencounters into their mission statement and made the themes part of the sermon cycle of their church calendar.

There are many things that happen at GODencounters events, all intended to create opportunities for attendees to personally and corporately experience Christ Jesus. Beyond worship sessions, concerts, service projects, and seminars, there are some unique activities at GODencounters, including a prayer room and the Encounters Café.

When we first started GODencounters, a couple of young adults who owned an interior design business wanted to contribute their skills to the events. So they asked permission to transform a couple of classrooms into prayer rooms, where young adults could express their prayers in creative and multisensory ways. It's been amazing to witness the enthusiasm of young adults with design skills to be involved, and over the years many attendees have expressed that some of their most memorable encounters with God have come in these sacred spaces.

Encounters Café was invented because our first GODencounters planning group recognized that the "real"

What Kind of Impact Has GODencounters Had on Young Adults?

Pastor A. Allan Martin shared with *Adventist Today* the feedback written by some of the participants in these gatherings. Some of the names and other key details have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals. All gave permission for these stories to be shared.

Sharon, age 22: "I have felt far from God for awhile now and in need of spiritual renewal and counsel. I've embraced the practical advice of GODencounters and, through the Holy Spirit, have put my feet and eyes back on the path."

Mark, age 24, graduate student: "For anyone whose spiritual well had run dry, GODencounters is a refreshing return to the Source. It goes beyond a church service or a sermon; it describes a way of life. It has opened my eyes to new ways to pursue this relationship with God. It has let me know I'm not alone, either... Amidst our inauthentic culture, GODencounters is real!"

Erin, age 31: "GODencounters is a refreshing and renewing reminder of what kind of follower of Christ I want to be. More of my time in this world needs to be spent in constant communion with GOD and those He loves."

Roger, age 17: "GODencounters has taught me to be still with God, allowing the sacred space in my life to be filled by His presence."

Bruce Pearson, age 23, guitarist and vocalist with Garage Voice: "The most exciting thing about GODencounters is the way it challenges young people to fully engage with Christ; to spend time in the Word and in prayer; to have Christ become a part of their thoughts—and who they are. Equally important is the realization that Christ is coming soon and that there is work to be done. If young people connect with this truth, it will shape their life purpose and set Christ free to work in their lives."

Aaron Roche, age 25, songwriter/musician: "This revolution is a quiet one. It can be found everywhere, everyday. It's knowing your neighbors; it's a letter to a lonely friend; it's a good word at the right time. It's opening the door for someone; it's siding with the poor; it's rejoicing in the success of others. It's poetry, music, science, achievements, failures. It is encountering God together in the time we have been given. When we become aware of the profound workings of eternity in the light of the common day, our hearts cry out to the Author of all things and with eyes as wide as children's and arms as wide as grandparents', we experience GODencounters."

meeting for young adults often occurs after the program, in the parking lot or at some local restaurant; so we decided to create a place—a café-styled space—for fellowship and conversations to occur informally. Encounters Café creates a casual, comfortable place where young adults are invited to chat, enjoy refreshments, and relax. Inevitably many of the conversations have turned from small talk to discussions about life and God. It's been amazing to see how God has worked in Encounters Café activities. While young adults are making new friends and sharing life stories, it's fascinating to see how God shows up in the midst of the relationships they are building.

Will secular young adults actually come to an event where God and religion are going to be talked about?

Young adults in general have a great fascination with God and spirituality. Some also have skepticism about organized religion. Many are disenchanted with those who claim to be Christians while acting contrary to the ideals Christ espoused. I have observed that young adults are less interested in going to an “event” that talks about God or religion; they crave a personal experience with the living God. Young adults are not the only ones who crave this type of encounter. We always have some outside the “young adult” age group who attend our gatherings.

What kind of young adult is most likely to have a good experience at a GODencounters weekend?

That's an intriguing question. As I've watched God work through the GODencounters movement, I've come to believe even more fervently that God is the One who lays it on our hearts to seek him. “I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart” (Jer. 24:7, NIV).

It's my hope that any young adult who attends a GODencounters gathering or pursues Christ through the other GODencounters activities will experience how very good God is. I've been blessed to be a witness to God's faithfulness in sharing his “goodness” through the years. I'm grateful to be a small part of what he's doing through GODencounters.

What have you learned over the decade? Is there anything you do differently now than when you started?

