

General Conference Session In Review

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

On Saturday July 8, 2000, came to a close the 57th Session of the General Conference of SDA. For 10 days my wife and I were privileged to watch Adventists from every corner of the globe visiting our BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE booth and streaming into the SkyDome to hear the heart-warming reports about the unprecedented growth of the Adventist church, especially in developing countries.

For many Adventists living in isolated areas and attending small congregations, it must have been a thrilling experience to discover the international magnitude of the Adventist mission. It must have been reassuring for them to see that the Adventist church is alive and well in many parts of the world. General Conference sessions afford the opportunity to see Adventism in all its diversity.

I was made forcefully aware of the diversity of the Adventist Church especially on the last Sabbath, July 8, 2000, while I was trying to exit from the SkyDome. I found myself pressed on all sides by a multitude of fellow believers, most of whom were Blacks, Hispanics, and Orientals. It was evident that Caucasian Adventists are becoming an engendered species in the Adventist Church, making up less than 10% of the global membership.

What a change has occurred since 1848 when our church had only 100 believers, living mostly in the New England area! To them Ellen White's vision about the printed page someday encircling the world like streams of light, must have seemed like day dreaming. Truly, the impossible has happened, thanks to the providential leading of the Lord.

Coming from Rome, Italy, I could not help but make the comparison between the over 30 million pilgrims who are flocking to Rome this year during the Grand Jubilee 2000 to receive plenary indulgences, (that is, the full remission from the temporal punishments of their sins), and the 60 to 70 thousand Adventists who came to Toronto, to capture a new vision of the endtime mission of the Adventist church today.

A General Conference Session affords an opportunity to gauge the theological and spiritual temperature of the church and to define new goals and strategies for the coming years. It also provides an opportunity to see first hand what are some of the challenges and issues facing the church today.

No attempt will be made in this newsletter to report on all speeches, resolutions, and nominations done during the General Conference Session. Such information is readily available on the *ADVENTIST REVIEW*. My comments will be limited to few items that caught my attention.

MESSAGE VERSUS METHODS

The evening reports from the various world Divisions, seemed to underscore a difference between message and methods in the church growth strategies in different parts of the world. For example, the report from the North American Division was built around the theme "This is My Church," and focused primarily on the various methods and programs sponsored by the church in this territory. During the course of the report I was hoping that some of the testimonies about "This is My Church" would mention also how the Adventist message has brought new meaning, faith, and hope to the life of many people. However, references to the Adventist message were minimal, presumably because Church growth in industrialized countries seems to be largely linked to the implementation various programs and worship styles.

By contrast, the reports from Africa, Inter-America, South America, former communist countries and Asia-Pacific Division dealt more with the proclamation of the Adventist message, not only by evangelists, but also by the laity, women, youth. Adventist women and youth in the so-called third world are at the forefront of evangelism and soul-winning. They are not going around presenting frivolous youth programs with drama, puppets, and beat music, masquerading them as evangelism. Instead, their passion is to share the Good News of the Risen Savior who is working hard in the heavenly sanctuary to bring to speedy consummation His redemption achieved on the Cross.

The interest for a deeper understanding of the Adventist Message on the part of delegates and visitors from developing countries, was most evident at our BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES booth. Their attention was caught by the display of my 16 books dealing with such fundamental Adventist beliefs as the Sabbath, the Second Advent, the State of the Dead, Christian Dress and Adornment, the biblical imperative of total abstinence, the role of women in the church, Christian Marriage, etc.

Their eagerness to deepen their understanding and experience of the Adventist message was evidenced by the financial sacrifice they were willing to make to purchase the whole set of my 16 books. Initially, I had planned to offer the complete package of my 16 books at 50% discount, that is, for only \$150.00, instead of the regular price of \$305.00. But when they made me aware of the fact that for some of them \$150.00 represents two months salary, I felt compelled to reduce the price to \$100.00 and much less for those with limited financial means.

The response was overwhelming. Church leaders from countries like Romania, Russia, Poland, Philippines, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, etc., were most eager to order a complete set for all their workers. The result is that during the coming weeks we will be busy shipping these timely publications to our fellow believers who can read English.

EXTENSION OF THE GC SESSION SPECIAL OFFER

A number of people from overseas who learned about the special offer on my books we gave at the GC Session, have already contacted me to find out if I would extend to them also the special offer of US\$100.00 for the complete set of 16 books. To be fair to those who were not privileged to attend the GC Session, I decided to extend the offer to ALL the ENDTIME ISSUES subscribers until August 15, 2000.