It feels like we are constantly learning, and in some ways that is exactly as one would expect it to be if you are pursuing encounters with God. God continues to be fascinating, full of surprises, and yet so faithful to his Word. I hope that with each generation we

continue to learn and grow, able to contextualize the expressions of the movement to the pulse of where God is working in young hearts and moving in young lives.

How has this ministry survived for a full decade? Will you keep going?


I sincerely believe God must be credited for sustaining this and making it a movement. It's been amazing and inspiring to see God transform young adult lives through the years. I believe God is the one keeping it going, and I'm just honored to be along for the ride.

That GODencounters continues to grow is a blessing, and with growth there are all of the various idiosyncrasies that make you cringe, cry, and celebrate. Like anything in life, GODencounters can be messy. Our “successes” are mixed with our “setbacks,” and truth be told, some of our best moments may have been deemed as accidents at that moment. Some of our most intimate times with God have been less than glorious, when we have been most desperate for him.

God always finds ways to encourage and humble us, so as we have the honor of participating in GODencounters, it really is beyond our control or direct manipulation. Faith and trust in God plays a major role in it. What has been amazing and affirming is to watch as God brings up “on the radar” these seemingly unconnected blips, all resonating with his intention to return us to his heart. Can we take credit for that? No! But we can certainly ride the amazing wave. And it has been quite a ride.

Where can we find out more about GODencounters?

Thanks to young adults, there are a variety of online resources to help you discover more: www.GODencounters.org links you to our Facebook page filled with information and interactivity, including dates of upcoming events. There is also a Facebook group at www.facebook.com/groups/GODencounters/ where people around the world build online community. There is free downloadable music MP3s from young adult artists involved with GODencounters at <http://music.GODencounters.org/> and digital videos of presentations at GODencounters events at <http://media.GODencounters.org/> as well as devotional readings at <http://blog.GODencounters.org/>. GODencounters can also be accessed through Google at <http://plus.GODencounters.org/> and Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/GETweets>.

For those interested in organizing a GODencounters event or group in their church or community, a Starter Pak can be obtained at <http://db.tt/iP8Y3nG1>. Questions can be sent by email to info@GODencounters.org by individuals or on behalf of local groups. 



A Quantum Paradox of Time *and* Providence

DEATH BEFORE SIN AND MAN'S FALL AFTERWARD AS ITS CAUSE

By Darrel Lindensmith

Due to the fact that many seem to feel a load of increasing evidence in the fossil record of death in nature before the creation of men and women, it's prudent to examine our assumptions. God is the author of all truth, paleontological and theological.

As a theological thought experiment, let's say for the sake of discussion that there is geological evidence of death in nature before man's fall in sin. Would this be a defeater for the biblical teaching that death is the result of sin?

Four Assumptions for This Experiment

1. The Creator makes the universe an “open system,” where cause and effect operate to allow free choice.
2. Death is a *result of sin and a precondition* for sin, to put a check on evil and to allow as many individuals as possible to “have their turn” at freely choosing good or evil, until the judgment.
3. The Creator provides for adaptation—fangs and camouflaging in animals, and powerful brains and moral consciences in humans—to prevent complete destruction in creation due to competition.
4. The Creator's ultimate goal would be to avoid human perfection via preprogramming. The Creator would give first priority to free choice, yet direct mankind through moral enlightenment and in the end garner the good and reject the bad without gaming the system in his favor.¹

Leibniz' Theodicy

Gottfried Leibniz, who coined the word *theodicy*, maintained that God, being omniscient, started out by considering all possible worlds. Then God compared them in all respects (preprogramming vs. self-programming) to figure out which was the best.

Leibniz's argument asks us to think of how God could have done it better. The philosopher Voltaire took up the challenge and ridiculed Leibniz's position in his *Candide*. He parodies Leibniz's argument as Alexander Pope's version in *Essay on Man*, writing, “whatever is, is right.” This is not at all what Leibniz means or what this article argues. Rather, God's design of the world is best *overall*, given that “freedom” is in operation at some level. God chooses what is “best on the whole,”² given this fact.

Imagine, Leibniz says, a world without suffering. How would we understand the good? We need to understand suffering to experience joy.³ Looking at a canvas very closely, what we see is unorganized and without beauty. If we could step back and view the canvas as a whole, we would see that the painting is purposeful and beautiful.⁴

What Follows

Foreknowing the complete array of outcomes from this “free system,” the Creator would predesign creation for a world of cause and effect, where selfishness and free choice would exert selective pressures (i.e., lions would need teeth and gazelles would need speed). Things would die!