What this means is that for the next month, until August 15, 2000, anyone who receives this newsletter, whether living in North America or overseas, can order the complete set of my 16 books for only US\$100.00, instead of the regular price of \$305.00. The special price includes the mailing expenses, even for overseas, which usually runs about \$15.00 for the set. A listing and description of the 16 books is found at my website: <http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com>

Please DO NOT ORDER your set of books through the shopping cart service provided at my website, because no special prices are given there. Instead, send your order directly to me by mail or email. If you wish to pay by check, send you order to 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, MI 49103. If you can pay by credit card, email your order to sbacchiocchi@qtm.net or call us at (616) 471-2915. An order form for your use is provided at the end of this newsletter.

THE MUSIC CONTROVERSY

The controversy over the use of rock type of music in church services was evident even at the General Conference session. For the sake of accuracy it must be stated that the music at the two Sabbath morning services, as well as at most of the evening services, was of superb quality. There were few programs, however, where inappropriate beat music was played.

Many fellow believers came to our booth to express their concerns about the type of music played, especially at youth programs. Let me share with you the email message received from a 22 years old young man living in Toronto who attended the youth program at the SkyDome on the first Sabbath, July 1, 2000. He wrote:

"I am a 22 years old young man who just recently graduated from university. ... I attended the youth program at the SkyDome on the first Sabbath, July 1st 2000. The program opened with the singing of Hymns. Different choirs went on the stage to sing hymns to the glory of God. However, soon some of these "choir" began singing with very loud background beat music. I know that each person is different with regards to the tolerance level for certain beat type of music. But the music was very loud, and the beat reminded me of songs that are usually played on today's rock radio stations. To my surprise however, many people responded positively to this style of music by means of hand clapping or waving. . . .

"I sincerely doubt whether all the cheering, hand clapping and screaming that took place that morning showed much reverence towards God. I felt embarrassed to being there. I was certainly glad that the few friends (whom are not church member and whom have never attended any of our church meetings) I had asked to join me on that one Sabbath, ended up not being able to come. When I was baptized I did so with the idea that Sabbath was the day when we put aside our daily concerns and attend church to express our gratitude to the Lord in a reverent manner. Attending that meeting on that morning showed me that the behavior of some people is too extreme and irreverential."

The problem was not limited to the youth programs. A colleague from Andrews who teaches at the Seminary told me that he walked out from one of the meetings of the World Ministers Council because the music was very offensive to him. It appears that the Ministerial Association of the General Conference supports the use of beat music for worship and evangelism as part of the church planting strategy to reach the Baby Boomers who have grown up addicted to beat music. This issue is discussed at some length in our new book ***The Christian and Rock Music: A Study of Biblical Principles of Music***, where recent articles from Adventist publications are examined.

My wife and I were deeply offended by the African children's choir that was featured to introduce their report of the Trans-European Division on Saturday evening, July 1, 2000. Together with a good number of other people we left the meeting after their dancing. The children had been staged to sing and dance a bugi-bugi type of beat dance that I have never seen played at Adventist church gatherings in Africa. I have traveled extensively through Ethiopia, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, but I have never seen young people or adults dancing at the sound of beat music for worship.

I asked several of our African leaders if our congregations in Africa are now adopting rocky type dancing music for their church services. Their answers were unequivocal. No beat, dancing music is ever played in our African church services, because such music is associated with their former pagan life-style. However, in rare instances there are bands recently organized by people who want to introduce the Western style of pop and rock music to Africa. But they have not been well received so far. The native music and singing of our African believers, may sound monotonous to Westerners because of the small range of notes, but it is their sacred music for worship. Such music is clearly different from the secular dancing music of their pagan neighbors.

The music issue was deeply felt during the GC Session. Many people came to our booth to share their distress and to buy copies of our new book ***The Christian and Rock Music: A Study of Biblical Principles of Music***. The demand was such that our supply which was meant to last for 10 days, run out after only two days. Even the second shipment we received lasted only few hours. People would buy a copy of the book, read few pages or chapters at night, and then they came back the next day to order a case of 26 copies at the special price of \$170.00, postage paid. **This translates to \$6.50 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$20.00.** Incidentally this special offer is still valid. If the book has thrilled your soul and you wish to order a case for your church, call us at (616) 471-2915, and we will mail you a case immediately. The special \$170.00 for a case of 26 copies, includes the mailing expenses, even overseas.