Another central assumption in this thought experiment is that God cannot do the logically impossible. God cannot create a married bachelor. God cannot create a mostly free and autonomous system where wrong choices will never be made.

If God would create a closed system with no free choice, it would be like the garden without the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” peopled by totally ignorant beings, unable to relate as rational creatures.

Augustine, in his apologetics manual *The Enchiridion*, writes that “God judged it better to bring good out of evil than not to permit any evil to exist.”⁵

The Creator made possible the above outcome by creating beings with free will and moral aptitude (conscience), thus putting “enmity between” evil and good in mankind—“between thy seed and her seed” (Gen. 3:15, KJV). Man would be created to understand ethics and be blessed with the gift of reason and a disgust of evil.

The Creator would arrive at true perfection by the “long route,” creating beings that were both free *and good* through a process of failure and learning and choice. Charles Kingsley, of Westminster Abbey, in his 1871 lecture on “The Natural Theology of the Future,” singled out Darwin's views on adaptation, stating: “We knew of old that God was so wise that He could make all things; but behold, He is so much wiser than even that, that He can make all things make themselves.”⁶

This desire for freedom and goodness would be the compulsion

that would drive the progress of human cultures.

The gravamen of this view is that the Creator *would not* coerce man's moral development. Mankind must freely choose the good and reject evil. God would not *directly* intervene.

As Blaise Pascal put it: “[God] so regulates the knowledge of Himself that He has given signs of Himself, visible to those who seek Him, and not to those who seek Him not. There is enough light for those who only desire to see, and enough obscurity for those who have a contrary disposition.”⁷

The Creator would foreknow that free choice would allow wrong choices; sin would be a reality in this situation of freedom, and thus the Creator designed nature to work under the conditions of natural selection.

Provision One

The Creator, before he created, took responsibility for *all* of the effects of freedom that “open creation” would unleash in human society. God did this by punishing himself on the Cross, taking the responsibility for our sin. God did this from the beginning. Christ was “foreordained *before the foundation of the world*, but was manifested in these last times for you” (1 Pet. 1:20, KJV, emphasis added).

“The Lamb *slain from the foundation of the world* (Rev. 13:8, KJV, emphasis added).

We see from these verses that the Creator, from his eternity, saw and reacted to the sin situation before it “happened” in the stream of Earth-based time! If this were not so, then when mankind first sinned, Adam and Eve would have died *that very day* (see Gen. 2:17).

Symbols of the Cross were placed on mankind even before the event that the symbols pointed to actually happened. “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21, KJV).


The need for Calvary was “foreknown,” and the benefits of the Cross were proactively applied. “Who saved us ... according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ *before the world began*” (2 Tim. 1:9, KJV, emphasis added).

Provision Two

The reality of the death of Christ on Calvary was proactively applied to mankind in the garden, thousands of years *before* the event. In the same way, the effects of sin—death—were applied to nature *before* creation. The Creator, before he created, would foreknow perfectly the negative outcomes due to free choice, and *from the beginning* he would design nature with the ability to adapt and to maintain balance.

Nature was “made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of *him who hath subjected the same in hope*” (Rom. 8:20, KJV, emphasis added). This is not referring to Adam, but to God. Death and predation—“vanity,” according to Paul—would be a reality until the “restoration of all things” (Acts 3:21, NKJV). But God offers hope. The Creator, in the final day, would free nature from this “bondage of corruption” (Rom. 8:21, KJV).

There is an inner sense in human hearts that something is wrong with this world. There is a sense not only of God, but a strong sense that God is good. Our desire and hope for a “better world” resonates with Scripture’s promise in this passage. In the New Creation, mankind and all of nature will experience freedom *and* Perfection;⁸ goodness will be realized on Earth, as it is in heaven.⁹

“The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:18-19, KJV). 

Darrel Lindensmith is the pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Fargo, North Dakota.

¹ “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn” (Matt. 13:24-30, KJV).

² Gottfried Leibniz, *Theodicy* (la Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1990), p. 196.

³ Emily Dickinson expressed in a powerful poetic form this truth of human nature regarding suffering and learning:

“Earth would have been too much, I see,
And heaven not enough for me;
I should have had the joy
Without the fear to justify,—
The palm without the Calvary;
So, Saviour, crucify.