IS THE MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION PROMOTING SUNDAY WORSHIP?

A brother came to our booth during the GC session, exclaiming: "Dr. Bacchiocchi, did you know that the General Conference Ministerial Association is selling a book that promotes Sunday observance?" "It cannot be. You must be joking," I replied. "Come with me," he said. I followed him to the booth of the Ministerial Association, where he picked up a copy of the book ***Confessions of a Nomad: What We Learned in Sinai's Shadow***, authored by Carolyn Shealy Self and William L. Self, and asked me to read the following two paragraphs from page 118:

"The early Christians were obsessed with the fact that they came out of a Jewish background. Yet God did something new and real for them in the Easter experience, so they would have the Sabbath, and they would gather together as the Christian sect on Sunday morning and celebrate the resurrection.

"But there is a difference between the Sabbath and Sunday. You work until the Sabbath, and then you rest. Sunday is the day that gives you strength to work the six days in front of you. The Sabbath is the end of the week; Sunday is the beginning. The Sabbath is from sundown to sundown, but Sunday is from midnight to midnight. The Sabbath is a day of rest, but Sunday is a day of worship. The Sabbath has a penalty to it, if you break it; Sunday has no penalty, except that you shortchange yourself."

Similar ideas are expressed on pages 31, 75, and 86 of the book, which is largely a meditation on the Ten Commandments. Overall the book does contain some insightful concepts on the Decalogue, but the authors are grossly mistaken about the origin of Sunday and the relationship between Sabbath and Sunday.

The early Jewish Christians were not "were obsessed with the fact that they came out of a Jewish background," because they viewed themselves as believing Jews who were "zealous for the law" (Acts 21:20). They did not come together early Sunday morning to celebrate Christ's resurrection. There are ample evidences that Jewish Christians continued in the observance of the Sabbath until the fourth centuries, as attested by the Palestinian Historian Epiphanius (A. D. 350). The first reference to early Sunday morning gatherings refers to Gentile Christians and comes to us from *I Apology* 67 of Justin Martyr, who wrote from Rome, Italy, about A. D. 150.

Twice Justin underlines that the assembly of Gentile Christians took place "on the day of the Sun." "On the day which is called Day of the Sun (*te tou eliou legomene hemera*) we have a common assembly of all who live in the cities or in the outlying districts, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the Prophets are read, as long as there is time. The Day of the Sun indeed, is the day on which we all hold our common assembly because it is the first day on which God, transforming the darkness and prime matter, created the world; and our Savior Jesus Christ arose from the dead on the same day (*I Apology* 67:3-5).

Gentile, rather than Jewish Christians, assembled early on the Day of the Sun, to show to the Roman authorities their identification with pagan Sun-worship and their distinction from the Jews, at a time when Judaism in general and Sabbathkeeping in particular were proscribed by Roman law. The first reason given for such Sunday gathering is the creation of the light on the first day of creation week. This question is discussed at great length in my dissertation ***From Sabbath to Sunday***.

Contrary to what the Selfs wrote, Sunday did not originate as a "DAY of worship." Instead, it began as an HOUR of worship. In spite of the efforts made by Constantine (A. D. 321 Sunday Law), church councils, Popes, and Puritans, Sunday has largely remained an hour of worship followed by secular activities. The recognition of this historical reality has led the Catholic Church to introduce the Saturday evening Mass for those who cannot make it to church on Sunday. Over 10,000 Protestant churches have already adopted the same practice, including the Willow Creek Community Church in suburban

Chicago, which has two Saturday evening services for those who find it inconvenient to go to church on Sunday.

The attempt of the Selfs to differentiate between the Sabbath as a day of rest and Sunday as a day of worship, is based on the ignorance of the fact that in the Bible the act of resting on the Sabbath is an act of worship, because the Sabbath rest is not self-centered, but God-centered. We do not rest unto ourselves, but "unto the Lord." We stop our work to allow God to work in us more fully and freely (Heb 4:10). It is the act of resting unto the Lord that makes the worship experience possible.