Defeat whets victory, they say;
The reefs in old Gethsemane
Endear the shore beyond.

’T is beggars banquets best define;
’T is thirsting vitalizes wine,—
Faith faints to understand.”

⁴ Gottfried Leibniz, “On the Radical Origination of Things,” in *Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters* (1697), edited by Leroy Loemker (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1969), pp. 488-489.

⁵ Augustine, “The Plight of Man After the Fall,” *Enchiridion* (translated by Albert C. Outler), point 27. See <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/enchiridion.txt>

⁶ Charles Kingsley, “The Natural Theology of the Future,” read at Sion College Jan. 10, 1871, published in *Scientific Lectures and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1880), p. 332.

⁷ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, No. 430 under “Morality and Doctrine;” see also “Paradox of the Greatness and Wretchedness of Man” excerpt at http://www.monergism.com/paradox_of_the_greatness_and_w.php.

⁸ C.S. Lewis states in his book *Miracles* (pp. 196-197) that God in his omniscience “saw that from a world of free creatures, even though they fell, He could work out a deeper happiness and a fuller splendour than any world of automata would admit.”

⁹ Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote in *The Brothers Karamazov* (pp. 247-248): “I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage, like the despicable fabrication of the impotent and infinitely small Euclidean mind of man, that in the world’s finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, of all the blood they’ve shed; that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened with men.”



Making Peace With Change

By Alden Thompson

Like most “conservative” Christians who believe in a personal God, Adventists resist admitting change in beliefs and practices. But the list is impressive: no more stoning, death penalty, blood vengeance, cities of refuge, or animal sacrifice. And that’s just a start.

In the New Testaments, changes take place before our very eyes. In Acts 10 and 11, for example, the distinction between Jew and Gentile begins to fall; the Jewish observers were “astonished” (Acts 10:45). In Acts 15 and 16, circumcision moves from mandatory to optional.

Some significant changes take place after the close of the New Testament. Liberation for slaves and the equality of men and women are not clearly taught in the New Testament, though Jesus’ example points in that direction.

In Adventism, the *Testimonies* document change in lifestyle. In 1859, for example, Ellen White exclaimed: “The small bonnets, exposing the face and head, show a lack of modesty.”¹ In doctrine, the acceptance of the trinity is the most stunning example, and here Ellen White led the way, writing in 1898: “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, undivided.”²

According to George Knight, M.L. Andreasen called that line “unbelievable.” “That statement may not seem very revolutionary to you,” he told an audience in 1948, “but to us it was. We could hardly believe it.”³

The change is indeed striking, for in

1852 James White referred to “that old trinitarian absurdity,” a passage cited by Knight⁴ but watered down to “the ‘old trinitarian’ idea” in the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*.⁵ It is not easy for the church to show the contrast between old and new.

Our current statement of fundamental beliefs offers a good example of how modern Adventism has inched toward recognizing change. In 1980 the delegates at the General Conference voted a statement of beliefs that included a preamble with a surprising last sentence: “Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teaching of God’s Holy Word.”

The idea of “revision” was apparently so distasteful to some church leaders that the preamble was completed omitted from the first edition of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe ...*, the 1988 ministerial association’s commentary on our beliefs.⁶

In my History of Adventism class, comparing our statements of belief is important: the first unofficial statement (1872), the first official statement (1931), and the first official statement discussed and voted at a full General Conference in session. Because the differences in the preambles are significant, I was stunned by the omission in the ministerial association’s book. By the third printing 10 months later (March 1989), however,

the preamble appears in the book’s front matter, a step in the right direction.

The next step came after the church voted belief No. 28 in 2005. Listed as No. 11 in our current statement, it addresses the problem of demon worship in Africa, where new believers are often haunted by demons, even after becoming Christians. The preamble’s reference to “revision” was crucial as the church prepared to expand its statement of beliefs.

Thus, in the 2005 edition of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, the preamble figures prominently in the front matter. It still isn’t part of the main body of the book, but it is more visible, and that’s good.

If eager “liberals” and cautious “conservatives” can work together, the church will move forward at an appropriate pace. Typically changes happen quietly, without fanfare—like the dropping of circumcision from the list of requirements at the first General Conference in Acts 15. We know that change comes. We also need to know that it usually comes very slowly.

¹ *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1868), p. 188.

² *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), p. 530.

³ George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), pp. 116-117.