Much more could be said to expose the senselessness of what the Selfs wrote about the Sabbath, but what concerns me at this juncture is the fact that the book has a 1998 copyright by the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Originally the book was published in 1983 by the Peachtree Publishers. Apparently the Ministerial Association received the permission to reprint it, with editorial modifications, because its says: "All copy has been reset and repaginated. Several short portions have been edited to conserve space" (p. 2).

Frankly, I wish that the Ministerial Association would have edited the portions of the books which promote Sunday observance. At least they could have put a disclaimer in the introduction saying something like this: "The Ministerial Association does not endorse the authors defense of Sunday observance, which is based on mistaken interpretations of biblical and historical data. The decision to sponsor this book rests on the belief that there are sufficient good thoughts in the book to offset the erroneous comments about Sunday observance."

Undoubtedly the Ministerial Association will let us know the reasons why they have sponsored this devotional book, in spite of its negation of the validity and value of the Sabbath. On my part I will be sure to pass on to you whatever information I receive.

GEORGE KNIGHT'S PRESENTATION: "IF I WERE THE DEVIL"

Originally, I had planned to comment on several stirring presentations given during the General Conference Session. I was edified especially by Ralph Thompson's sermon "Knowing the Time," given on Sabbath morning, July 1, 2000. Time and space constrains me to limit my comments to the presentation "If I Were the Devil" of George Knight, Ph. D., Professor of Church History at the SDA Theological Seminary.

Knight must be commended not only for choosing a catchy title, but also for making very perceptive comments on what he would do to undermine the Adventist church, if he were the Devil. I believe that his lecture does provide food for thought. The main points of his talk are as follows:

- "If I were the Devil I would put my best energies into getting the church to reject the ideas and plans of the coming generation. . . .
- "If I were the Devil I would get the church to think small. . . . With small thinking, the church will be on the planet for a long time. . . .
- "If I were the Devil I would get people to believe that there is only one way to do something and that everybody has to do it that one way. . . .
- "If I were the Devil I would downplay the importance of new technologies in finishing the church's work. . . .
- "If I were the Devil I would make pastors and administrators the center of the work of the church. . . .
- "If I were the Devil, I would undermine the importance of the local congregation. . . .
- "If I were the Devil I would create more administrative levels and generate more administrators.
- "If I were the Devil I would make Adventists afraid of the Holy Spirit. Too many of us fear Pentecostalism when we think of the topic of the Holy Spirit. . . .
- "If I were the Devil I would encourage the denomination to keep playing the numbers game. . . .
- "If I were the Devil I would get Seventh-day Adventists to forget or at least downplay their apocalyptic heritage. . . .
- "If I were the Devil I would get Adventists to hold that all of their beliefs are of equal importance. . . .
- "If I were the Devil I would get Adventists fighting with each other. Any old topic would do—worship styles, theology, dress standards. . . .
- "Lastly, if I were the Devil I would get Adventists to look miserable on Sabbath. When do Adventists rejoice—sundown Friday or sundown Saturday?

Most of the above comments are right on target. For example, the last one which speaks of the Devil strategy to make Adventist experience the Sabbath as a day of frustration, rather than of joyful celebration, is absolutely right. To counteract the negative understanding and experience of the Sabbath, I have developed a SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR which I have been presenting in many parts of the world. Some Adventists have confessed to me that for many years they have experienced the Sabbath, more as an alienating imposition than a divine invitation to experience the presence, peace, and rest of God.

The same is true of the Devil's strategy to make Seventh-day Adventists forget or at least downplay their "apocalyptic heritage." Somehow I felt that the prophetic nature of our mission and message was hardly brought out in the major presentations given at the General Conference. I do not have in my folder the text of all the presentations. It is possible that some "prophetic" presentations were given and I did not receive a copy.

My concern relates especially to Knight's expansion of the first point. Let me first quote the whole paragraph: "If I were the Devil I would put my best energies into getting the church to reject the ideas and plans of the coming generation. That shouldn't be too

difficult since in most areas they don't dress like their elders, sing like them, or even think like them. When I get older people to frown on guitars, I will at the same time help them forget that early Adventists didn't allow organs in their churches. While I take a shot at their so-called drama, I will help their elders forget that Jesus used fictional stories such as the rich man and Lazarus and that Ellen White used the term drama to refer to what we think of as soap operas. And I certainly would encourage the older members to think of their drama as some great evil rather than an enacted parable. I would also help the Adventist church to forget that their very movement was largely begun by young people whose ideas were innovative and creative."