⁴ *Search*, p. 111, citing *The Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*, Aug. 5, 1852, p. 52.

⁵ “Christology,” in *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, revised edition (Takoma Park, MD: Review & Herald, 1976), p. 287.

⁶ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe. . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Ministerial Association, General Conference of SDA, 1988).



I would like to respond briefly to the article by Dr. Roger N. Trubey in your March-April 2012 issue. The main points of his article are well taken, and I fully agree with his summary of *The China Study*, having recently presented a similar opinion and having similar concerns about the improper weight given to this study by many Adventists. While we may agree with many of Dr. Campbell's conclusions in that study, it is important for credibility that the evidence we cite in favor of certain lifestyles does truly support our statements. The China Project cannot do this, but several other good studies found in peer-reviewed medical journals can properly be quoted.

It is not my purpose to write in support of our own studies here at Loma Linda, as they need no such support, being generally accepted as high quality, although inevitably not always conclusive. Rather, I would like to disagree with some points expressed by Dr. Trubey that in fact were quite ancillary to his main points, but somehow were included. We have nearly 100,000 Adventists from all over the United States and Canada who are presently participating in Adventist Health Study-2 (AHS-2), a traditional

cohort study that has had great attention given to design and analysis. On behalf of study members, I feel compelled to respond to doubtful information about studies of this sort that appears in church publications such as *Adventist Today*.

First, Dr. Trubey stated that observational studies (AHS-2 is one of these) “can never yield proof of anything” and that one must rely on “randomized controlled trials to determine proof.” Determining causality is a very tricky business, and I would agree that observational studies may never give final unequivocal evidence of causality. However, a critical difference—one of many—between AHS-2 and the China Project is that information about diet and other habits was obtained from each individual, rather than just summaries of data from whole regions of a country. Individual-based data is a characteristic of any good observational study.

It is a common belief, particularly of clinicians, that randomized trials do provide evidence of causality. Unfortunately, in most instances relating to preventive medicine, the “proof” they provide has very limited practical application. The problem that is increasingly recognized is that such trials, being very expensive, must be relatively short-term—and even a few years may be quite insufficient to test cancer hypotheses, as these disorders develop over decades. Secondly, typically less than 10 percent of persons who are initially screened for entry to such studies finally become enrolled. In order to preserve the required balance and to rule out other confounding influences, the study populations are usually so special that the results must be applied with real caution to real-life more inclusive groups of patients and community members. On the other hand, longitudinal

observational studies do not suffer these problems but do require very careful analysis and thoughtful interpretation.

Consequently, in the end, evidence for causality among large population groups is never unequivocal but becomes more and more certain with each supporting study. This is particularly true if these studies represent both observational and experimental designs and include a variety of different populations.

Also in need of comment is Dr. Trubey's reference to the Framingham Heart Study and that Dr. William Castelli (director of that study at the time) made comment in an editorial on our work in *Adventists*, stating, “In Framingham, ... the more saturated fat one ate, the more cholesterol one ate, the more calories one ate, the lower the person's serum cholesterol.” It is not entirely clear what Dr. Trubey's motivation was in referring to this, but Castelli's article was somewhat “tongue in cheek” commenting on our work, which strongly suggested that nut consumption was associated with reduced rates of heart attack.

Time has shown that this was not Castelli's strongest moment! Our initial evidence in favor of nut consumption is now supported by the Nurses' Health Study from Harvard, the Iowa Women's Study, the large European EPIC Study, and also by a large number of small randomized feeding trials showing that moderate nut consumption reduces serum cholesterol. While the Framingham study was a landmark study when relating blood cholesterol, blood pressure, smoking, diabetes, and physical inactivity to risk of heart attack, it was a very inadequate design to address any questions relating to diet. This is not at all controversial today, but it was apparently not well understood by Castelli at that time. Today it is well established by both observational and



Commenters Needed!

At our *Adventist Today* staff meetings, “what the Church needs” is always a topic that generates shouting, table thumping, and the throwing of No. 2 pencils.

“Know what Adventism needs?” I insisted at last Thursday’s gathering. “Adventism needs more commenters.”

“You mean commen-tators?” someone asked.

“Leave carbohydrates out of it,” I snapped.

“I mean *commenters*—the people who post their comments below the articles on Adventist websites. Haven’t you noticed that it’s often just the same three or four kinds of people going ‘round and ‘round?”

“Hear, hear,” someone growled.