It is unfortunate that in this paragraph Knight creates an unwarranted dichotomy between the dress, music, and worship style of the younger generation and that of the older. The assumption seems to be that the elders play the Devil's game by rejecting what the young people have to offer to the church today. The truth of the matter is that the choice of dress, music, and worship style has far more to do with spiritual maturity than with age. The vast majority of Adventist young people, especially in developing countries, are admired by the older generation.

Last Sabbath, for example, at the Altamonte Springs SDA Church, Florida, where I presented my seminar, young people led out in a meaningful candlelight ceremony of welcoming the Sabbath on Friday evening and closing the Sabbath on Saturday evening. Some of the older members told me how much they appreciated the program presented by teenagers.

The tension between the older and younger generation develops when some immature young people want to turn the church into a night club, by dressing like hippies, and jumping and dancing at the sound of loud beat music played with drums and guitars. I have been confronted several times with this kind of offensive and disrespectful behavior. Such behavior, however, is just as offensive to spiritual mature young people than to older folks. I am thinking of three brothers, age 22, 25, and 27, who left the Sabbath morning the youth program (July 1) at the GC Session after 45 minutes, because they told me: "If we want to hear that kind of music we go to a night club, not to church."

Knight is correct that the Adventist Church was started "by young people whose ideas were innovative and creative." What he ignores, however, is that the young founders of our church did not go around putting on frivolous youth programs with dancing, drama, and beat music. They had a passion for the study of the Bible, for discovering and sharing new found truths. They did not offend the older people, but led them to Christ. The situation is radically different today, especially in industrialized countries where few young people study the Bible or attend Sabbath school.

Last year while lecturing in Europe, I was told that in some countries like Germany most Adventist young people do not attend regular church services. In fact, I saw very few young faces at the Humburg SDA, which is the largest in Germany. Young people only attend special religious convocations when "Christian" rock bands are performing. To allow young people, who are primarily interested to entertain themselves, to run the church, in my view it is tantamount to play the Devil's game that Knight is warning against. Our challenge is to work for a spiritual revival among our young people and encourage those who are spiritually mature to lead out in ministering to the younger and older generation.

RESOLUTION ON "BIBLICAL TEACHINGS ON MARRIAGE"

Two important documents to be integrated into the *Church Manual* were voted by the delegates at the GC Session. The first is entitled "Biblical Teaching on Marriage," and the second "Biblical Teaching on Divorce." From a theological perspective, these two documents are the most controversial items approved. If at the previous GC session at Utrecht, it was the document on women's ordination that proved to be the most controversial, at this last GC session it was the document on the "Biblical Teachings on Divorce" that was most debated, and eventually approved through what some have called "a coup d'etat" strategy. Let us take a brief look at these two documents.

The first part of the document on the "Biblical Teachings on Marriage" sets forth the origin, oneness, permanence, and sexual intimacy in marriage. Here the concepts presented are biblically sound. The problem arises in the next sections promoting the egalitarian view of marriage, or what is often called "the partnership paradigm." It is alleged that husband-headship and wife-submission are *not* part of the original functional distinction in marriage, but came about as the result of sin. "The entrance of sin adversely affected marriage. When Adam and Eve sinned they lost the oneness which they had known with God and with one another (Gen 3:6-24). As part of the curse of sin, rulership was given to the husband (Gen 3:16; see also *Patriarchs and Prophets* pp. 58-59)" (p. 232)

The implication is that prior to the Fall, Adam did not exercise a headship role. Husband-headship and wife-submission are the result of sin and redemption is designed to eliminate these functional distinctions by restoring "marriage to its original ideal . . . of oneness and equality" in Christ. "The gospel emphasizes the love and submission of husband and wife to one another (1 Cor 7:3, 4; Eph 5:21)" (p. 232).

This view is apparently inspired by the desire to find a biblical justification for women ordination. By arguing that the role distinctions of husband-headship and wife-submission originated as a result of the Fall, and are to be eliminated by the gospel, ordinationists wish to prove that women can be ordained to serve in the church in headship position over men without violating a biblical principle.