“There, there,” said another soothingly, retaining a No. 2 pencil long enough to record both the notes and the proposal our meeting finally generated. First we listed the usual commenter types one often sees on these sites:

The Old Crank. Let’s call this type a “he” so we won’t have to play “he-or-she hopscotch” all day. This person evidently has stomach problems, but for some reason he avoids Maalox and Prilosec and eschews (rather than chews) Roloids. He thus brings a bleak and dyspeptic attitude to everything. Sometimes the Old Crank gets so

trial data that saturated fat increases serum cholesterol and, to a lesser extent, that dietary cholesterol also increases serum cholesterol and that overweight is associated with higher levels of LDL (bad) and lower levels of HDL (good) cholesterol.

Finally, Dr. Trubey’s apparent suggestion that wheat consumption may be related importantly to many different diseases, including “almost

Adventist Man

A SATIRICAL LOOK AT ADVENTIST LIFE

caustic that you wonder why he even bothers with the Adventist church any more. Yet if an online topic pushes his button, he’s back in a jiffy with the old familiar splash of battery acid.

The Doofus. (Shall we say “she” to be fair to both sexes? Except the Doofuses always seem to be guys, so let’s call him “he.”) The Doofus brings with him a bucket of anger-grenades, a disinclination to understand or even entirely read the article on which he’s commenting, and an inability to spell or capitalize correctly, as though e e cummings had grown up in a gang, with an attitude. The Doofus not only draws all the wrong conclusions from the article, but often descends so deeply into personalities that he has to be warned by the website’s watchdog.

The Pollyanna. The Pollyanna, who can spell impeccably and has neither stomach nor anger problems, always assumes that the Old Crank and the Doofus just need a bit of mellowing, and that she—we finally break the gender barrier here—can pull this off with huge scoopshovels of glad, glad, glad. No matter how often the Doofus questions her sanity or how many times the Old Crank lashes her with scathing sarcasm, she remains earnest and upbeat.

The Wise One. The Wise One has read the article completely, formed carefully buttressed rebuttals if such are needed, and cherishes the hope—even in an online arena, in which absolutely anyone and his or her pet pug can join any discussion at any time—that reasoned discourse will eventually prevail. The Wise One, however, is a realist. He keeps a couple of bottles of Maalox in the fridge and is often to be seen with a white chalk ring around his lips.

all autoimmune diseases,” is highly controversial in any application to the whole population. Clearly gluten (from wheat) is a real problem for those unfortunate individuals suffering from gluten enteropathy, but for other persons, causal associations between wheat and a wide variety of other disorders is highly speculative at best. The quoted *New England Journal of Medicine* article does not imply otherwise. It is certainly

So here’s our proposal, and you can help. Become a commenter! Here are some suggested personas to adopt:

The Aging Hippie. This commenter’s responsibility would be to quote from Lennon, or even Lenin, and say, “All we are saying is give peace a chance,” and “It’s all relative, man,” and “Power to the people,” thus needling the Doofus into leaving in a huff.

The Bufferer. This person’s purpose is to fill the screen with so much material that the Doofus (until he leaves in the abovementioned huff) won’t have the patience to scroll all the way up to Pollyanna’s last comment and explode another grenade. The Bufferer must always use dense paragraphs with no breaks, or obscure links which must be laboriously scrolled through to discover the one sentence that might bear vaguely on the issue at hand.

The Metaphorists. We also need people who can offer sports metaphors for the topic at hand (“Wow! That was a three-pointer!” and “Let’s keep our eye on the ball!”). Someone else could provide farming metaphors (“Whoops! *That* gopher never made it across the highway,” or “What sale barn did you buy *that* sow at?”).

And that, of course, is only the beginning. We need your help, and right speedily. Create a persona, sign on to future discussions, and do your part!

Do you have a tough question? Adventist Man has “the answer.” As a former member of “the remnant of the remnant,” Adventist Man was ranked 8,391 of the 144,000—and working his way up. Now he relies solely on grace and friendship with Jesus. You can email him at atoday@atoday.org.

puzzling that Dr. Trubey quotes support for adverse effects of wheat from correlations in the China Project. As he has so aptly pointed out, correlations from that study cannot provide any evidence of causality.

Nevertheless, we should all thank Dr. Trubey for his much-needed and illuminating critique of *The China Study*.

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Adventist Today Update



TOO MUCH “SPIN” CAN RUIN A WEB SITE

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