After considerable discussion, the document was modified by deleting the phrase: "As part of the curse of sin, rulership was given to the husband (Gen 3:16; see also *Patriarchs and Prophets* pp. 58-59)." The removal of this phrase took out the key suggestion that male-headship and female-submission began at the Fall, but the document remains theologically fuzzy, studded with feminist language. We can live with this document as long as church members remember that at creation God created Adam and Eve equal in nature and worth, but different in function.

The creational origin of role distinction are examined at great length in my chapter "Headship, Submission, and Equality," published in the symposium *Prove all Things: A Response to Women in Ministry* (2000). I will simply summarize in this study my conclusions.

Genesis 1 simply affirms that man and woman are equally created in the image of God, but they are sexually different. By twice calling the human race "man" (Gen 1:26-27), God whispers male headship already in Genesis 1, though it is explained in chapter two.

Genesis 2 clarifies the equality and gender distinctions of Genesis 1. Man and woman are equal in nature because they share the same human flesh and bone and have the same spiritual value before God. Yet they are different in function because woman is to be submissive to man. The latter is indicated by the followings four elements of the narrative: (1) the priority of man's creation (Gen 2:7, 22), (2) the manner of the woman's creation out of man (Gen 2:21-22), (3) the woman's creation to be man's helpmate (Gen 2:18-20), and (4) man's naming of the woman both before and after the Fall (Gen 2:23; 3:20).

The headship of man is implied also in chapter 3 where God calls upon the man to answer for the pair's transgression and indites man (not the woman) for failing to fulfill his headship role by listening to the voice of his wife rather than to His command.

Genesis 3 describes the distortion of creation's order brought about by the Fall. This distortion affected not only the serpent, the land, work and childbearing, but also the headship of man and the submission of woman. Contrary to the claims of the symposium *Women in Ministry* and the 1999 Annual Council's recommendations, the curse marks not the origin of man's headship, but rather its distortion into oppressive domination. Sinful man would now take advantage of his headship to dominate and oppress his wife.

Paul attaches fundamental importance to the teachings of the first three chapters of Genesis. He appeals to the pre-Fall order and manner of creation to defend the submission of women to the leadership of man both in marriage and in the church. His appeal to the order of creation is in line with Christ's teaching that calls for a restoration of the creational relationship (Matt 19:8) by the members of His kingdom. The function of redemption is not to redefine creation, but to restore it, so that wives learn godly submission and husbands learn godly headship.

Paul bases his teaching concerning the role of women in the church, not on the consequences of Fall described in Genesis 3, but on the pre-Fall order of creation presented in Genesis 1 and 2. The foundation of his teaching is not the divine judgments pronounced at the Fall, but God's original purpose manifested in the order (1 Tim 2:13) and manner of human creation (1 Cor 11:8). It is unfortunate that in their interpretation of Genesis 1, 2, and 3, the egalitarians consistently ignore Paul's appeals to these chapters to support his teachings on male/female role distinctions in the home and church. To ignore the self-authenticating internal witness of the Bible, can give rise to gratuitous private interpretations.

Summing up, the first three chapters of Genesis and their Pauline interpretation indicate that both husband-wife equality *and* role distinctions, properly defined, are part of God's creational design for the harmonious functioning of the family. God created the man and the woman perfectly equal in their moral worth and spiritual status, but clearly distinct in their biological and functional roles.

Simply stated, in the partnership of two spiritually equal human beings, man and woman, God created man to function in the servant headship role of husband/father, and women in the submissive role of wife/mother. These distinctive roles apply equally to the home and to the church, because from a biblical perspective the church is an extended spiritual family, often referred to as "the household of God" (Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 4:17; Gal 6:10). We wish that this fundamental biblical truth was clearly stated in our Church Manual.

RESOLUTION ON THE "BIBLICAL TEACHINGS ON DIVORCE"

The most controversial document that was approved by the GC delegates through a questionable strategy, is the one on the "Biblical Teachings on Divorce." The first part of the document accurately explains that "divorce is contrary to God's original purpose in creating marriage (Matt 19:3-8; Mark 10:2-9)," and that marriage can be destroyed when the principles of love, loyalty, exclusiveness, and trust are violated.

The problematic part of the document is the one dealing with the "Grounds for Divorce," which says: "Scripture recognizes adultery and/or fornication (Matt 5:32) as well as abandonment by an unbelieving partner (1 Cor 7:10-15) as ground for divorce." The controversy centers around the concept "abandonment by an unbelieving partner."

Unfortunately, no attempt is made in the document to define what constitutes abandonment by an unbelieving partner? Who is an "unbelieving partner?" Is he/she a member of a different denomination or an Adventist who does not practice what he professes? Is abandonment primarily a physical separation for two weeks, a month, a year, or ten years? What about emotional abandonment? What about a person who claims that his or her spouse has abandoned him/her emotionally or sexually? Is this a legitimate ground for divorce?

The document is silent on these issues and thus it leaves the door open to seek divorce for any reason. Because of its lack of clarity, the document was discussed at great length during the business session on Tuesday and Wednesday (July 4 and 5). Finally, the 2000 delegates voted on Wednesday, July 5, to refer the document back to the Church Manual Committee to examine the theological concerns about the "abandonment" clause. The understanding was that the whole document would be reworked and brought back at the next GC session in 2005, St. Louis. This was the decision taken on Wednesday, July 5.

But on Friday, July 7, the unexpected happen. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, Ph. D. (pipim@compuserve.com), an official delegate who recently earned a doctorate in systematic theology at Andrews University, offers a first hand account of what happened on Friday, July 7. He was interviewed at considerable length by Pastor Larry Kirkpatrick, (larry@greatcontroversy.org), a Pastor in the Utah-Nevada Conference and the editor of the Great Controversy website. The complete text of the interview is found at the following website address: <http://www.greatcontroversy.org/documents/papers/pip-interview10july2000.html> The following paragraphs posted below are excerpted from this interview, which you will find very informative.

Pipim said: "Many of our delegates, particularly from the developing countries, thinking that the major theological issues had been discussed, were not there at the Friday [July 7] morning business session. About 150 people were present. And taking advantage of the absence of the overwhelming majority of delegates, the people who really are pushing this new view of divorce and marriage, (mostly from segments in North America, Australia, and Europe the regions which constitute less than 10% of the world Adventist membership), came in and staged their theological coup d'etat. . . .

"They moved and made a motion that the decisions that was taken the previous two days, to refer the document to the Church Manual Committee, be rescinded. It was seconded and voted upon. And so, within a few minutes, a decision that was arrived at by an overwhelming majority of delegates including nominating committee members while the whole house was there, was overturned by a few people—less than a 150 people in attendance. Remember, the number of delegates who earlier had referred the document to the Church Manual committee was almost 2000. But it took less than 150 people to overturn their decision! . . .

"They rescinded the decision and then there was another move. They made a motion that we should accept 'as is' the Church Manual Committee document, including its questionable abandonment clause and some of these things that we had objected to.

There was a second to the motion. Some of us who understood what was going on wanted to debate that issue again since they had brought it to the floor. Before we could effectively speak to that issue, another person makes a motion that we should cut off discussion and that there should be no debate because we had already debated on it the previous days. So using the parliamentary procedures, they cut off debate and were able to vote it in because they had the numbers. I am talking about how a small group of people, mostly from the industrialized countries maneuvered the parliamentary procedures to overturn the majority decision. . . .

"I want to emphasize that what they did, procedurally was O.K., because once you call a business meeting, whether the people are there or not, you know, it is a business meeting. Our people from the developing countries can be faulted for not being there. Perhaps they were too naive or trusting, oblivious of the many ideological currents at GC sessions. Undoubtedly, they have themselves to blame for this theologically questionable position now enshrined in the church manual.

"But the question before us is, did the individuals from the industrialized countries act rightly and fairly? I have spoken to many people, including people who disagree with me theologically; I'm talking about even liberals. And they all concede that the action was really wrong. It doesn't show maturity and a sense of fairness. It's almost like a coup d'etat by a few determined people who think they can overturn a decision by an overwhelming majority by just capitalizing on the fact that a majority of the people were not there. . . .

"So what now stands today is that the Church Manual is going to contain a clause that is not biblical, that goes contrary to the Spirit of Prophecy, that goes contrary to the overwhelming consensus of the larger body that met to refer it back to the Church Manual Committee, but which a few people, from a particular segment of the world church, decided it could overturn and liberalize. The document that has been voted will create problems for pastors in the field, who believe that the Bible is against any kind of divorce except in the cases of adultery and fornication.

"If, for example, you are a pastor, and your church member comes to you and says, Pastor, I'm going to divorce my husband because he has abandoned me; he is a Methodist, or a Baptist, a non-believer. He has abandoned me for two weeks, or for whatever reason. And the pastor says, Sister, or brother, you cannot do that, because it is not biblical. That person can tell the pastor, 'The Church Manual gives me permission.' So the pastor will have to decide between what is biblically binding, and what the Church Manual has now instituted through legislation by a small group of people. . . .

"We recognize that this is God's church, though it is not a perfect church. The wheat and tares are in existence. Yet Ellen White says, "Feeble and defective as the church is, it is still the object upon which He bestows His maximum regard." So, in spite of my disappointment for of these theological positions which have been legislated at this GC session, I can truthfully and honestly say, that God's will was done at this GC session.

"What happened on Friday, July 7 at the GC, has woken-up many of our delegates, particularly those from outside of the industrialized countries. For the first time, they have understood what they are up against. And now, all this talk about justice, maturity, and fairness, which folks from the industrialized countries have been throwing around, sounds hollow. And now they are more committed than ever before to stand up for the truth."

I wish to express my gratitude to Pipim for providing us with this first-hand report. Interested readers may wish to read the complete lengthy report (15 pages) at the website given above. The commitment to stand for biblical truths is fundamental to the Adventist church family around the world. Like Pipim, I have reasons to believe that whatever mistaken decision was taken at the GC, in time it will rectify.

It was my intent to post in this newsletter some of the highlights of my research on divorce and remarriage which have been published in my book ***The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage***. This research relates directly to the divorce and remarriage document that was voted at the GC. But this newsletter is already rather lengthy and many of our subscribers would not appreciate my adding another 15-20 pages of material. Thus, I have decided to post this timely research in the next newsletters, which may prove to be among the most informative.

CONCLUSION

Some of the issues we have addressed in this newsletter, may give a negative impression about the state of the Adventist Church. The truth of the matter is that the reports from the various world Divisions have shown that the Adventist church is alive and very well in many parts of the world. We do have some problems, but this is to be expected in a church that has grown from 3.5 million in 1980 to 11 million in 2000. Our challenge is to turn our problems, not in stumbling blocks, but in stepping stones to reach higher heights.

Let me close by using the fitting words of Elder Ralph Thompson's sermon "Knowing the Time" (Sabbath, July 1, 2000). In his final appeal Elder Thompson said: "We Seventh-day Adventist are incurable optimists. We believe that the future is as bright as the promises of God for the triumphant finishing of the Advent message. For this message that we believe in and share is not going to peter out on the rocks of chaos and decay and end up in some obscure little corner with some indistinguishable little squeak. But under the mighty hand of God and the outpouring of His Holy Spirit and the latter rain power, thousands are going to be converted in one day. The entire world will be galvanized to take their stand for the truth of God. So, knowing the time, let us awake and join hands in the glorious proclamation of the Third Angel's Message as it sweeps to its mighty climax."

UPCOMING SEMINARS & EXHIBITS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of my upcoming BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES EXHIBITS and weekend SEMINARS on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Life-style. Each seminar consists of three presentations: Friday evening at 7:30 p. m., Sabbath morning at 11:00 a. m., and Sabbath afternoon at 5:00 p. m. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area.

JULY 23 TO AUGUST 1: BIBLE CONFERENCE IN BERMUDA

Address: 41 King Street, Hamilton HM 19, Bermuda
For information call: President Carlyle C. Simmons
at (441) 292-4110 or (441) 238-0792

AUGUST 2-5: EXHIBIT AT THE ADVENTIST-LAYMEN'S SERVICES & INDUSTRIES CONVENTION

Address: Amway Grand Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

EXHIBIT BOOTH Ns. 606-608: To find our booth look for a 12' long banner saying: **BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES Presents . . .** The banner has my picture and that of the 15 books I have authored. At the convention all my books, cassettes, and videos will be made available at a substantially discounted price. I will be on hand to autograph your copies.

AUGUST 18-19: SEMINAR AT THE HEIGHT SDA CHURCH IN ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

Address: 4920 Wyoming N E, Albuquerque, NM 87191
For information call: Pastor Wayne Gayton at (505) 298-5811
Or (505)271-5850

AUGUST 25-26: SEMINAR AT THE HINSDALE FIL-AM SDA CHURCH

Address: 9 East 59th Street, Hinsdale, Illinois 60521
For information call: Pastor Daniel Botabara (630) 515-0939
Or (630) 655-8786

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